



Department  
for Education

2 St Paul's Place  
125 Norfolk Street  
Sheffield  
S1 2FJ

Mr Jim Leivers  
Interim Director Children's Services  
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Gamble Building  
Victoria Square  
St Helens  
WA10 1DY

18<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Mr Leivers

## **ST HELENS METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT NOTICE**

I am writing to you in relation to the Improvement Notice issued to St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education.

We are aware that local authorities are facing unprecedented pressures arising from the Covid-19 crisis in addition to carrying out normal children's social work activity to ensure children are safe and protected from harm. We know you and your teams will be doing everything you can to keep children safe during this unprecedented time.

As part of these efforts, it is critical that local authorities continue their focus on improving services. The pressures created by Covid-19 are a reminder of how important it is that we tackle longer-standing challenges in children's social care services, to ensure that we can deliver effective and efficient services that meet the needs of children and families.

We are working closely with local authorities where there is an Improvement Notice in place to understand the impact of Covid-19 and support them in implementing robust response plans. The Improvement Notice specifies certain requirements which we recognise may be a challenge for you to meet in the current climate. In these exceptional circumstances we are confirming the following flexibilities to enable you to deliver your responsibilities at this challenging time while continuing your improvement journey:

- a) Improvement boards to be held virtually with an expectation that all usual board members or their representatives will attend, including statutory partners and education leads occurring every 6 weeks at the very least.
- b) Improvement boards can be re-focussed to support management of Covid-19 and partnership response to key issues.

- c) Improvement plans to be monitored and updated with delivery risks due to Covid-19 clearly identified.
- d) Adviser roles to encompass LAs response and management of Covid-19 and therefore reporting to update on progress of both improvement work and Covid-19 response.
- e) DfE review meetings to be scheduled virtually when necessary and within 3 months of the original timeframe, involving key individuals. These meetings should focus on progress to date as well impact of Covid-19 to service delivery.

These measures have been agreed after careful consideration, taking into account your local authority's position in terms of improvement and feedback from Samantha Morrison, your Caselead and Linda Clegg, your DfE adviser.

While offering these flexibilities, our focus continues to be to ensure that children are safe and protected from harm and we expect that the local authority will maintain momentum in progressing the improvement objectives outlined in the Improvement Notice. If we become concerned about progress, we will take quick action to address this.

Please note that these are temporary measures for the duration of the Covid-19 crisis and there is an expectation that once you have returned to business as usual, you will return to the priorities and timeframes specified in your Improvement Notice. As ever, please continue to work closely with Samantha as you make progress and to keep plans under review.

I am copying this letter to Kath O'Dwyer, Chief Executive, Councillor David Baines, Leader of the council and Linda Clegg, Children's Services Adviser for St Helens. The letter will be published on the .Gov webpage - we will confirm with you when this has been done.

Yours sincerely



**Matthew Edwards**  
**Deputy Director, Children's Social Care, Improvement and Interventions**