



Edward Timpson MP

Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families

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Councillor Stewart Young
Leader, Cumbria County Council

By email

21 December 2016

Dear Stewart,

DfE INTERVENTION IN CUMBRIA

I am writing further to the DfE progress review out on 22 November. I have now had the opportunity to consider officials' views, alongside information from Ofsted and reports from the independent chairs of both the Children's Services Improvement Board and the LSCB.

On the basis of all the available evidence, I intend to maintain the current level of DfE intervention. The information I have received suggests that the council is continuing to prioritise the improvement of children's services and that it is committed to improving outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

I have noted a number of areas where progress has been made since the last review. I am pleased that there is now, for example, a robust quality assurance framework in place, particularly since this was highlighted as an area of concern in the LGA peer review earlier this year. I am encouraged too by the improvement in management oversight and by the effective use of performance management information, both of which have a crucial role to play in supporting improvement across the service. More generally, I have noted the improvements which have been made to the management of the 'front door', and to the way in which services are structured within the county. Staffing appears to be increasingly stable, and it is clear that the council's workforce strategy is starting to bear fruit.

There remain, though, some areas where the pace of improvement needs to increase. In particular, progress in ensuring consistently good social work practice across the county does not yet appear to be sufficient. This must now be a priority for the council, so that plans for

children and young people are clear and outcome-focused and they are receiving the right support. My officials will be looking for evidence of progress in this area at the next review and reporting their findings to me. My expectation is that improvements made so far will be fully embedded and that progress will continue at pace, otherwise I will have to consider whether services can continue to remain with the council.

However, I recognise overall that much has been achieved over the past six months to improve services and I welcome the council's willingness to learn from and engage with external partners. The sense of progress which Cumbria is making is consistent across all the assessments I have seen, including through Ofsted's monitoring visits. On that basis, I am content for the Improvement Board to meet on a six-weekly basis; however, the Department does of course reserve the right to require compliance with the terms of the statutory direction should that be necessary.

I would like to end by thanking Diane Wood for her significant contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people in Cumbria; she has shown passion and commitment in difficult circumstances and I wish her well for the future.

I am copying this letter to: Councillor Anne Burns; Diane Wood; John Macilwraith; and Gill Rigg.



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