

# COMMISSIONERS NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Secretary of State, Department for Education

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2018

Ref: TM/vml

Dear Secretary of State

## **Northamptonshire County Council: Intervention**

On 9 May 2018, The Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued Directions to Northamptonshire County Council in order to secure the Authority's compliance with fundamental duties that it was failing to meet. The focus of the Directions related to the Authority's arrangements for governance and scrutiny, and its financial management, with Commissioners appointed to exercise a range of powers in respect of these functions. The power to intervene in respect of other aspects of the Council's business was reserved to the Commissioners, to be exercised if they believed it necessary.

It is our considered view that we need to extend the Commissioner team to provide oversight of the operation of the Council's Children's Services function. Despite the production of action plans designed to tackle accepted shortcomings, we have witnessed the failure of the leadership within the service to address the fundamental problems facing it, including its operational stability; performance and finance. This leadership is now being replaced by the new Chief Executive, but this will take some time, and is a further, albeit necessary, disruption.

I have met many hard-working, committed staff at Northamptonshire County Council, who continue to provide excellent public service despite these challenging circumstances. However, morale is evidently low, with numerous instances of complaints from staff about decision making that is opaque and about inconsistency in the application of operational procedures. We are aware of projected improvements that either fail to get off the ground, stall, or result in little or no change in outcomes. Most recently, the verbal feedback from Ofsted following a focused visit reinforced some of these concerns and uncovered others. We lack confidence in the Service's ability to give us the necessary assurance that it will either contribute to the Council's duty to secure best value or that it is capable of adequately delivering the services that the people of Northamptonshire have a right to expect and that many of Northamptonshire's children's services staff are working hard to deliver.

We believe that we need to have an ability to reach into the Service and its operations in order to exercise the degree of support and challenge that the Service needs, apply rigour in its improvement plans, and provide assurance that it will make the changes that are necessary.

When we were appointed, the Secretary of State made clear that he would be prepared to consider the appointment of further Commissioners should we have any concerns which might merit this. We believe that the addition of a Children's Services Commissioner to the team would strengthen our capacity and enable us to manage the specific risks in this area at this time. We are making a request for such a further Commissioner accordingly.

Yours sincerely

Tony McArdle  
Lead Commissioner