

To: Blackpool Borough Council (“the Council”),

Progress House, Clifton Road, Blackpool. FY4 4US

This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance in Children’s Social Care Services on the basis of evidence contained in the report of the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children published by Ofsted 13 July 2012 (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of Blackpool Borough Council (“ the Council”) arrangements to protect children to be ‘inadequate’.

The following measures are needed for you to comply with this Improvement Notice:

1. The Council must take action to:
 - improve areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report dated 13 July 2012 and ensure child protection arrangements meet all legislative and statutory guidance requirements; and
 - put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvement secured.
2. In respect of the above the Council, working with its partner agencies, as identified by the Council, must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by the following:
3. The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers
 - 3.1. Work collaboratively with partner agencies to develop and implement a preventative and early help strategy to improve co-ordination of services, ensure services are provided which meet the needs of children and their families.
 - 3.2. Work with partner agencies to review and agree thresholds for meeting statutory assessments and which set out the criteria for access to children’s social care services. Ensure procedures are in place which set out the services that will be provided to those children and young people who do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention, but require targeted, multi-agency, or early help. Ensure that procedures are communicated and applied consistently by staff working within social care services of the Council and their partner agencies. Improvements will be measured by the reduction in re-referral rates.

- 3.3. Improve the consistency and quality of locally agreed shared assessment processes (e.g. Common Assessment Framework) to ensure issues and needs are identified, and actions, timescales and success criteria are recorded, delivery monitored and action to taken to address issues affecting consistency, quality and timeliness.
4. Improve the quality and consistency of assessments by ensuring:
 - 4.1. All assessments are carried out using the “*the Conceptual Framework for Thinking about Risk Assessment and Case Management in Child Protective Service*” (“Conceptual Framework”) (1), so that evidence is analysed to determine the level of risk faced by the individual child and informs plans.
 - 4.2. All assessments are completed within the timescales set out in statutory guidance ‘*Working Together*’. Ensure that the assessment informs decision making and planning in line with statutory guidance.
 - 4.3. That findings and lessons from auditing of files are captured and there is a clear system to address development areas arising from audit.
 - 4.4. All decisions and actions are recorded in accordance with the agreed local procedures and child protection plans comply with ‘*Working Together*’, ensuring that plans set out the actions that must be taken and by whom and the outcomes to be achieved, with timescales.
 - 4.5. Ensure that management of social work practice, oversight of work undertaken and challenge to the process of risk assessment is demonstrated.
 - 4.6. Management information and the audit of case files provide evidence that the matters set out in 4.5 are being carried out and the quality of social work practice is improving. Action must be taken to address areas of practice where performance does not meet standards.

5. The Quality of Practice

1 “the Conceptual Framework for Thinking about Risk Assessment and Case Management in Child Protective Service” as described in Statutory guidance ‘The Framework for The Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families’
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Framework%20for%20the%20assessment%20of%20children%20in%20need%20and%20their%20families.pdf>

- 5.1. Ensure all management oversight and decision-making on individual child protection cases including assessments are conducted in line with standards set out by the Council (and agreed with the Blackpool Children's Improvement Board) and standards set out in statutory guidance '*Working Together*', and evidence of that management oversight and decision making is set out in detail on each case file. Ensure that evidence from management information and information arising from case audits confirms that this has been carried out. Improvement would include no case being closed prematurely leaving children and young people at risk of harm.
- 5.2. Improve the quality, delivery and management of child protection plans by ensuring that they comply with the standards set out in '*Working Together*' and '*The Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*' including ensuring that all plans set out the actions that must be taken and by whom and the outcomes to be achieved with timescales.
- 5.3. Ensure that evidence of management oversight of case work and decision making is set out in detail on each case file and information arising from case audits confirms that all actions have been carried out in accordance with statutory guidance.
- 5.4. Ensure statutory visits are undertaken for all children who are subject to a child protection plans and management oversight is in place.
- 5.5. Develop and implement a format for recording all child protection plans and ensure that all child protection plans meet the standards set out in "*Working Together*" and are unambiguous, detailed, set out outcomes for the child, contain chronologies and set out a child's specific needs, risks, responsibilities and timescales.
- 5.6. Review and revise, if appropriate, the Council's quality assurance framework so that it meets the standards set out in statutory guidance and ensure it is implemented by all those in the Council's Children's Service. The framework must draw on all the evidence available including survey information, responses to complaints and other feedback from service users. It must include regular auditing arrangements of case files, with independent oversight and challenge to ensure the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance with recording in individual case records and the analysis of risk.
- 5.7. Conduct within two months of this notice an audit of all case files including those that are closed to assess whether children are at

risk and whether further action is required.

- 5.8. Agree with Blackpool's Children's Improvement Board and Blackpool's Safeguarding Children Board the frequency, scope and number of single & multi-agency quality assurance audits. Develop and introduce audit tools to ensure robust auditing and case tracking arrangements.
- 5.9. Ensure that quality assurance audits are carried out and the performance information and evidence from these audits are analysed and reported to both Blackpool's Children's Improvement Board and Blackpool's Safeguarding Children Board in accordance with Ofsted '*Good practice by local safeguarding children boards*'. Analysis should be used to inform action taken by the Council, working with partner agencies, to bring about improvements in safeguarding social work practice and casework. The Council must demonstrate that findings from file audits are used to improve social work practice and that there is compliance with management and case work practice standards. The impact of these areas will be evidenced through the continuous improvement of social work practice.
- 5.10. Ensure supervision of social work practice in accordance with the Council's quality assurance framework, this must include management challenge, reflective practice and management oversight of social work practice and decision making on individual cases. Any identified strengths and areas requiring development will be used to inform training and development needs of individuals and the wider workforce.

6. Leadership and Governance

- 6.1. Work with partner agencies, to establish a remit for Blackpool's Children's Improvement Board, Children's Trust and the Blackpool's Safeguarding Children Board with governance, lines of accountability and specific roles of each body in bringing about improvement. Ensure all children who are subject to a child protection plans are seen and effective management oversight is in place to partners agencies and staff are informed of their specific roles and accountabilities for delivering services and driving improvement.
- 6.2. Review the membership, structure and operation of Blackpool's Safeguarding Children Board by the end of November 2012 to ensure the Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board is able to provide scrutiny, monitoring and challenge of services and outcomes for vulnerable children, and is able to meet all statutory requirements and carries out its role in accordance with

'Working Together'.

- 6.3. Complete a Joint Strategic Needs Analysis that informs the Children and Young People's Plan. This should be underpinned by a deep comprehensive needs analysis of children, young people and their families for particular segments or service users. The analysis should identify priorities and any gaps in service.
- 6.4. Ensure the Council shares their vision and ambition for improvement for Children's Services and that it is communicated to staff of the Council and partner agencies. Ensure that Council staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are held to account in delivering their contribution to this vision and ambition for overall improvement.
- 6.5. Develop and implement a communications strategy, which includes mechanisms for listening to 'the voice of the child', including those who are under 5 years of age, families, and all staff and partner agencies.
- 6.6. Establish and embed the senior management team including recruitment of staff to vacant posts and undertaking training of new appointees.
- 6.7. Develop a strategy for strengthening the wider workforce across children's services, including a plan for the appointment of personnel, permanency of structure and the setting out of lines of accountabilities. The development of this strategy should be informed by demographic and service needs analysis, an analysis of training needs, and include recruitment and retention strategies. The strategy should be linked to the improvement and service plans.
- 6.8. Ensure elected members of the Council are informed about and carry out their corporate parent role and meet all their statutory requirements, including statutory visits. Putting in place appropriate training and support to undertake a scrutiny role of children and family services. This must include regular discussion with the Children in Care Council and regular reviews of management information and visits to meet staff working on the 'front line' of social care.
- 6.9. Ensure that performance management systems are reviewed, focusing on management oversight and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officers, and any recommendations made as a result of the review are implemented. The impact of any changes must be monitored to ensure that they have resulted in improvements to the quality of social care practice.

- 6.10. Ensure that managers have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities, including oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and areas for improvement.

7. Improvement support measures

Delivering improvement places additional pressures and higher expectations in terms of the performance of both senior officers and members. Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice we expect the Council to :

- 7.1. Work with representatives of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) to formalise a package of sector support to address the issues set out in any inspections or raised through sector peer review or challenge activities. The outcome of such activities is to help support delivery of improvement in outcomes for children, young people and families in Blackpool and to increase the skills, knowledge and professional practice of staff.
- 7.2. Put in place an Improvement Board ("the Board") which shall have an Independent Chair ("the Chair") and which is expected to meet every 6 weeks. If in the future the Improvement Board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education. An official from the Department for Education will attend Improvement Board meetings as a participant observer. The Board should include in its membership partners agencies. The Council must provide the Independent Chair with administrative support to a level sufficient for the Chair to undertake their role efficiently and for the Improvement Board to operate effectively.
- 7.3. Develop an Improvement Plan by the Board with partner agencies to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report of 13 July 2012 and those set out in this Improvement Notice. With members of the Board, the Council must agree a dataset of performance indicators with targets and timescales. Targets should be set at 6 and 12 month intervals. The Council must report to the Board on progress against these, and reporting must include analysis of performance trends that are failing to meet the targets and timescales set. The Council should aim for all targets to be met within 12 months of the Improvement Notice. The performance targets will form part of the discussion at the formal review meetings with the Department for Education.

8. Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

- 8.1. The Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written, 6 month progress report including specific commentary against the

targets set out in this Notice. The Chair must also provide an initial report 2 months after the commencement of this Notice. Additional external validation of progress, such as a peer review, should be commissioned and carried out before the end of this Notice to inform decisions on next steps.

8.2. The progress reports from the Chair will inform reviews of progress which will be conducted by Department for Education officials and take place after six and twelve months of this Improvement Notice or at the specific request of the Department for Education. The Chair's report will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Leader of the Council. Such reviews may result in an amendment to this Improvement Notice and further action being required.

9. Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates may lead to the Secretary of State for Education using statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) directing the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's services.

Signed: **Date:**

Edward Timpson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State