

Improvement Notice

To: NAME Coventry City Council (“the Council”)
ADDRESS Civic Centre 1, Little Park Street, Coventry CV1 5RR

This Improvement Notice is issued to Coventry City Council on 30 June 2014 following the findings of inadequate performance and arrangements for ‘children needing help and protection’, for ‘leadership, management and governance’, and for ‘effectiveness of the LSCB’ as identified in the Ofsted inspection report published 21 March 2014.

1. This Notice is given to:

- (i) address the areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection of services for child protection and looked after children published by Ofsted on 21 March 2014;
- (ii) incorporate the actions required to respond to the findings identified in the Serious Case Review (published September 2013) and subsequent deeper analysis (published December 2013), into the death of Daniel Pelka AND subsequent Serious Case Reviews;
- (iii) and the adoption scorecards published by the Department for Education in Jan 2014 (covering the period 2011-13).

To comply with this Notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with its partner agencies (“partners”) as identified by the Children Act (s11), with clear evidence of improvement:

Early Help and Partnership Working

2. **Implement a prevention and early intervention strategy to provide children, young people and families appropriate support from early help to statutory intervention by:**
 - developing and agreeing a local protocol for early assessment as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* so all partners are able to respond to early needs and involve others as required;
 - reviewing and monitoring the understanding, use of thresholds and criteria, and referral routes (including the CAF) by different partners;
 - monitoring referral/re-referral rates and feedback from referrers;
 - commissioning targeted services with partners with mechanisms for step-up/step-down between early help and statutory social care to ensure appropriate support and shared case leads across partners; and
 - monitoring the contributions to, the use and impact of early help as made by all partners and to regularly report to Improvement Board on this with recommendations to improvement practice.

Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)

3. Strengthen the LSCB so it can ensure that partners work together effectively and are held to account for their responsibilities by ensuring that:

- there is action to improve the effectiveness of the LSCB with necessary improvements to take place within 3 months of this notice, with work reported to the Improvement Board at that point (and later reporting and updates agreed afterwards);
- multi-agency practice and individual partner audits are robust, with reporting to the Improvement Board on any key lessons and recommendations to improve practice; and
- that all partners are committed a shared set of priorities for safeguarding, child protection, and early help/intervention and prevention.

Quality and effectiveness of Practice

4. Improve the quality, timeliness and consistency of assessments by ensuring that:

- all assessments by the Council and partners follow the principles and parameters of a good assessment as stated in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2013)¹;
- Agree and monitor protocols and ensure information is shared in a timely fashion e.g. after key planning meetings where decisions are taken;
- the child or young person's is seen alone and their views recorded;
- evidence, rationale and decision making for assessments are timely in being recorded (and shared as needed);
- joint screening for domestic abuse notifications are timely and good quality in accordance to local protocols with performance monitored; and
- all assessments are completed to the timescales set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*; and qualitative evidence arising from performance management systems and case audits confirms that this has been carried out effectively.

5. Improve the quality, delivery and management of child protection practice and plans by ensuring that:

- all partners attend child protection meetings and strategy meetings and this is escalated when not occurring;
- child protection plans comply with the requirements of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* including ensuring that all plans include the views of the child, time bound actions, with assigned 'owners', and with measurable, success outcomes for children and young people;
- plans include review and evaluation points, with timescales agreed with

¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>

- other professionals along with information about their contributions;
 - case records are regularly updated, in a timely fashion, to document any new or amended information, rationale and decisions as they arise (and new information shared as needed);
 - evidence of management oversight, decision making and appropriate action, 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 and clear improvements, actions and timescales, identified when needed.
- 6. Improve the timeliness of adoptions in order to achieve scorecard thresholds** by ensuring that:
- clear plans are in place to improve all aspects of timeliness (local authority decision-making, placement orders, matching and placement);
 - planned improvements to the recruitment strategy for adoptive parents are embedded; and
 - measures are taken to build on recent improvements in timeliness, including the use of case tracking in order to identify children likely to be adopted to help predict and manage future performance.
- 7. Establish effective supervision and management oversight of appropriate workloads** by ensuring that:
- all supervision is regular and reflective to promote learning, in line with agreed protocols, with training available for supervisors;
 - social worker responsibilities and workloads are clearly and tightly defined and reviewed so effective practice can take place, with a range of work for staff consistent with their level of experience and competence (including protected caseloads for NQSWs); and
 - all management oversight (such as case discussion, supervision and audit) is conducted in line with standards set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* to ensure safe practice and decision making on individual child protection cases.

Quality assurance and audit

- 8. Ensure there are robust and effective quality assurance and audit frameworks to drive improvements** that:
- use quantitative and qualitative evidence, with a view to the effectiveness of practice and the degree to which it is safe;
 - give consideration to the experience of the child and family and their journey through the system;
 - include regular auditing arrangements of case files, with use of independent arrangements to review the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance in individual case records (as set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*);
 - agree a regular and planned approach (including the size and scope of audits), to update the Improvement Board on audit findings and analysis, along with recommendations to improve practice, which should also inform the work of the LSCB;

- ensure recommendations and actions are measurable and based on what is known to constitute best practice to inform improvements in practice as well as inform workforce development, supervision and future service development; and
- are themselves monitored for their effectiveness with an update to the Improvement Board and the LSCB.

Leadership and Governance

9. **Guide an effective response to address improvement needs** by:
 - ensuring that the Council and partners on the Improvement Board agree an improvement plan (and the objectives, actions, owners, timescales, and mechanisms to monitor progress and impact), on children’s safeguarding services. The Improvement Board, the LSCB, and the Council should determine the most effective method to engage and communicate to staff across agencies so they understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering these improvements;

10. **Develop a strategic understanding and response to the factors leading to the increased service demand on social care**, including demographic and wider service design factors.

Taking account of the measures set out in this Improvement Notice the Council is expected to:

11. Continue to support the Improvement Board and its Independent Chair (“the Chair”). The Board is expected to meet at least every 6 weeks. 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 key partner agencies in its membership. The Council must provide the Chair with administrative support to a level sufficient for the Chair to undertake their role efficiently and for the Board to operate effectively.

12. The Council must ensure that the content of the Improvement Plan and a record of progress is kept up to date. The Council must report to the Improvement Board on progress against the objectives in the plan and can commission updates from partners in order to do this. Reporting should include analysis and recommendations supported by reviewing performance trends against key data sets (which partners should agree) including quality of service and outcomes for children and young people. The Council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened.

13. **The Council should aim for actions included in the revised plan to be delivered within 2 years of the Ofsted inspection.** The objectives and performance trends will form part of the discussion at formal review meetings with the Department for Education.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

14. The Improvement Board Chair must provide to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families a written progress report against the areas set out in this Notice by 30 June 2014 and every two improvement boards thereafter. The Chair's report should be based on independent testing and validation of improvements, incorporating at least 2 days every month (either by the Chair directly or an independently appointed person on behalf of the Chair).
15. In parallel, the LSCB Chair should first separately report on the local board's fulfilment of its statutory responsibility by 30 June 2014. It should then report every two improvement boards thereafter. This does not preclude the Improvement Board Chair from separately assessing the LSCB's effectiveness in progress reports.
16. A more extensive and substantial independent review of progress within this calendar year should be used to further assess progress. The timing and focus of this review should be agreed with the Department for Education.
17. Progress reviews will be conducted by Department for Education officials and take place every six months until this notice is lifted, or at the specific request of the Department. Prior to the review any Improvement Board Chair's report for that period will be supplemented by a report on progress from the Lead Member for Children's Services. 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 or poor progress:

18. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement Notice, or should ministers not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, ministers may choose to invoke their 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 services.

Signed:  Date: 30.6.14

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