

DIRECTION UNDER SECTIONS 497(4B) OF THE EDUCATION ACT 1996 TO NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

WHEREAS

1. Northamptonshire County Council (“the Council”) is the children’s services authority for its area;
2. The Ofsted inspection of arrangements for the protection of children in Northamptonshire, published 20 March 2013, the Ofsted report on the Council’s adoption service, published 2 May 2013, and the Ofsted report into Looked After Children’s services, published 23 August 2013, found that services were “inadequate”;
3. The Secretary of State is satisfied that the Council is failing to perform to an adequate standard or at all some or all of the functions to which section 497(A) of the Education Act 1996 is applied by section 50 of the Children Act 2004, namely:
 - a. social services functions, as defined in the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, so far as those functions relate to children;
 - b. the functions conferred on the local authority under sections 23C to 24D of the Children Act 1989 (so far as not falling within paragraph (a) above); and
 - c. the functions conferred on the authority under section 10, 12, 12C, 12D and 17A of the Children Act 2004
4. The Secretary of State considers it expedient in accordance with section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 to direct the Council, as set out below, in order to secure that those functions are performed to an adequate standard; and
5. The Department for Education will assess progress by undertaking performance reviews at 6 monthly intervals from the date of this direction.

NOW THEREFORE

1. Pursuant to section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State for Education directs the Council to:
 - i. Submit the Council’s plans to improve children’s services to the Department for Education for approval within one calendar month of the issuing of this Direction;
 - ii. Appoint an experienced Director of Children’s Services as independent peer support for the Strategic Director of

Children's Services, the appointment must be approved by the Secretary of State.

- iii. Secure independent peer support for the Cabinet Member for Children and Education, the appointment must be approved by the Secretary of State.
- iv. Set up an Improvement Board which will comprise of an Independent Chair, who's appointment must be approved by the Secretary of State; the Leader of the Council; the Cabinet Member for Children and Education; the Director of Children's Services; the Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board; representatives of the Department for Education; and independent peer support for the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children and Education. The Council may add other members to the Improvement Board as it sees fit. The Improvement Board will oversee and drive improvements to Children's Services for the duration of the Direction.
- v. The Improvement Board must meet on at least one occasion per calendar month and provide quarterly reports on all aspects of the Council's improvement plan to the Secretary of State for Education;
- vi. Ensure that the Independent Chair of the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board (Kevin Crompton) reports quarterly to the Secretary of State for Education on the progress of all agencies in improving children's services in Northamptonshire;
- vii. Engage an improvement partner, who must be approved by the Secretary of State, to review the functioning of the adoption and looked after children services and to develop options for the delivery of sustainable improvements to the service. The impact of this work should be monitored through the Improvement Board.
- viii. Engage an improvement partner, who must be approved by the Secretary of State, to support the development and strengthening of the middle management tier.

2. This Direction will remain in force for a period of 2 years from the date on which it is made.

Signed by authority of the Secretary of State for Education

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Dated this 23rd day of Oct 2013