

Improvement Notice

To: St Helens Council ('the council')
Wesley House
Corporation Street
St Helens
WA10 1HF

This Improvement Notice is issued to St Helens Council on 12 November 2019 following the judgement that children's social care services are inadequate, as identified in the Ofsted inspection report published 4 November 2019.

1. This Notice is given to address all the areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection of children's social care services dated 4 November 2019.
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).

Adviser arrangements

3. The Secretary of State has chosen to appoint an adviser to provide advice to the Department and/or the council. The council will work with the adviser until some such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied this is no longer required.

Improvement plan

4. The council's improvement plan will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should cover the areas identified in the Ofsted report of 4 November 2019 as well as recommendations made by the adviser appointed by the Department.
5. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
 - a. the content of the improvement plan and a record of progress against it must be kept up to date;
 - b. the council must ensure there is an improvement board with an independent chair in place to oversee implementation of the improvement plan and report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It can commission updates from partners in order to do this;
 - c. reports to the improvement board should include data, analysis and recommendations supported by evidence of impact of improvements on the quality of practice and experience of children and families;
 - d. the council should highlight those objectives which are slow to

progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened; and

- e. the views of frontline staff and of children and young people will be taken into consideration in the development of practice and standards.

Department for Education reviews


6. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement agenda at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.
7. These reviews may cover, but are not exclusive to: culture; performance; leadership, management and governance; workforce and management oversight; early help; and multi-agency arrangements.
8. From time to time, the adviser may require that a diagnostic review or assessment of performance in a specific service area is undertaken by a local authority or other party agreed with the Department.
9. For any review or assessment, the council must provide the persons conducting it with:
 - a. access to, and time with, staff and leadership;
 - b. accurate and up to date data on performance and quality;
 - c. facilities to carry out the reviews;
 - d. access to case files, minutes of meetings, supervision records or any other relevant information.
10. Prior to any reviews, the council should provide its own assessment of improvement. This may reflect, but is not limited to:
 - a. progress against the improvement plan objectives;
 - b. staff surveys;
 - c. staff supervision and the quality of feedback.
11. Taking account of the measures set out in this improvement notice and the diagnostic report produced by the DfE's adviser, the council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of May 2021 (within 18 months of the Ofsted inspection) or sooner, where appropriate.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

12. The adviser will provide to the Department regular reports of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice; improvement against the Ofsted requirements; and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:

13. 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:  Date: 12/11/19

Matthew Edwards
A senior civil servant in the Department for Education