Improvement Notice

To: Cornwall Council ('the council')
New County Hall
Treyew Road
Truro Cornwall
TR1 3AY

This Improvement Notice is issued to Cornwall Council on 19 October 2026 by the Department for Education following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 27th May 2026 and in response to the areas for priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.

1. This notice is given to address the four areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 27th May 2026 The inspection found that Cornwall's SEND arrangements continue to result in Inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. While inspectors recognised progress in several areas since the previous inspection in February 2023, three of the four areas for improvement reflect concerns raised at that inspection, indicating that improvement has not been secured consistently or at sufficient pace across the local area.

2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its other local partners ("partners"), as set out in section 28 (2) of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Improvement steps to be taken

The Department has received the updated Strategic Plan that the Council and partners have prepared and submitted, which sets out how the Council will address the areas of concern identified through inspection. The Department is currently reviewing the plan to determine whether it provides a sufficiently robust basis for securing the improvements required. The Council and its partners should continue to refine and strengthen the plan as necessary, ensuring that actions are clear, measurable and deliverable, with appropriate arrangements in place for the SEND Improvement Board to oversee progress and hold partners to account. Once approved, the Department will expect the Council and its partners to implement the plan at pace and demonstrate measurable impact against the identified areas for improvement.

3. This plan must address the following areas for improvement as specified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report published on 27th May 2026:

a. Local area partnership leaders should improve the accessibility of commissioned services across the county. They should also improve their parents', carers' and professionals' knowledge about the availability of services to meet children's and young people's education, health and care needs throughout their lives.
b. Leaders should work together to improve and strengthen communication across Cornwall, between themselves, children and young people with SEND and their families. This includes information about support services, ongoing wait times and where they can access support while waiting.
c. Partnership leaders should improve the quality and consistency of EHC plans. This should include ensuring that professional contributions, from education, health and social care are accurately recorded and updated at key transition points so that EHC plans reflect children and young people's changing needs accurately.
d. Leaders across the partnership should work at pace to ensure robust plans are implemented effectively to secure improvements in the waiting times for children and young people awaiting diagnosis of their neurodevelopmental need.

4. You have recently worked with partners to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan. We require that plans for improvement align with your plans for reform.

   So, during the period in which they are delivering necessary improvements against the specific areas set out in this Improvement Notice, the Council and its partners must demonstrate the ability to also show progress against these reform requirements.

5. The Council's plan working with the ICB, should deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people, school and education leaders and putting co-production at the centre of improvement activity.

6. The improvement plans should also include any further recommendations from the Department for Education as a result of ongoing support and intervention.

7. The Department has also provided a SEND adviser a finance adviser to offer support and challenge to the Council on identifying and delivering against the necessary improvements. The Council should work with this adviser, and any other support and challenge programmes put in place, until such time that the Department is satisfied this is no longer required.

8. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:

   a. the Council must ensure there is an Improvement Board, with an Independent Chair, which is attended by key leaders across Education, Health and Care services, Parent/Carer Forum and appropriate Elected

Members of the Council, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It is expected that the Chief Executives of the Council and the ICB, and the Children's Services and ICB Accountable Officers are held to account for the improvements required to be made through effective engagement with the Board and escalation/resolution of matters arising as the Board identifies;

b. the Improvement Board must have clearly assigned accountabilities for all actions agreed, along with clear and measurable targets covering the areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted and CQC report and any actions recommended by DfE;
c. Given that several of the areas for improvement identified by inspectors in 2026 are substantially similar to concerns identified in the February 2023 inspection, the Improvement Board should maintain a clear focus on evidencing the impact of actions and ensuring that improvements are embedded and sustained across the local area.
d. the Improvement Board takes equal responsibility for ensuring that they also deliver against the core minimum requirements of the Local SEND Reform Plan, and that improvement actions are progressed in alignment with their Local SEND Reform Plan;
e. those accountable for the actions in the plans must keep the content up to date, with a risk register and mitigation plan updated in line with the meeting cycle and provided to the Improvement Board in advance;
f. reports to the Improvement Board should include data, analysis and evidence of the impact of improvements on the lived experience of children and families;
g. the Improvement Board should maintain an action and impact log which is updated at each meeting, highlighting objectives which are slow to progress and where contributions need to be strengthened.

9. Invitations to Improvement Board meetings must be sent on each occasion to the DfE appointed SEND adviser, NHS England adviser and to the Department's case lead as external attendees, rather than members of the board.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

10. The DfE appointed SEND adviser and NHS advisers, working alongside regional representatives from the respective departments, will provide regular updates to Ministers and the Department more generally of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice; improvement against the Ofsted and CQC requirements; and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.

Department for Education Stocktake Reviews

11. Officials from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the plan at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate,

including more frequent monitoring and engagement on the Local SEND Reform Plan specifically.

12. Reviews may cover but are not exclusive to leadership; governance; co-production; quality of workforce training and support; multi-agency arrangements including joint commissioning, Education, Health, and Social Care provision; the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans; and engagement with children, young people, families and carers.

13. Prior to any reviews, the Council should provide to the Department its own assessment of improvement. This may include, but is not limited to:

    a. progress against improvement plan objectives;
    b. feedback from parents, carers, children and young people;
    c. clear information about local accountability and governance structures;
    d. the documentary evidence used to plan, track and evaluate the impact of actions. This may include:
        i. A progress update against each area for improvement and DfE recommendations;
        ii. A dashboard of performance measures showing whether targets and milestones are being met in a timely manner; any slippage; evidence of impact and whether the local area is on track to meet the next set of milestones.
        iii. Evidence that key partners, including children and young people, families and schools are playing an active role in improving services.

14. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment is undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.

15. 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; and
    d. access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information.

Timescales:

16. The Council should aim for actions included in the updated Strategic Plan to be delivered by the end of December 2027 or sooner, and for the impact measures set out in those plans to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also ensure that delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan is evidenced.

17. The Improvement Notice will not be stepped down until sufficient progress against expected improvements has been evidenced, reform delivery is also in line with expectations, and the Minister agrees.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:

18. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement Notice or should the Secretary of State not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, she may choose to invoke her statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to take any further actions deemed necessary to secure the improvements required in SEND services.

Signed: **Date:** 19 October 2026

Jessica Trahar

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education