

Improvement Notice

Date: 5th July

Recipients:

Cllr Tracey Dixon	Leader of the Council
Cllr Adam Ellison	Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools
Jonathan Tew	Chief Executive
Steve Reddy	Director of Children' Services

To: South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council ('the council')
Town Hall and Civic Offices
Westoe Road
South Shields
NE33 2RL

This Improvement Notice is issued to South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council on 5th July 2023, following significant concerns highlighted by the publication of Ofsted's inspection report of the council's children's services, published on 10th May 2023.

1. This Notice is given to address all the areas for improvement identified in Ofsted's inspection report of children's services dated 10th May 2023.
2. To comply with this Notice, the following actions are required by the council, working with its partner agencies ("partners") as set out in the Children Act 2004 (Section 11).

Adviser arrangements

3. In April 2023, the Secretary of State appointed an Improvement Adviser, Caroline O'Neill, to provide advice and support to the council. The adviser will work with the council for a period of 24 months, or until such time that the Secretary of State is satisfied that the Improvement Adviser is no longer needed.

Improvement plan

4. The council's improvement plan will deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement. The plan should cover all the areas for improvement identified in Ofsted's inspection report (see Annex 1), as well as

recommendations made by the Improvement Adviser appointed by the Department. The plan should be submitted to the Department for Education (“the Department”), by a date determined by the Improvement Adviser.

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 be attended by the DfE Improvement Adviser) to oversee implementation of the improvement plan and report to the improvement board on progress against the objectives in the plan. The council may commission updates from partners in order to do this. The Improvement Board will meet every 6 weeks with the frequency to be kept under review.
 - c. reports to the improvement board should include data, analysis and recommendations supported by evidence of the 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
 - e. the views of frontline staff, 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 plan 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; arrangements at the front door/ Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), early help; and multi-agency arrangements.
8. The Improvement 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. The council should aim for actions included in the improvement plan and the diagnostic report to be delivered by the end of April 2024 or sooner, where necessary.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

12. The Improvement Adviser will provide to the Department 6 weekly reports of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice; and progress against the Improvement plan; 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 (under section 497A of the Education Act 1996) to direct the council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children's services.



Signed: **Date:**5/07/23.....

Katherine Cowell

A senior civil servant in the Department for Education

Annex 1

Areas for Improvement

- Management recording of decision-making rationales throughout the service, including the timeliness and efficacy of senior leaders' written oversight of children's plans to reflect live decision-making.
- The local authority's effectiveness in ensuring that there are enough suitable regulated homes for children who cannot live with their birth families.
- The effectiveness of performance management and quality management.
- Partner agencies' understanding the application of the threshold guidance for making referrals to the local authority about children who may be in need or at risk of harm.
- The timeliness of assessments.
- How quickly the local authority finds and agrees permanent homes for children and how effectively independent reviewing officers scrutinise and challenge both this process and wider planning for children.
- The timeliness and quality of direct work with children, including life-story work.