

Improvement Notice

To: Halton Borough Council (the Council)
Municipal Building
Kingsway
Widnes
WA8 7QF

This Improvement Notice is issued to Halton Borough Council (the council) on 13 January 2022 following the judgement that children's social care services have areas for priority action, as identified in the Ofsted Focused Visit report published on 17 November 2021.

1. This Notice is given to address the two areas for priority action that were identified in the report of the Focused Visit of children's social care services dated 17 November 2021.
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 10).

Adviser arrangements

3. The Secretary of State has chosen to appoint an adviser to provide advice to the Department and 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 17 November 2021 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 it establishes and maintains an improvement board, which the council will be responsible for. The improvement board is to have an independent chair in place who will oversee the 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 services for children in need of help and protection;

- d. the council should highlight those objectives which are slow to progress and highlight where contributions need to be strengthened;
- 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 person(s) 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 adviser's feedback, the council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of November 2022 (within 12 months of the Ofsted Focused Visit) 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: 13 January 2022

Carolan Goggin
A senior civil servant in the Department for Education