

STATUTORY DIRECTION TO SEFTON COUNCIL IN RELATION TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES UNDER SECTION 497A(4B) OF THE EDUCATION ACT 1996

WHEREAS:

1. The Secretary of State for Education ("the Secretary of State") has carefully considered Ofsted's report, in respect of Sefton ("the Council"), of its inspection carried out between 21 February and 4 March 2022. The inspection report found that children's services are 'inadequate'. The sub-judgements for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and; the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers were all rated as 'inadequate'.

2. The Secretary of State is therefore satisfied that the Council is failing to perform to an adequate standard, some or all of the functions to which section 497A of the Education Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act") is applied by section 50 of the Children Act 2004 ("children's social care functions"), namely;

a) social services functions, as defined in the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, so far as those functions relate to children;

b) the functions conferred on the Council under sections 23C to 24D of the Children Act 1989 (so far as not falling within paragraph a. above); and

c) the functions conferred on the Council under sections 10, 12, 12C, 12D and 17A of the Children Act 2004.

3. The Secretary of State has appointed Paul Moffat as Commissioner for Children's Services in Sefton ("the Children's Services Commissioner") in accordance with, and for the purposes of, the terms of reference ("the Terms of Reference") set out in the Annex to this direction.

4. The Secretary of State, having considered representations made by the Council, considers it expedient, in accordance with his powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, to direct the Council as set out below in order to ensure that all of the Council's children's social care functions are performed to an adequate standard.

NOW THEREFORE:

5. Pursuant to his powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 Act, the Secretary of State directs the Council as follows:

a. To comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State or the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to the improvement of the Council's exercise of its children's social care functions and provide such assistance as either the Secretary of State or the Children's Services Commissioner may require;

b. To co-operate with the Children's Services Commissioner, including on request allowing the Commissioner at all reasonable times access:

- i. to any premises of the Council;
- ii. to any document of, or relating to, the Council; and
- iii. to any employee or member of the Council,

which appears to them to be necessary for achieving the purposes of, and carrying out the responsibilities set out in, the Terms of Reference.

c. To provide the Children's Services Commissioner with such amenities, services and administrative support as they may reasonably require from time to time for the carrying out of their responsibilities in accordance with the Terms of Reference, including:

- i. providing officers' time or support;
- ii. providing office space, meeting rooms or computer facilities;

d. To co-operate with a Children's Services Commissioner-led review as to whether the most effective way of securing and sustaining improvement in Sefton is to remove the control of children's social care services from the Council.

6. This direction will remain in force until it is revoked by the Secretary of State.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education,



Carolan Goggin

A Senior Civil Servant in the Department for Education

Dated: 23 May 2022

ANNEX

Non-Executive Commissioner for Children's Services

Sefton Council

Terms of Reference

Sefton have been found to be 'inadequate' across all of the key judgements in the recent Ofsted inspection report. There is a presumption in cases of persistent or systemic failure that children's social care services will be removed from local authority control in order to bring about sustainable improvement, unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.

In line with the recommendations set out in the Ofsted report of children's social care, published 9 May 2022, the Children's Services Commissioner for Sefton is expected to take the following steps:

1. To issue any necessary instructions to the Council for the purpose of securing immediate improvement in the Council's delivery of children's social care; to identify ongoing improvement requirements; and to recommend any additional support required to deliver those improvements.
2. To bring together evidence to assess the Council's capacity and capability to improve itself, in a reasonable timeframe, and recommend whether or not this evidence is sufficiently strong to suggest that long-term sustainable improvement to children's social care can be achieved should operational service control continue to remain with the Council.
3. To advise on relevant alternative delivery and governance arrangements for children's social care, outside of the operational control of the Council, taking account of local circumstances and the views of the Council and key partners.
4. To report to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State by 16 September 2022.