

## **Improvement Notice**

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To: NAME Surrey County Council ("the Council")  
ADDRESS Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT1 2DW

**This Improvement Notice is issued to Surrey County Council on 26 January 2016 following the judgement that children's services are 'inadequate' as identified in the Ofsted inspection report published on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015.**

1. This Notice is given to address all the areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers published by Ofsted on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015.
2. 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 2004 (section 11), with clear evidence of improvement:

### **Adviser arrangements**

3. The Secretary of State has chosen to appoint Rose Durban ("the adviser") to provide advice to the Department and / or the council. She has been supporting Surrey County Council since August 2015. The council will continue to work with the adviser until such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied that this is no longer required.

### **Improvement board**

4. The current improvement board arrangements should be maintained.
  - a. The board is expected to meet at least monthly. If in the future the board wishes to vary the frequency of meetings this must first be agreed by the Department for Education.
  - b. The adviser or an official from the Department for Education will attend the improvement board.
  - c. The board must always include key partner agencies in its membership
  - d. The effectiveness of the current improvement board arrangements will be included in the periodic reviews and may be subject to change.

### **Leadership, Management and Governance**

5. Ensure the Council sets out a statement of their vision and ambition for children's services and a strategic improvement plan ('the Improvement Plan') which sets clear objectives, timescales, and outcomes and is supported by a data set which includes qualitative and quantitative performance indicators. The improvement plan and its accompanying priority work stream plans should drive continuous and sustainable improvements in the areas identified in the Ofsted 2015 report

and through subsequent Ofsted monitoring visits and should be grounded in an understanding of the needs of children and families. The detailed work plans underpinning the Improvement Plan should be set out and communicated to practitioners and partners by the 26th February 2016 and regularly updated with progress and impact on outcomes for children

6. **Ensure leadership, scrutiny and challenge is exercised** and impacts on the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding and looked after children services. By ensuring that:
  - a. effective assurance arrangements are in place within the Council and across the partnership in line with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance *'Roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children Services'* and *'Working Together to Safeguard Children'*;
  - b. elected members understand and deliver their responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of the local authority children's services,
  - c. elected members of the Council understand and deliver their corporate parent role for looked after children, care leavers and meet all the statutory requirements, including statutory visits;
  - d. the Director of Children's Services is supported by an experienced peer with a successful track record of providing leadership in a Council that has gone through sustained and significant improvement following an inspection;
  - e. Council senior managers engage and consult staff and partners on the changes necessary to secure improved children's services and ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to enable senior managers to implement the improvement activity and measure impact; and
  - f. a culture of accountability is developed with managers, staff and partners holding each other to account with action taken when required to challenge poor and unacceptable performance.

### **Early Help and Partnership Working**

7. Develop and implement a cohesive, collaborative early help offer delivered jointly by all partners, to provide a continuum of help and support to respond to the different levels of need and risk by children and families. This will require clear criteria and agreed pathways from universal to support services, with effective step-up and step-down arrangements in place. The council should take a leadership role in coordinating effective strategies, information and access points for children and families, supported by evidence-based interventions.

### **Quality and effectiveness of Practice**

8. Improve the quality, timeliness and consistency of children's social care assessments and plans by ensuring that:
  - a. all assessments by the Council and partners follow the principles and parameters of a good assessment and are completed within

- timescales as stated in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*;
- b. all protocols are agreed and monitored and ensure information is shared in a timely fashion;
- c. evidence, rationale and decision making for assessments are timely in being recorded and lead to planned and purposeful direct work with families;
- d. risk is effectively identified and managed; and
- e. management oversight, analysis and challenge are effective in driving forward improved practice across the teams.

### **Quality assurance, audit and management oversight**

9. Ensure there is a robust and effective quality assurance framework to drive and evidence the impact of improvement for children and families, front line practitioners and key partner agencies that:
  - a. uses quantitative and qualitative evidence, with a view to the effectiveness of practice and the degree to which it is safe;
  - b. includes 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*);
  - c. there is an agreed and planned approach (including the size and scope of audits), to update the Board on audit findings and analysis, along with recommendations to improve practice;
  - d. that there is a comprehensive and accurate data set that is regularly communicated and understood by all levels of the Council to ensure that data better informs practice and the provision for children;
  - e. ensures recommendations and actions are measurable, inform improvements in practice, workforce development and supervision; and
  - f. the council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened.
  
10. Establish effective supervision and management oversight by ensuring that:
  - a. all staff have regular supervision;
  - b. supervision is reflective to promote learning, in line with agreed protocols, with training available for supervisors;
  - c. social worker responsibilities and workloads are defined and reviewed with a range of work for staff consistent with their level of experience and competence (including protected caseloads for Newly Qualified Social Workers); and
  - d. 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 all individual children's social cases.

### **Staff capability and capacity**

11. Develop a workforce strategy which is based upon an analysis of need. The workforce strategy must include clear recruitment, development and retention strategies, set out how poor performance and capability issues will be dealt with and an analysis of skills and training needs required to deliver good social work. It should be linked to the Improvement Plan, and clearly related to service plans and audit outcomes. The strategy should be aimed initially at reducing the dependency on agency staff and should include:
- a. A review of support for newly qualified social workers to ensure that it meets need and results in them becoming advocates for the service;
  - b. a review of, and improvement to, tools and systems (including the electronic information system) required to deliver good and agile social work ; and
  - c. staff engagement and regular feedback to improve and shape practice using feedback mechanisms, such as staff surveys and report the results to the Improvement Board.

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

13. The Council should aim for actions included in the Improvement Plan to be delivered within 12 months of the date of this notice. 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. Progress reviews will be conducted by the adviser and DfE officials. The first review will take place before the end of February 2016. Subsequent reviews will take place at six monthly intervals from the date of the improvement notice and will continue until the notice is lifted, or at the specific request of the Department. To inform the review the council will provide a report on progress, the impact of the improvements, remaining challenges and risks to improvement. 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:**

15. 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 on behalf of the Secretary of State

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

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SUZANNE LUNN  
A Senior Civil Servant in the Department for Education

Dated : 26 January 2016