



**Edward Timpson MP**

Minister of State for Vulnerable Children

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BP

Councillor Steve Eling  
Leader of the Council  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Oldbury  
West Midlands  
B69 3DE

6 October 2016

Dear Steve,

**DIRECTION FOR NEXT STAGE OF GOVERNMENT'S INTERVENTION IN  
SANDWELL'S CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES**

I hereby enclose, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education, a statutory Direction to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council issued under section 497A (4B) of the 1996 Education Act, which will be published on the Government's website.

Thank you for the Council's representations on the draft Direction, which I have taken full account of, and for taking the time to meet me to discuss your views.

An important part of this Direction is for the Council to bring forward – by 1 December – proposals to transfer its children's social care services to a Children's Services Trust, for a period of time. This decision has not been taken lightly. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council has failed its most vulnerable children and young people for approaching seven years. This is unacceptable and I am determined to reverse this record of failure.

To that end I am extremely heartened that you want to see rapid, positive change in Sandwell. That is exactly what I want to achieve. The necessary acceleration of improvement to your services does not start after a Trust has been established in Sandwell, towards the end of next year. It starts now, with the support and challenge of my Commissioner for Children's Services in Sandwell, Malcolm Newsam.

I understand and appreciate that there will be some anxiety about the Government's decision to establish a Trust among key groups in Sandwell, notably your social workers. However, given your commitment to work constructively with me and my officials, I am optimistic that some reassurance can be provided quite quickly on a number of points related to Trusts, including – for instance – the Terms and Conditions on which social workers transfer to a Trust.

I hope there is now an opportunity to demonstrate to social workers in Sandwell the benefits, both to themselves and to the children and families they are there to support, of making a fresh start. I have looked carefully at the most recent evidence of the Council's failure to deliver adequate services, including the 2015 Ofsted report, Malcolm Newsam's diagnostic work with the Council last year and Eleanor

Brazil's report to me. It convinced me that a decisive break with the past is required. I am sure that a new vision for children's social care, the opportunity to work with excellent leaders and the very real prospect that – in time – your children's social care services could be Good or we hope even better can be attractive to many people in Sandwell, including the Council's partners and social workers.

Excellent social work is the foundation upon which an improvement in Sandwell's children's social care services will be built. Your social workers will rightly be encouraged at some positive changes identified by Ofsted in its most recent monitoring letter. However, the Ofsted letter following the first monitoring visit in June described little progress since the Ofsted inspection in early 2015. Having considered all the evidence available, I am of the view that there is clearly still a huge amount of work to do to secure improvement that is sustainable. Good social workers need reassurance that the service will not slip back again if they are to commit to living and working in Sandwell, driving forward the delivery of children's social care services towards a confident new future.

It is worth noting that there are encouraging signs of improvement following the establishment of Trusts in Doncaster, Slough and in Kingston-on Thames where Achieving for Children - a community interest company dedicated to improving and delivering children's services across Kingston and Richmond - transformed services from inadequate to Good in fewer than three years. Just last month, Ofsted's monitoring of services delivered by the Doncaster Children's Services Trust found 'significant improvement from a low baseline to improve services for children and young people in need of help and protection' and also noted that 'social work staff are very positive about working in Doncaster, and report clear improvement in support and their working environment'. While real and lasting change takes time to embed, I am encouraged by these positive developments and I believe that a Sandwell Children's Services Trust will similarly be able to start making a real difference to the lives of Sandwell's most vulnerable children and young people.

Alongside the statutory direction, I am publishing the Commissioner's report and the first Ofsted monitoring letter. I will arrange to meet you again, towards the end of year, to discuss questions of resource and the Council's progress towards setting up a Trust. In the meantime I wish you and your staff well in the important work that lies ahead.

I am copying this letter to: Councillor Simon Hackett; Jan Britton; Matthew Sampson; and Malcolm Newsam.

*Yours sincerely,  
Edward*

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