

# Improvement Notice

---

To: SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL (“the Council”)

Address: MERTON HOUSE, STANLEY ROAD, BOOTLE L20 3JA

## **This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance in:**

Adoption Services.

## **On the basis of evidence contained in:**

- The adoption scorecard published by the Department of Education in May and November 2012.
- The Outcomes UK/BAAF diagnostic assessment of Sefton’s adoption service dated 13 July 2012.

## **The following measures are required for the Council to comply with this Improvement Notice:**

The Council must take action to:

- build on the improvements already secured by the Council and ensure arrangements are in place to sustain and improve levels of performance relating to the key timeliness measures set out on the adoption scorecard;
- address the areas for consideration identified in the Outcomes UK/BAAF diagnostic assessment to tackle delays in children being adopted;

In respect of the above the Council must provide evidence of improvement in outcomes by:

### Management and Leadership

1. Developing, within one month of the date of this Improvement Notice, a plan to improve the performance of the adoption service and reduce delays in process and decision making for children being adopted. The plan must set out milestones and performance indicators which will help monitor improvement progress.
2. Consider the conclusions of the review of current adoption practice within the Children’s Services of the Council building on improvement work already delivered and implementing any further recommendations, including making changes to the structure of Children’s Social Care Services to ensure improvement in the organisation of work and how teams work together. Changes should be reflected in the Council’s improvement plan with the aim of ensuring:
  - a holistic approach to service delivery;
  - smooth transfers between teams;

- reducing case drift, delays in process and decision making;
  - improving and embedding good quality practice; and
  - minimising the number of different social workers experienced by children and young people in care.
3. Implementing and monitoring the impact of a programme of adoption training for all children's social care staff which will ensure that all such staff are aware of permanence options and the consequences for children of drift and delays in decision making.
  4. Ensuring implementation of the new Integrated Children's System (ICS) is completed during the period of the Improvement Notice and demonstrates that it provides an improvement in the quality of case recording. Such recording must meet the requirements set out in Regulation 12 of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, and include the views of children and families.
  5. Minimising operational risks by providing all relevant staff with training and support throughout the implementation of the ICS.
  6. Implementing the changes identified following the Council's review of the role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). All such changes must ensure IROs are able to undertake their role, make and disseminate decisions in a timely way and consistent with the timescales set out in the IRO Handbook and that more robust oversight by IROs is sustained.
  7. Reviewing and, if appropriate, revising the Council's website so that, it has a clear link to Adoption and Fostering Services with the aim of increasing marketing opportunities and promoting services. Adoption and Fostering Services website pages should contain clear and informative information.

#### Quality and Effectiveness of practice

8. The quality assurance framework must include regular supervision, observation of practice and auditing arrangements of case files with independent scrutiny, monitoring and evaluation to ensure compliance with recording standards as set out in Regulation 12 of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and consistency in practice.
9. Ensuring all children in care who are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 have clear and rigorous care plans in place which are regularly reviewed to reduce the potential for drift.
10. Reducing the time taken from the point that a child is looked after by the Council and is placed with their adoptive family, and the time when a Placement Order is made by the court under section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the decision of the Council to place a child with a specific adoptive family. In doing so the Council must have regard to the timescales set out in the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations and Statutory Adoption Guidance revised in February 2011.

### **Reporting to the Department for Education**

The Council must report against the targets, actions and timescales contained in this Improvement Notice and the Council's Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis. Reports should include quantitative and qualitative information and contingency arrangements for any actions or targets not being met. The first report to the Department will be due before the end of March 2013 and quarterly thereafter. The Council should aim for all targets, performance indicators and milestones to be met within 12 months of the issue of this notice.

### **Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates may lead to:**

The Secretary of State for Education may make a direction to ensure the proper performance of the Council's functions under section 497a of the Education Act 1996.

Signed:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

**EDWARD TIMPSON MP**

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families**