



**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
Secretary of State

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Mayor Ros Jones  
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15 July 2013

Dear Ros,

I am writing further to your letter of 8 July, and our telephone conversation of 15 July, concerning Doncaster Children's Services. During our conversation, we discussed Professor Julian Le Grand's report on children's social care services in Doncaster and the conclusions it had drawn about the best approach to securing improvement over the long term. We also discussed my response to that report. I would now like to set this out in a little more detail.

First, I would like to thank you, your officers and partners of Doncaster children's services for providing the time, information and facilities to enable Professor Le Grand and his colleagues, Alan Wood and Dame Moira Gibb, to conduct this review. Their co-operation was essential in enabling them to get a clear picture of the position. I am grateful.

I have now considered their report, which I attach. As you will see, I am afraid they found little evidence of improvement between Ofsted's inspection in November 2012 and the start of their review. While they noted a strong desire for this improvement, they heard from a number of those interviewed a belief that it could only be delivered through radical change. They also found that the history of Doncaster's children's services showed many unsuccessful attempts to tackle the problems. The review panel found that, within Doncaster children's services, "There is a culture of failure and disillusion that pervades the service and that serves to obstruct every attempt at reform."

Consequently, they recommend that an organisation external to the Council should be established to provide all children's services, except those regarding education. Their preference, which I endorse, is that an independent Trust should be established to provide those services. Given this assessment, I agree with the recommendations and will now seek to put them to effect.

The review panel also recommend that, along with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, I appoint a fourth "Commissioner" in Doncaster. This "Commissioner of Children's Social Care" would have specific responsibility for ensuring the implementation of Professor Le Grand's recommendations and for overseeing existing improvement measures, working alongside the three existing commissioners. I also agree this recommendation and Alan Wood, Director of Children's Services at Hackney, shall take on that role.

In their report, the review panel set out a process and timetable to transfer the relevant functions to an independent Trust. If possible, we would like to see the Trust operational by 1 April 2014. Accompanying this letter is a draft direction which I, along with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, are minded to issue under section 15(5) of the Local Government Act 1999 and section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996. This requires that Doncaster Council work with the Commissioner to enable that transfer of services to a Trust and secure improvements to children's social care services. If you have any representations to make, please direct these to my officials by 13 August 2013. It is intended that the direction will be issued formally shortly after that date.

I am pleased that you have appointed an improvement partner, iMPower, further to my previous Direction and that this work has now commenced. I am sure that this will be important in driving improvements in practice and management immediately and, in the longer-term, supporting the transition to the Trust. To support Doncaster in this, I have secured some funding from my Department's budget and would like to contribute £250k towards this work.

The review panel recommends that, when improvements to the service are secure and confidence in Doncaster Council's ability to deliver children's social care functions is gained, those services should return to council control. My intention is therefore to establish the Trust for a ten year period, with a review point after five years. Progress of both the Trust and the Council's capacity to deliver its functions can be assessed at that stage and a decision taken as to whether the Trust should continue.

As I said during our telephone conversation, all of that argues strongly, I believe, for a continuation of the constructive working relationship established between the Review Team and the Council. When we spoke, I was struck by your clear message that the children of Doncaster are your absolute priority and your commitment to work with my decision. I am very grateful to be able to continue to count on your co-operation and positive involvement in putting in place these measures.

I am copying this letter to Jo Miller and to Rob Sykes.

*with every good wish,*

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MICHAEL GOVE