



Janet Daby MP

Minister for Children and Families

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Mayor Cooke

By email: mayor@middlesbrough.gov.uk

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Dear Mayor Chris Cooke

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL: CHILDREN'S SERVICES STATUTORY DIRECTION

I was very pleased to hear from my officials about the progress the Council has made to improve services for Middlesbrough's children and families. I am aware that it has been a challenging improvement journey following the Ofsted ILACS inspection in November 2019, which prompted the department to issue the Council with a Statutory Direction. I am reassured to hear that recently there has been an enhanced commitment to improve children's social care services and evidence of strengthening practice and workforce culture.

The findings of a recent progress review completed by our appointed Advisor and my officials, demonstrated improved leadership and some stabilisation of the workforce. I understand that more needs to be done to stabilise the workforce further and to embed more consistency in practice. However, I have confidence that the drive and capability of your leaders, with the necessary capacity in the system, can keep building better services at pace.

The 2023 Ofsted inspection noted "gradual improvements to practice", I was pleased to hear that there has been targeted work to the improvement areas identified at inspection and some progress has been made in most areas. The findings of the recent Ofsted focused visit in July 2024, looking at your arrangements for care leavers, demonstrated the clear commitment to "radically improve outcomes for care experienced young people" and the robust development plans your leaders have in place.

My officials inform me that there is an increased openness from leaders to engage with sector led support and external review to support improvements, and your workforce feel changes to services are generally positive and manageable. There seems to be a sense of pride and optimism for the future of children's services in your workforce which is encouraging.

Based on the evidence of improvement for children and families in Middlesbrough, I have decided to revoke the revised Statutory Direction which was issued in 2022 on the understanding that children's social care services remain a priority of the Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the staff in Middlesbrough for the hard work and commitment in shifting children's services to this stronger position. Please continue to engage with my officials to ensure that Middlesbrough continues to benefit from the department's ongoing support.

I look forward to hearing about further progress made over the coming months and years.

I am copying this letter to Zafar Uddin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Clive Heaphy (Chief Executive), Joe Tynan (Director of Children's Services) and Katherine Cowell (Regional Director, DfE). A copy is also being sent to Andy McDonald MP and Luke Myers MP.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Daby." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Janet Daby MP
Minister for Children and Families