

Improvement Notice

To: Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (“the Council”)
Barnsley Town Hall
Barnsley
S70 2TA

1. This Improvement Notice (“the Notice”) is being issued due to poor performance in safeguarding and looked after 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 10 August 2012 (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s safeguarding services to be ‘inadequate.

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

3. The Council must take action to:

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

4. 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:

5. Quality and effectiveness of safeguarding practice

5.1. Improve the quality and consistency of assessments by recording the level of risk to the child, recording the views of child and recording the analysis of Council’s partners whilst maintaining timeliness. The assessment will inform decision making and planning in line with statutory guidance ‘*Working Together*’.

5.2. Work with the Council’s partners to agree and implement a common assessment procedure which will improve the identification of need and deliver early help services. (e.g.CAF). Ensure the Improvement Board and the Barnsley Safeguarding Childrens Board (BSCB) monitors the use and impact of the agreed assessment processes by the Council’s partners and take the necessary remedial action to ensure compliance.

5.3. Develop and implement a risk assessment framework that will inform the development of child protection and children in need plans to ensure consistent judgments are made about the levels of risk. This framework should follow “the Conceptual Framework for Thinking about Risk Assessment and Case Management in Child Protective

Service”¹. Ensure that staff applies the framework in their practice, that levels of risk are recorded and that management information and the audit of the case files provide evidence that this is being done and the quality of social work practice is improving.

- 5.4. Ensure the Council’s quality assurance systems are prepared in line with the “*Children’s Safeguarding Performance Information Framework*” and quality assurance processes referred to in ‘*Working Together*’.
- 5.5. Ensure that quality assurance systems are implemented by officers and members of the Council. The system must include the 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*’). The frequency of the oversight and challenge must be agreed by the Improvement Board in consultation with the BSCB. Regular reports of the audits must be made available to the Improvement Board and BSCB such reports must demonstrate how the Council have addressed any findings and made improvement to the quality of social work practice.
- 5.6. Ensure the thresholds, in particular for access to social care services, and criteria for assessment of the child² and what to do when children and young people do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but require targeted, multi-agency, or early help, are communicated, to all Council partners. Review and monitor the use of thresholds and criteria to ensure their effectiveness and that they are applied consistently.
- 5.7. Ensure that child protection investigations are carried out in accordance with section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and the BSCB Joint Investigation Protocol and child protection plans are specific and measurable and conference arrangements are child sensitive where appropriate and take into account the needs of the child attending such conferences.
- 5.8. Ensure that child protection conference chairs receive comprehensive reports before and during the conference to enable them to assess the effectiveness of safeguarding practice and that they report to the BSCB, to enable monitoring and challenge to ensure the effectiveness of the procedures and advise on improvement.
- 5.9. Ensure the health needs, including health assessments and dental checks of looked after children are met and in accordance with standards specified in statutory guidance “*Promoting the Health and*

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<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Framework%20for%20the%20assessment%20of%20children%20in%20need%20and%20their%20families.pdf>

² under section 17 of the Children Act 1989

Well Being of Looked after Children”.

- 5.10. Ensure that the procedures of the Independent Reviewing Officers, for looked after children, are reviewed to provide challenge to care plans and ensure the child’s wishes and feelings are considered. Ensure any recommendations made as a result of the review are implemented and any new arrangements must ensure that the Independent Reviewing Officer is able to fulfil their role in accordance with the ‘*IRO Handbook*’
 - 5.11. Ensure that the Council finds suitable accommodation and meets the education, training or employment needs requirements set out in the Pathway Plan for all care leavers and meet the requirements set out in ‘*The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010*’.
6. Improving the effectiveness of partnership and governance
- 6.1. Ensure the Council communicates and embeds their vision and ambition for children’s social care services and that staff and Council partners are aware of their roles and responsibilities in delivering this vision and ambition of the Council.
 - 6.2. Undertake a review of the effectiveness of partnership working, particularly BSCB with a view to agreeing with the Council’s partner’s actions to address any issues concerning partnership working. The implementation of those actions and the impact on improving the working relationship of the Council and their partners will be monitored by the Improvement Board. This should include ensuring the voluntary sector is actively engaged in strategic and operational planning.
 - 6.3. Ensure that elected members of the Council and members of the BSCB are aware of their responsibilities for improving the quality of children’s services; ensuring there is close oversight of children’s services and for ensuring improvement in outcomes for children are being delivered.
 - 6.4. Ensure elected members of the Council understand and deliver their corporate parent role and are trained and supported to undertake a leadership, scrutiny and challenge role of safeguarding services and services for looked after children.
 - 6.5. Ensure the BSCB is able to scrutinise, 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.
7. Capacity and Capability
- 7.1. Ensure children’s social care services are resourced to manage the caseloads including plans for permanency, in structure and

appointment of personnel, and effective lines of accountabilities to ensure an effective delivery of services. Review the demands on, capacity and duties of the social care service emergency duty team to meet needs and enable a timely response. Review the roles of senior managers to ensure their focus is on the front line and quality of practice.

- 7.2. Embed the leadership team across children services, securing transition arrangements for changes in key posts and personnel.
- 7.3. Implement a programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development to improve the quality of front line social work, based upon skills audits of children's social care staff including managers. Attention must be paid to the eight standards for employers of social workers.³ The Council should report the impact the training has on improving outcomes for children to the Improvement Board.
- 7.4. Ensure management oversight of safeguarding practice and social care caseloads. The results of the oversight should be used to identify strengths, areas for development and potential gaps which will then be used to bring about improvements in the quality of social work practice;
- 7.5. Ensure that the views of staff are considered in relation to their work and workplace using feedback mechanisms, such as staff surveys, the result of which should be reported to the Improvement Board. To support this, consideration should be given to the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).⁴

8. Support measures

- 8.1. 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 (CIB) to formalise a package of sector support to address the issues set out in the inspection or raised through any other sector review. A package of support may be considered subject to the direction of the Improvement Board but should include peer challenge and scrutiny at the Improvement Board.

9. Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice

³ http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

⁴ <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

- 9.1. We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an independent 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 Council partners. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer.
- 9.2. The Council, working with Council partners, on the Improvement Board must 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 and looked after children services.
- 9.3. An Improvement Plan should be developed by the Improvement Board to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection reports of safeguarding and looked after children's services dated 10 August 2012 and those set out in this Improvement Notice. The Improvement Board must ensure that the actions and timescales set out in the plan are communicated to staff and Council partners so that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in delivering the improvements.
- 9.4. Agree with the Improvement Board a dataset of performance targets with targets and timescales. Targets should be set at 6 and 12 month intervals. The Council must report to the Improvement 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 by up to 18 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.

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

- 10.1. The Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written 6 and 12 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 Improvement Board Chair will inform reviews of progress which will be conducted by Department for Education officials and take place after 6 and 12 months of this Improvement Notice. Such reviews may result in an amendment

to this Improvement Notice and further action being required.

11. Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates may result in the Secretary of State for Education exercising his statutory powers under section 497A 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 for Children and Families