



Robert Goodwill MP

Minister of State for Children and Families

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KIRKLEES COUNCIL: CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INTERVENTION

In November, the Secretary of State issued Kirklees Council with a statutory direction under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996. This followed the Ofsted inspection in October 2016 that found the Council's children's social care service to be inadequate across all key elements, meeting the Department for Education's systemic failure threshold.

As you are aware, following a four month review the Commissioner submitted her report and recommendations to the Secretary of State in April. As Minister of state for children and families I am responding on the Secretary of State's behalf.

I have now had the opportunity to carefully consider the Commissioner's report.

I believe the report paints an accurate picture of the challenges currently facing the service and gives a comprehensive account of the issues that have led to its decline. It is clear that despite the best efforts of political leaders and your officers over the past eighteen months the quality of service still falls far below the level that is expected.

There is an urgent need to increase the pace of change in a more coordinated way and the evidence in the report clearly demonstrates the service does not currently have the leadership skills to do this. Consequently, I am minded to agree with the Commissioner's recommendation that Kirklees Council does not currently

have the leadership and management capacity and capability to drive forward the changes necessary to achieve the required standards in children's social care and alternative forms of service governance need to be considered.

I have considered the options in the report and agree that pursuing a long-term strategic partnership with Leeds currently presents the best opportunity to rapidly secure and sustain improvement.

I am aware that the Council has undertaken a number of positive steps in recent months. Your recruitment of an improvement director and new assistant director with experience of turning around struggling services is a good step forward and one I hope will help drive the necessary improvements. Similarly, the positive discussions that you have already undertaken with Leeds are very encouraging.

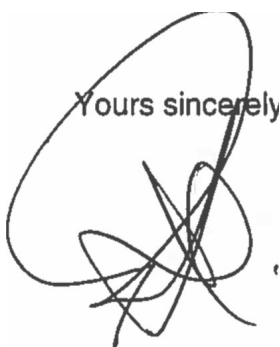
As a next step, I have instructed officials to work with you, Leeds and the Commissioner to develop a more detailed proposal setting out how the Councils intend to deliver the partnership. Once we have more detail on the likely agreement structure, plans for governance, scope, implementation and a financial case I will make a final decision on the way forward. Following this decision, the Commissioner's full report will be published, along with further detail on how alternative service governance will be established.

I understand that you, Councillor Hill and Jacqui Gedman are keen to meet with me ahead of the report's publication and agree a meeting would be helpful. My office will be in touch to arrange a convenient time.

During the coming months, it is vital that improvement work continues. Eleanor Brazil's current term as Commissioner ends at the end of September and the statutory direction remains in force until revoked. Whilst Eleanor has concluded her report, the Council is still directed to comply with any instructions she issues in relation to the improvement of children's social care functions. I understand that to date the Council has been extremely supportive of Eleanor in her role and trust that this positive relationship will continue over the coming months. It is my intention to appoint a Commissioner to oversee the next stage of the intervention and I would expect him or her to take up the role from the start of October.

I am copying this letter to Councillor Hill, Jacqui Gedman, Gill Ellis and Eleanor Brazil.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Robert Goodwill', written over the typed name 'Yours sincerely'.

Robert Goodwill MP
Minister of State for Children and Families