

Improvement Notice

To: Name Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council (“the Council”)
Address Municipal Offices, Smith Street, Rochdale OL16 1LQ

This Improvement Notice (“the Notice”) is being issued due to inadequate 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 on 21 December 2012 (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s arrangements to protect children to be ‘inadequate’; and
- adoption scorecard data published by the Department for Education in May and November 2012.

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

The Council must take action to:

- (i) improve areas of weakness identified in the inspection report;
- (ii) reduce the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, and the average time between receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family; and
- (iii) put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvement secured.

In respect of the above, the Council, working with its partner agencies (“the Council’s Partners”) as identified by the Council, must demonstrate evidence of improvement, and also take the following actions:

1. Leadership and Governance

- 1.1. Senior Managers must provide a clear vision and strategy that results in their taking a lead role in planning and development to reduce risk and provide an appropriate range of services to children and families. The Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board (“RBSCB”) must ensure that Council staff and the Council’s Partners understand their roles and responsibilities and are held to account in delivering their contribution to this vision and ambition for overall improvement.
- 1.2. Review the membership, structure and operation of RBSCB by 29 March 2013 to ensure the Board is fulfilling its statutory objectives and functions under section 14 of the Children Act 2004 and regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

Regulations 2006 by:

- a) co-ordinating what is done by each person or body represented on RBSCB for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area;
 - b) ensuring the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for those purposes;
 - c) assessing the effectiveness and impact of the help being provided to children and families, including early help;
 - d) assessing whether Board partners are fulfilling their statutory obligations under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and parallel duties, and asking Board partners to self-evaluate; and
 - e) quality assuring practice, for example through joint audits of case files, involving practitioners and identifying lessons to be learned.
- 1.3. Ensure that all RBSCB partners contribute proportionately with reliable resources that enable the Board to be strong and effective.
 - 1.4. Ensure that mechanisms are in place for listening to children and their families, including ensuring that children and young people in receipt of children in need and child protection services have access to appropriate advocacy services, and that their views are used to inform learning and service improvements.
 - 1.5. Establish and embed the Council's senior management team and improve the stability of the workforce by:
 - a) putting in place clear handover strategies for the replacement of interim staff with permanent appointees who support continuity of improvement;
 - b) taking action to fill vacant posts and reduce reliance on agency staff; and
 - c) ensuring that strategies are clearly communicated to all staff.

2. Early Help and Partnership Working

- 2.1. Work collaboratively with partners to develop and implement an early help strategy which:
 - a) identifies children and families who would benefit from early help;
 - b) ensures effective assessment of the need for early help, by means of agreed assessment processes and clear thresholds¹ which are understood and consistently applied by all staff working within social care services of the Council and the Council's Partners;
 - c) sets out the services that will be provided to those children

¹ under section 17 of the Children Act 1989

and young people who do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention or referral to children's social care services, but who require targeted, multi-agency, or early help; and

- d) ensures that consistent, effective, co-ordinated early help services are provided by the most appropriate agencies.

3. 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:

- 3.1. Put in place an Improvement Board ("the Board") which shall have an Independent Chair ("the Chair") and which is expected to meet every month. If in the future the 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 Board meetings as a participant observer. The Board should include the Council's Partners in its membership. 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 Board to operate effectively.
- 3.2. Develop and implement an Improvement Plan which will set out the actions required to comply with this Notice, including an adoption plan to achieve the thresholds set out by the Department for Education² by 2016.
- 3.3. With members of the Board, the Council must agree a dataset of performance indicators with targets and timescales. Targets should be set at appropriate 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 six months of the commencement 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:

- Two months after the commencement of this Notice, the Board Chair must provide the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families with an initial report. After six months, the Board Chair must provide a written progress report including specific commentary against the targets set out in this Notice. At this stage, the Chair's report will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Leader of the Council.
- Additional external validation of progress, such as a peer review or Ofsted inspection, should be commissioned and carried out before the end of this

² <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/a00205069/action-plan-for-adoption-tackling-delay>

Notice to inform decisions on next steps.

- The progress reports from the Chair will inform reviews of progress which will be conducted by Department for Education officials and take place six months after commencement of this Improvement Notice, or at the specific request of the Department for Education. Such reviews may result in an amendment to this Notice and further action being required.

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

Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Notice, or the Secretary of State for Education not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, the Secretary of State for Education may choose to use his statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children's social care services.

Signed: **Date:**

Edward Timpson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State