

Improvement Notice

To: Name BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

This Improvement Notice is being issued due to poor performance/decline in:

Children's social care and safeguarding

on the basis of evidence provided by/contained in:

Annual Performance Assessment 2008, which judged Staying Safe to be 'inadequate'.

The following measure(s) are needed for you to comply with this Improvement Notice:

The Council must:

Demonstrate clear evidence of improvement in outcomes, evidenced by:

- Improvements in the following performance indicators:
 - NI 59 - increase the percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out within 7 working days of referral from the 2007-08 baseline of 62 per cent to 69 per cent in line with statistical neighbours.
 - NI 60 - increase the percentage of core assessments for children's social care carried out within 35 working days of their commencement from the 2007-08 baseline of 75 per cent to 86 per cent in line with statistical neighbours.
 - NI 66 – increase the percentage of looked after children cases reviewed within required timescales from the 2007-08 baseline on 85 per cent to 94 per cent (2 per cent above current statistical neighbour average).
 - NI68 – increase the percentage of referrals of children in need to children's social care going on to initial assessment from 45.1 per cent to 59.4 per cent in line with the national average.
 - C63 - Increase percentage of children in care who participate in reviews from the 2007 baseline of 66 per cent to 94 per cent in line with statistical neighbours.
 - CF/C24 – Reduce percentage of children in care who are absent from school for more than 25 days in a year from the 2007-08 baseline of 15 per cent to 12.3 per cent in line with statistical neighbours.
 - Reduce the percentage of social care staff vacancies from the 2007-08 baseline of 24.7 per cent to 17.7 per cent (on trajectory to meet statistical neighbour average of 10.8 per cent).

- Increase the number of care leavers at age 19 who are living in suitable accommodation from 79.7 per cent to 88.4 per cent in line with statistical neighbours.
- Sustained progress in all other social care indicators throughout the term of this Improvement Notice.
- Robust evidence of qualitative assessment, provided to GOWM to inform progress reporting. In meeting the timescales for initial and core assessments, it is crucial that the quality of assessments is monitored closely. This will include quality assuring the recording of the work to ensure that assessments are of a consistently high standard.
- Increased relative spend on family support services, responding to Ofsted's judgement in 2008 APA, and demonstrable evidence that investment in safeguarding is at the levels required to meet the terms of this Improvement Notice and sustain the improvements in the service over the long-term.

Build capacity and capability to deliver and sustain improvements by:

Ensuring robust leadership and implementation of an effective change programme covering all staff and elected members with a clear focus on improving outcomes for children particularly for the most disadvantaged:

- Increasing capacity at senior leadership levels within children's social care, and in particular ensuring that there is an effective Senior Management Team in place by co-operating with GOWM and RIEP in building capacity and capability and engaging with sector-led expertise.
- Carrying out a specific programme of work to analyse the needs and segmentation of the looked after children population and children on the edge of care and their families. Through this process develop a programme of evidence-based interventions and services which will ensure an appropriate population of looked after children and enable those who return home from care and those on the edge of care to remain safely supported in birth or wider families.
- Rigorously monitoring a robust action plan for making improvements across children's social care, looking in particular at the areas of weaknesses highlighted by Ofsted in the Council's 2008 Annual Performance Assessment, and engaging in regular monitoring, scrutiny and quality assurance of social care performance, both internally and in conjunction with GOWM/DCSF.
- Working with the external support team commissioned by DCSF to embed effective performance management and supervision across children's social care services and demonstrate over the 12-month period of this Improvement Notice improvements in the quality of practice and assessments as well as the timeliness of those assessments.
- Developing and effectively monitoring the children's workforce retention, training and development strategy to ensure effective implementation in conjunction with the CWDC practice-based initiatives currently being implemented in Birmingham.

Developing services and front-line practice:

- Reviewing the process for referrals to children's social care so that all partner agencies, including schools, are clear when they need to refer and the process for

doing so while ensuring that targets for initial and core assessments are met and the quality of assessments is high.

- Reviewing placements of looked after children including those in residential accommodation, to ensure that they are the most appropriate for responding to the needs of each child, including with respect to educational attainment, and that there is an allocated social worker for every child. Each child's reviews to be chaired by a named Independent Reviewing Officer responsible for scrutinising the quality of care planning with arrangements being in place to ensure that senior management are informed of any deficits in individual children's care plans so that appropriate action can be taken. Developing and implementing a strategy to develop a range of placement options close to children's homes with clear targets.
- Ensuring that regulatory requirements for children's homes are met and to reduce the existing number of inadequate judgements made following Ofsted inspections, with processes in place to avoid looked after children being placed in homes judged by Ofsted to be inadequate provided by external providers.
- Arrangements to consult with looked after children are in place to inform individual care planning and wider strategic development of looked after children's services; with regular reports on the quality of corporate parenting from the Children in Care Council, the Independent Reviewing Officer service and others being made available to lead members and senior managers to inform future development of looked after children's services.

Working with others:

- To co-operate with GOWM and others as appropriate and with a full review of the LSCB to ensure that an effective LSCB is in place. To have an action plan in place to deliver identified improvements in safeguarding arrangements and to address improvements required in Serious Case Reviews as identified by Ofsted.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed:

February 2010, with a review at the end of July 2009.

by:

The Department for Children, Schools, and Families, who will, on the basis of measurable progress towards the targets outlined above, advise Ministers on any necessary follow-up action.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment date may lead to:

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families using statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's social care provision.

Date of issue: 10 February 2009