

**STATUTORY DIRECTION TO READING BOROUGH COUNCIL IN
RELATION TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES UNDER SECTION 497A(4B) OF
THE EDUCATION ACT 1996**

WHEREAS:

1. The Secretary of State for Education ("the Secretary of State") has carefully considered Ofsted's report, in respect of Reading Borough Council ("the Council"), of its inspection carried out between 23 May and 15 June 2016. The inspection report found that children's services are 'inadequate'. The sub-judgements for children who need help and protection, children looked after and achieving permanence and leadership, management and governance were all rated as 'inadequate'.
2. The Secretary of State is therefore satisfied that the Council is failing to perform, to an adequate standard, some or all of the functions to which section 497A of the Education Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act") is applied by section 50 of the Children Act 2004 ("children's social care functions"), 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 Council 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 Council under sections 10, 12, 12C, 12D and 17A of the Children Act 2004.
3. The Secretary of State has appointed Nick Whitfield as Commissioner for Children's Services in Reading ("the Children's Services Commissioner") in accordance with, and for the purposes of, the terms of reference ("the Terms of Reference") set out in the Annex to this direction.
4. The Secretary of State, having considered representations made by the Council, considers it expedient, in accordance with her powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, to direct the Council as set out below in order to ensure that all of the Council's children's social care functions are performed to an adequate standard.

NOW THEREFORE:

5. Pursuant to her powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 Act, the Secretary of State directs the Council as follows:
 - a. To comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State or the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to the improvement of the Council's exercise of its children's social care functions and

provide such assistance as either the Secretary of State or the Children's Services Commissioner may require;

- b. To co-operate with the Children's Services Commissioner, including on request allowing the Commissioner at all reasonable times access:
 - i. to any premises of the Council;
 - ii. to any document of, or relating to, the Council; and
 - iii. to any employee or member of the Council,

which appears to him to be necessary for achieving the purposes of, and carrying out the responsibilities set out in, the Terms of Reference.

- c. To provide the Children's Services Commissioner with such amenities, services and administrative support as he may reasonably require from time to time for the carrying out of his responsibilities in accordance with the Terms of Reference, including:
 - i. providing officers' time or support;
 - ii. providing office space, meeting rooms or computer facilities;
- d. To co-operate with a Commissioner-led review as to whether the most effective way of securing and sustaining improvement in Reading is to remove the control of children's social care from the Council for a period of time.

This direction will remain in force until it is revoked by the Secretary of State.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Lunn', written in a cursive style.

SUZANNE LUNN
A Senior Civil Servant in the Department for Education
Dated this 16th day of September 2016

ANNEX

Non-Executive Commissioner for Children's Services

Reading Borough Council

Terms of Reference

There is a presumption in cases of persistent or systemic failure that children's social care services will be removed from local authority control, for a period of time, in order to bring about sustainable improvement, unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.

In line with the recommendations set out in the Ofsted report of children's social care published 5th August 2016 the Children's Services Commissioner for Reading is expected to take the following steps.

1. To issue any necessary instructions to the local authority for the purpose of securing immediate improvement in the authority's delivery of children's social care; to identify ongoing improvement requirements; and to recommend any additional support required to deliver those improvements.
2. To bring together evidence to assess the Council's capacity and capability to improve itself, in a reasonable timeframe, and recommend whether or not this evidence is sufficiently strong to suggest that long-term sustainable improvement to children's social care can be achieved should operational service control continue to remain with the Council.
3. To advise on relevant alternative delivery and governance arrangements for children's social care, outside of the operational control of the local authority, taking account of local circumstances and the views of the Council and key partners.
4. To report to the Minister of State for Children and Families by 16 December 2016.