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Lead Commissioner Mary Ney

21<sup>st</sup> March 2018

The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for Housing  
Communities & Local Government  
Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local  
Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

The Rt Hon. Damien Hinds MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretaries of State,

I wrote to you on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2018 with my latest report on the progress of the intervention in Rotherham MBC. Following the very encouraging report from OFSTED, in that letter I recommended the return of executive powers in relation to Children's Services and indicated that I would write to you again following receipt of the report of the Independent Health Check of the Council which I had commissioned.

The Independent Health Check took place between 27<sup>th</sup> February and 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018. The team was led by Frances Done, currently a government commissioner with Birmingham City Council and comprised:

- Irene Lucas, an experienced CE in local government and ex Director General in DCLG;
- Cllr Imogen Walker, Deputy Leader of Lambeth Council;

and was supported by Sally Hammond and Judith Hurcombe from the LGA who funded and supported this piece of work.

The purpose of the Health Check was to provide an independent critique on whether the intervention had served its purpose and whether the Council was now fit to continue its improvement journey without Commissioner oversight. The Commissioner Team set the standard for assurance that the Council could demonstrate that it was sufficiently self-aware and tenaciously committed to continuous improvement without the oversight of Commissioners and in particular that the leadership of the Council could demonstrate their commitment and understanding of their roles in ensuring that the children of Rotherham are kept safe and thrive.

The report of the Independent Health Check has now been received and a copy is attached to this letter (**see Appendix**). It comments on the 10 areas that Commissioners specified within the terms of reference (detailed in the attached appendix) and reports that there is assurance on all 10 areas, and highlights a high degree of assurance in a number as well as examples of good and excellent practice. Overall the Team found that the Council had demonstrated to them "...that it is presently fit to continue its improvement journey without Commissioner oversight." and that "The speed and extent of the improvements delivered since 2015 are impressive." The report recognises that the next stages of improvement will be challenging but expresses confidence that the right foundations are in place and are sufficiently strong. It bodes well that the Team found such high levels of assurance in the political and officer leadership of the Council, the strategic direction of the Council and the engagement of partners. Importantly, for those functions still subject to additional Directions, Domestic Abuse and Adult Social Care, the Health Check found:

- Assurance in Adult Social Care of the Council's improved capability and preparedness to take forward its improvement agenda without ongoing Commissioner advice; and
- High degree of assurance in Domestic Abuse Services having found excellent partnership working and examples of best practice.

Commissioners have had the opportunity to explore the report in greater detail with the Health Check Team and fully accept the outcome and findings. The Commissioner Team has now met to discuss next steps in light of the Health Check report, and we have agreed that it is right to recommend to you that the government intervention in Rotherham can now be concluded. We appreciate that you will wish to consider the Health Check report and our recommendation and we would be pleased to meet with you and your Ministers or officials to discuss our views in more detail. We were impressed by the thorough and thoughtful way in which the Independent Health Check Team undertook their review and the expertise and experience they brought to bear. We were encouraged that they found much evidence which supported Commissioners' perceptions and judgements of the position reached and that we are not faced with new and unexpected weaknesses. I am sure the Council will be receptive to the suggestion in the report that they "...should consider undertaking a further independent review or validated self-assessment..." in 12-18 months' time and to the ongoing offer of support from the LGA.

In the interim, the Commissioner Team will continue to exercise the requirements of your current Directions issued in September 2017. We intend to give some focus to providing support to the Council on the areas of challenge referred to in both the Independent Health Check Report and the Ofsted Report.

The Council's Director of Children's Services, Ian Thomas, will be leaving the Council on 27<sup>th</sup> April to take up his new post as Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham. I would therefore like to advise you that the Council is appropriately involving the Children's Commissioner Councillor Bradwell in the arrangements to appoint a new Director. In addition, the Council has asked the Director of Children's Services from Lincolnshire County Council (the Improvement Partner) to mentor the acting Director and to undertake the technical interviews for the new appointment. Lincolnshire County Council have provided vital, expert and effective support to Children's Services for the past two years and they are well placed to fulfil these roles and give a degree of assurance on the management of the period of transition.

Commissioners look forward to the opportunity to discuss our recommendation with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Ney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'M' and 'N'.

Mary Ney  
Lead Commissioner

Enc: Appendix – Report of the Independent Health Check