

Improvement Notice

To: Name **London Borough of Bexley** (“the Council”)

Address **Civic Offices, Broadway Bexleyheath, DA6 7LB**

This Improvement Notice (“the Notice”) is being issued due to poor performance in: Children’s Services on the basis of evidence contained in:

- the report of the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children’s services carried out by Ofsted dated 24th August (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s safeguarding services as ‘inadequate’ and its Looked after Children services as Good.

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

The Council must take action to:

- (i) improve areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report and ensure safeguarding and looked after children’s services meet all legislative requirements.
- (ii) put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvement secured.

In respect of the above the Council, working with its partner agencies, as identified by the Council, (“the Council’s partners”) must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by the following:

Quality and effectiveness of safeguarding practice

- Improve the quality, and consistency of assessments by taking account of the safeguarding risks to the children and young people and ensuring their views are recorded, where this is appropriate. Take account of the analysis on assessments and views of the Council’s partners and ensure all assessments are completed within the timescales set out in statutory guidance ‘*Working Together*’¹. Ensure that the assessment informs decision making and planning in line with statutory guidance.
- Develop and implement a system of risk assessment that will inform all Child Protection and Children in Need Plans to ensure consistent judgments are made about the levels of risk, which follows “the Conceptual Framework for Thinking about Risk Assessment and Case

¹ Statutory Guidance: ‘*Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*’
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00305-2010>

Management in Child Protective Service” (“Conceptual Framework”) ². Ensure that all staff engaged in safeguarding work are applying the Conceptual Framework in their practice and that management information and the audit of case files provide evidence that this is being done and the quality of social work practice is improving.

- Improve the quality, delivery and management of child protection plans by ensuring that all child protection plans comply with ‘*Working Together*’ including ensuring that the plans set out the actions that must be taken and by whom and the outcomes to be achieved, with timescales. Action must be taken to address areas of practice where performance does not meet standards.
- Ensure that all management oversight and decision-making is conducted in line with standards set out in ‘*Working Together*’ by the Council and agreed with the Improvement Board and evidence of that management oversight and decision making is set out in detail on each case file. Evidence from management information and information arising from case audits should reflect that this has been carried out satisfactorily.
- Ensure that the views of staff are considered in relation to their work and workplace using feedback mechanisms such as staff surveys and report the results to the Improvement Board. To support this, consideration should be given to the Children’s Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).³
- Ensure the Council’s quality assurance systems meet the standards set out in the Children’s Safeguarding Performance Information Framework and quality assurance processes referred to in ‘*Working Together*’. Ensure that the quality assurance systems are implemented by all those in the Council’s Children’s Service. The system 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 (as set out in ‘*Working Together*’) and that an assessment of risk is recorded. The frequency of the oversight and challenge must be agreed by the Safeguarding Improvement Board (“the Improvement Board”) who must also work with the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (“LSCB”). Regular reports must be made available to the Improvement Board and LSCB which demonstrate how the Council have addressed any findings of the audits and are improving the quality of social work practice.

Capacity and Capability

² “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>

³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

- Monitor social worker workloads to ensure that responsibilities for tasks are understood by social workers, that evidence is provided to show that supervision and support meets social workers needs and that practitioners' workloads do not prevent them carrying out what they and their managers feel to be effective social work practice. Ensure that workloads and supervision take into account the experience of social workers', ensure attention is paid to case allocation and case management and that a workload management scheme is used. It is vital that those with responsibility for supervising social workers have relevant experience and have the opportunity to access training and support to fulfil this responsibility. Ensure that the Improvement Board receives management information to confirm that this is achieved and sustained.
- Implement a programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development for all children and families staff including managers to improve the quality of front line social work. Attention must be paid to the eight standards for employers of social workers⁴. In particular, ensure that this programme includes training for staff and managers on risk analysis. The Council must also work with the Council's partners to ensure that shared learning opportunities are utilised. The Council must report the impact the training has on improving outcomes for children to the Improvement Board.

Improving the effectiveness of partnership and governance

- Ensure that the Council's partners on the Improvement Board work with the Council to agree objectives, actions and timescales which will provide the evidence to monitor progress and assess impact for improvement in the delivery of children's safeguarding services. The Improvement Board must ensure that these actions and timescales are communicated to all staff and the Council's partners who have been identified by the Council as requiring this information so that they understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering these objectives and improvements. The Improvement Board must also ensure that plans are implemented to agreed timescales.
- Ensure the LSCB consider, monitor, challenge and provide strategic direction in relation to the quality of services provided by the Council and the outcomes for vulnerable children and meets all statutory requirements as set out in '*Working Together*'. Multi-agency audits must be undertaken by the LSCB and reported to the Improvement Board outlining the key lessons to be learnt and improvements to be made.
- Establish a remit for the Improvement Board, Children's Trust and the LSCB which sets out governance arrangements, lines of accountability and specific roles of each body in bringing about improvement.
- Establish procedures that will ensure that each member of the Improvement Board, Children's Partnership Board and the LSCB are aware of the terms of

⁴http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

reference for their respective boards and the overall governance, responsibilities and roles of the bodies they represent on those boards in bringing about improvement.

Support measures

Delivering improvement places additional pressures and higher expectations in terms of the performance of both senior officers and members. Therefore the Council must:

- Work with representatives of the Children's Improvement Board to formalise a package of sector support to address the issues set out in the inspections or raised through any 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 Bexley and to increase the skills, knowledge and professional practice of staff.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an independent Chair ("Board Chair") and which we expect will meet every 4 weeks initially. If in the future the Improvement Board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education. The Improvement Board should include in its membership representatives from the Council's partners. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer.

An Improvement Plan should be developed by the Improvement Board with Council partners to carry out the recommendations identified in the inspection report and those set out in this Improvement Notice. With members of the Improvement Board, the Council must agree a dataset of performance targets with targets and timescales. The Council must report to the Improvement Board on progress against those targets and timescales, and reporting must include analysis of performance trends that are failing to meet those targets and timescales. The Council should aim for all targets to be met by up to 12 months from the start of this Notice. The performance targets will form part of the discussion at the formal review meetings with the Department for Education.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

The Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written 6 monthly report including specific commentary against the targets set out in this Notice. The Board 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.

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

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

The Secretary of State for Education exercising his powers of intervention under section 497A Education Act 1996 and direct the Council so as to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's services.

Signed: **Date:**

Edward Timpson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families