

# Improvement Notice

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To: Name           DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (“the Council”)

Address: County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QD

## **This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance in:**

Children’s Services

## **On the basis of evidence contained in:**

The report of the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children carried out by Ofsted published on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2013 (“the inspection report”) which judged the overall effectiveness of Devon’s arrangements for the protection of children to be ‘inadequate’.

## **The following measures are required for the Council to comply with this Improvement Notice:**

The Council must work with their partners to take action to:

1. improve the areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted inspection report having regard to the recommendations contained therein;
2. ensure children’s service meet all legislative requirements; and
3. put in place arrangements to sustain and build on the improvements secured.

In respect of the above the Council must demonstrate evidence of improvement in outcomes by the following:

### Quality and effectiveness of social work practice

- To improve the quality and consistency of assessments by ensuring:
  - all assessments by the Council and partners follow the principles and parameters of a good assessment as stated in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* 2013<sup>1</sup>;
  - a systematic approach is taken to enquires which investigates three domains – the child’s developmental needs; the parents/carers capacity to respond to those needs; and the impact of wider family and environmental factors;
  - the child or young person is seen alone and their views recorded;
  - all assessments are completed to the timescales set out in statutory guidance ‘*Working Together*’; and qualitative evidence arising from performance management systems and case audits confirms that this has

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>

been carried out satisfactorily.

- Agree thresholds with partners for meeting statutory assessments. Ensure thresholds and criteria for assessment of the child<sup>2</sup> and what to do when children and young people do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but require targeted, multi-agency support, or early help, are communicated, understood and applied consistently across all partners. Improvements would reflect a reduction in re-referral rates and positive feedback from partners and staff that children are receiving the help they need when they need it. Continue to review and monitor the use of thresholds and criteria to ensure their sustained effectiveness.
- Work collaboratively with partners to agree and implement an early help assessment process to improve the identification of need and deliver effective early help services. Ensure the Improvement Board and the LSCB monitors the use and impact of the agreed assessment processes by partners and take the necessary remedial action to ensure compliance.
- All management oversight must be conducted in line with standards set out in '*Working Together*' to ensure safe practice and decision-making on individual child protection cases. The Council must set standards which must be agreed by the Improvement Board. Regular qualitative feedback reports must be made available to the Improvement Board and LSCB which demonstrate continuing improvement in quality and effectiveness of management and decision making and that no case is closed prematurely leaving children and young people at risk of harm.

#### Quality Assurance Systems

- Ensure the Council's quality assurance systems are prepared taking into account the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework, LSCB quality assurance and joint-auditing, and the LSCB local learning and improvement framework referred to in '*Working Together*'. Ensure that quality assurance systems focus on qualitative evidence and the experience of the child and family and are implemented by all those in the Council's Children's Service. The system must include regular qualitative auditing arrangements of case files, with independent oversight and challenge to ensure the quality and timeliness of recording and compliance with recording in individual case records (as set out in '*Working Together*') and that an assessment of risk is recorded. The frequency of the oversight and challenge must be agreed by the Safeguarding Improvement Board and the DSCB. Regular qualitative feedback reports of the audits must be made available to the Improvement Board and DSCB which demonstrate continuing improvement in the quality and effectiveness of support to vulnerable children.
- Agree with the Improvement Board and the Devon Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) the frequency, scope and number of quality assurance audits. Ensure that the quality assurance audits are carried out and the performance information and evidence from the audits are analysed and reported to the

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<sup>2</sup> under section 17 of the Children Act 1989

Improvement Board and DSCB in accordance with Ofsted 'Good practice by local safeguarding children boards'. Analysis should be used to inform action taken by the Council and partner agencies to bring about improvements in safeguarding social work practice and casework. The Council and agency partners must demonstrate that findings from file audits are used to improve social work practice and that there is compliance with management and case work practice standards. The impact of these areas will be evidenced through the continuous improvement of social work practice. The Council should also report on the impact of actions to the Improvement Board and DSCB.

- Ensure that individual children, families and staff are engaged and provide regular feedback to improve and shape practice. Ensure that the views of staff are considered in relation to their work and workplace using feedback mechanisms such as staff surveys and report the results to the Improvement Board. To support this, consideration should be given to the Children's Safeguarding Performance Information Framework (published 12 June 2012).<sup>3</sup>

#### Partnership and governance

- Agree with the Improvement Board performance indicators and milestones to monitor progress in improving the delivery of safeguarding services. Reports on progress against the performance indicators and milestones should be discussed by the Improvement Board. The Improvement board should as a result of these discussions identify and take corrective action taken to address any performance concerns.
- Put in place scrutiny arrangements to enable members of the Council to scrutinise and challenge social care practice once the necessary improvements have been made.
- Ensuring the DSCB is able to scrutinise, monitor, challenge and provide strategic direction in relation to the quality of services provided by the Council and the outcomes for vulnerable children and meets all statutory requirements as set out in 'Working Together'.
- Ensuring that multi-agency audits are undertaken by the DSCB and reported to the Improvement Board outlining the key lessons to be learnt and improvements to be made.

#### Capacity and capability

- Implement a programme of induction, training, mentoring and continuous professional development for all social care staff including managers to improve the quality of front line social work. To support this attention should be paid to the eight standards for employers of social workers<sup>4</sup>. The Council

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/protection/b00209694/perf-info>

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal\\_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE](http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511605/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE)

should also work with agency partners to ensure that shared learning opportunities are exploited. The Council should report the impact the work has on improving outcomes for children to the Improvement board;

- Ensure management oversight of the social worker's caseload alongside decision making on individual cases through the use of reflective supervision. The results of the supervision should be used to identify strengths and areas for development which will then be used to bring about improvements in the quality of social work practice;

#### Support measures

We expect the Council to put in place an Improvement Board which shall have an independent chair and which we expect will meet once every 4 weeks and include in its membership partner agencies. An official from the Department for Education will attend as a participant observer. We would expect the Council to agree with and provide the independent chair with such support as they need to carry out their role and that the Council should consider if further support and challenge might be sourced from the sector. The package of support must include peer mentoring and support for the Strategic Director People and the Head of child and Adult Protection to support them in leading the required change.

Improvement plans should be developed with partner agencies to carry out the recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report and those specifically highlighted in this Improvement Notice. The plans should be agreed with all partner agencies and the Safeguarding Improvement Board within one month of the issue of this notice.

#### **Taking account of the measures set out in this Notice:**

The Council must report against the objectives, actions, timescales and impact indicators agreed by the Improvement Board. Reporting should include analysis of any objectives and actions which are not being achieved as planned, actions to address these, and revised timescales for improvement which should be agreed by the Improvement Board. The Council should aim for all performance indicators and milestones to be met by September 2014.

#### **Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:**

Ministers should receive information on progress from the Chair of the Improvement Board in respect of the performance indicators and milestones set out in this Improvement Notice in December 2013, March 2014, June 2014 and September 2014. An initial review of progress against the Improvement Notice will be held The Department for Education in February 2014 with a final review in September 2014.

#### **Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates:**

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:         *Gautier*        

Date:         13 . 9 . 13