



Edward Timpson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Councillor Sir Albert Bore
Leader of Birmingham City Council
Council House
Victoria Square
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27 March 2014

Dear Albert,

In December 2013, in the light of continued serious worries about the performance of Birmingham's children's services, I appointed Professor Julian Le Grand, supported by Alan Wood and Isabelle Trowler, to provide clear, independent and expert advice to inform future decisions about how to ensure improvement. As you know, the Panel was supported by experts and leaders in their field: Clare Chamberlain, Andrew Christie, John Coughlan, Steve Crocker and Graham Archer.

Having considered the Panel's Report, I continue, as I know you do, to be very concerned about the safety of children in Birmingham. I am sure you will share my view that it is of the utmost importance that we act quickly and decisively to ensure we do the absolute best for Birmingham's children, both through immediate actions to make children's social care services safe and more medium-term activity in pursuit of sustainable improvement. I have therefore accepted the Panel's recommendations and will be directing the Council to take a number of actions.

Firstly, I have accepted the recommendation that a Commissioner be appointed to oversee improvement in the quality of children's social care services in Birmingham. I am pleased to be able to tell you that I will be appointing Lord Norman Warner as Commissioner for Children's Social Care in Birmingham.

Lord Warner will be supported by an Expert Panel comprising the Chief Social Worker, Isabelle Trowler, and other experts and leaders in their field, including at least some of those who supported Professor Le Grand during the course of his work in Birmingham. This Expert Panel will be independent of the Council, and will be supported by a small team of DfE officials. I have set out below areas that I see as being immediate priorities for action for the Commissioner and Panel.

Separately, I have accepted Professor Le Grand's recommendation that we should explore how improvement capacity can be created or promoted in the children's services system nationally and that as part of this work, specific consideration should be given to potential longer-term solutions for Birmingham.

I have therefore decided to commission a piece of work, overseen by Professor Le Grand, to look at developing capacity for delivering children's services outside of local authorities – to be used not only in future thinking about the commissioning of services in Birmingham but elsewhere. This will report by September 2014. A further report by the end of the year will make recommendations specifically about the best long-term commissioning approach for services in Birmingham. That study will report to me and to you, jointly.

My immediate priority is to stabilise services in Birmingham and I therefore ask you to:

- Work with members of the Panel to undertake a proper analysis of the unidentified risk issue (building on any further insight generated as part of the Ofsted inspection I understand is currently taking place), with the Commissioner then, by the end of May 2014, to make recommendations to me on any urgent actions required.
- Support the Commissioner who will report to your Council, your Chief Executive Mark Rogers and me with recommendations for ways to strengthen senior management capacity within Birmingham's Directorate for People by June 2014.
- Work with the Panel and Commissioner to satisfy the Commissioner, by June 2014, that a single and coherent plan for improvement is in place. The Commissioner will subsequently report to me on the adequacy of this plan.
- Linked to that plan, I would like the Commissioner to work with you on a five year indicative budget for children's social care services in Birmingham, reflecting your improvement needs.

Together with the Department for Communities and Local Government, we will shortly be consulting you on a draft direction under section 15(5) of the Local Government Act 1999 and section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 to give effect to the above.

I know that you have been clear that the children of Birmingham and their safety is an absolute priority and that you and your officials are committed to working

with these decisions. I am pleased to be able to count on your continued co-operation and engagement. We need to work together to drive the changes which are vital to give the children and young people of Birmingham the safe and excellent service that they are entitled to.

I am copying this letter to the following key people in Birmingham, Councillor Brigid Jones - Lead Member, Mark Rogers – Chief Executive, Peter Hay – Director for People and Jane Held – Birmingham Children Safeguarding Board Chair.

Yours sincerely,

Edward

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