

## **Improvement Notice**

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**To: Name Somerset County Council (“the Council”)**  
**Address County Hall, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DY**

**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 local authority arrangements for the protection of children carried out by Ofsted between 24 June 2013 and 03 July 2013, and published on 05 August 2013 (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of the Council’s child protection services and all three sub-judgements to be ‘inadequate’.

### **The Notice will last a period of:**

Twelve months in the first instance, with a formal review of progress and improvement at the six month stage.

### **Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice:**

- I expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which will have an independent Chair (“Board Chair”) to meet every four weeks for the period of the Notice. The Improvement Board should include the Council’s partners in its membership. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer.
- An Improvement Plan should be developed by the Improvement Board to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report of 05 August 2013 and those set out in this Improvement Notice. The Council must agree a dataset of performance targets with clear and realistic targets and timescales with the members of the Improvement Board. This dataset should sit alongside a clear demonstration of how qualitative measures and analysis will be used to determine improvements in overall performance and outcomes for children and young people. The Council must report progress against these measures to the Improvement Board, and reporting must include an analysis of those performance trends that are failing to meet the targets and timescales set. The Council should aim for all targets set in the Improvement Notice to be met by twelve months from the start of the Notice.
- I expect the Council to work with the sector to identify and draw down appropriate improvement support as identified in Somerset’s improvement programme.

## **The following measures are needed for you to comply with the Notice:**

The Council working with its partner agencies (“the Council’s partners”), must take action to:

- (i) Improve areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report and ensure local authority arrangements for the protection of children meet all legislative requirements<sup>1</sup>;
- (ii) Improve performance against key indicators in the areas concerned and provide evidence of improvements in quality of practice; and
- (iii) Put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvement secured beyond the period of the Notice.

In respect of the above, the Council and its partner agencies must demonstrate that:

- All child protection enquiries are carried out by a qualified social worker from the date of the Improvement Notice;
- There are no unallocated cases in any reporting month for the duration of this Improvement Notice;
- 100% of new case plans for children are written, and specific to the child’s need by the time of the six month review;
- A specific and measurable set of reporting data and targets have been developed by Somerset and agreed by the Department, within two months of the date of this Improvement Notice;
- An early help provision plan has been drafted, that outlines the constraints to universal early help provision and how these constraints will be rectified, in time for the January Improvement Board to sign-off;
- An urgent review of the CAF process and associated audit arrangements, alongside appropriate action to ensure quality and effectiveness, has been undertaken and reported to the January Improvement Board;
- The Somerset Safeguarding Children’s Board sets out clear arrangements and evidence of how it fulfils its main functions as set out in statutory guidance in relation to scrutiny and challenge, prior to the December Board; and
- Elected Members understand and deliver their Corporate Parent and Overview & Scrutiny roles, and demonstrate how they engage with young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory Guidance: *‘Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children’*

The Council should demonstrate improvements in the following areas through evidence from its on-going auditing programme and external audit activity:

- Significant progress in improving quality of practice;
- A robust performance management framework put in place that is consistently used by practitioners to aid practice and managers at all levels to manage activity more effectively and provide early alerts to risk;
- 75% of cases judged 'adequate' or better through assessment audit; and
- 80% of managers' records judged 'adequate' or better for appropriate supervision and quality of management overview.

**Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:**

A formal assessment will be carried out at within six months of the date of the Improvement Notice.

**Improvement against the above measures will be assessed by:**

The Department for Education which will, on the basis of measurable progress towards the targets outlined above, advise Ministers on any necessary follow-up action. The Council must provide to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, a written report following the end of the Improvement Notice period including specific commentary against the targets set out in the Notice. The Board Chair must also provide an independent assessment of progress against the targets set out in the Notice within two months and then at six-monthly intervals.

**Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment date 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: 20.11.13

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