

Improvement Notice

To: Name WALTHAM FOREST BOROUGH COUNCIL
Address Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, Walthamstow,
E17 4JF

This Improvement Notice is being given due to poor performance in:

Looked after Children's Services

On the basis of evidence contained in:

The report of the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services carried out by Ofsted and CQC (published 28 October 2011) ("the report") which judged the overall effectiveness of looked after children's services of Waltham Forest Borough Council ("the Council") to be 'inadequate'.

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

The Council must incorporate all areas for development identified in the Report into their action plan which must include the following measures, with milestones and deadlines for each agreed by the Improvement Board. A formal review of progress will be held after **six months**. Improvements to the quality of practice should be externally validated via peer review and a written report of the findings of the peer review presented to the Department prior to and in readiness for the formal review.

The Council must take the following action:

Social Work Practice

- (i) Develop and implement a strategy to increase the stability of placements including through adoption. Ensure that where adoption is the best permanence option for a child or young person, decisions are taken in accordance with the legislative framework and revised statutory guidance.
- (ii) Ensure there is a recorded decision making process where children are placed more than twenty miles from home or outside of the borough, in line with statutory guidance. Review processes so that where this does occur, justifications are well documented. Formulate and implement strategies to reduce the number of such cases.
- (iii) Review processes to improve the quality of long term planning for looked after children and young people. Consult with the Children in Care Council and the Council's care leavers about what improvements need to be made to the Council's processes.

- (iv) Ensure that long term planning starts as soon as possible after a child or young person is looked after by the Council and that these plans include information about the child or young person's needs, including their equality and diversity needs. The Council should also ensure that effective protocols are in place with the Council's adult services so that where responsibility transfers from children's services to adult services the process is handled with minimum disruption to the child or young person. Provide evidence to the improvement board that protocols are operating as set out.
- (v) Ensure that social work practitioners and managers understand any risks posed to children and young people and any risks that they may pose to others. Ensure risk assessments are subject to management challenge and independent audit confirms quality is improving. Ensure that such risk assessments reflect the views of the Children in Care Council on how to improve support so that looked after children feel safe in the communities in which they live.
- (vi) Ensure multi agency audits of case files are undertaken by the Local Safeguarding Children Board ("LSCB") and are carried out in accordance with Ofsted's "Local Safeguarding Children Board Good Practice". Monthly auditing of Children's and Families Service case files will be carried out by the Council. The outcome of these audits will be reported to the Improvement Board. Such audit reports shall include an assessment of the quality of social work practice and decision making and any recommendation for change to social work practice and decision making as a result of the findings of the audits.

Capacity and Capability

- (vii) Ensure that within 3 months of the date of this Improvement Notice London Borough of Waltham Forest has clear plans in place for recruiting permanent senior leadership to deliver looked after children's services.

Partnership and Corporate

- (viii) Implement a strategic plan to improve the support given to looked after children which should include clear aspirational outcomes for each child or young person.
- (ix) Ensure elected members understand and deliver their corporate parent role and that they are properly trained and supported to undertake a scrutiny role of Children and Family Services. This must include regular discussions with the Children in Care Council and regular reviews of management information to include consideration of the number of placements which are more than twenty miles from the child or young people's ordinary residence, the number of looked after children or young persons who are adopted and the educational attainment and outcomes for looked after children.
- (x) Ensure that practice standards on the timeliness of health assessments are established, monitored and met. These practice standards should be agreed with health partners and disseminated through training programmes.

- (xi) Agree a strategy with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to ensure that their contribution is sought when considering therapeutic placements for looked after children. The strategy will be disseminated to staff and the impact will be evidenced through audit arrangements.
- (xii) Ensure the LSCB provide the challenge and scrutiny necessary to review the Looked after Children's Service and ensure partners of the Council are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities regarding safeguarding and looked after children.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

The Improvement Board Chair should provide an initial report to Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Children and Families within 6 weeks of the Improvement Notice being issued, setting out the challenges and plans the Council has put in place, followed by a progress report after six months which will include specific commentary against the targets set out in this Improvement Notice.

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

The Secretary of State for Education using statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) directing the Council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the necessary and rapid improvements required in children's services.

Signed: **Date:**