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CONFIDENTIAL

Rt Hon Dawn Primarolo MP
Minister of State for Children, Young People and
Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
SW1P 3BT

4 December 2009

Dear Ms Primarolo,

Further to our meeting on 9 November 2009, regarding children's services issues in Leeds, we are writing, as requested, to update you on the actions that are being taken to provide assurance that the Council and its partners are responding appropriately, and with rigour, to the performance challenges we currently face in the city.

You are aware of the outcome of Ofsted's 'unannounced inspection' of Contact, Assessment and Referral, undertaken in July, and we know too that you will be aware that we are this week in the midst of an 'announced inspection' of Safeguarding and Looked After Children, the outcome of which will be disclosed to us, as well your own officials, later today.

With respect to next week's publication, as part of the city's CAA, of Ofsted's 'performing poorly' assessment in relation to children's services in Leeds, you will have observed that whilst "the majority of the local authority's inspected and regulated services and provision in children's services are good or better, there are significant weakness in areas of social care provision". Accordingly, and as you might have expected, it has been these areas of significant weakness that have been our particular focus for attention over recent weeks.

As discussed at our meeting in early November, we responded to the unannounced inspection in July promptly and (we would hope) effectively: we moved urgently to establish a Children's Services Improvement Board, chaired by our Chief Executive and including key corporate officers and senior Elected Members, and this Board has been overseeing the implementation of a thorough and comprehensive programme of improvements.

However, with next week's CAA announcement, we fully recognise the need to seek to agree with you a statement of the further measures to be taken to provide unambiguous reassurance that children in Leeds are safe from the potential risk of serious harm. We understand that it is your intention to issue a press release early next week, which will be pre-agreed with ourselves, outlining the basis of our improvement plans.

Further, then, to recent discussions with your officials, we would propose:

the establishment of a new, externally-led Improvement Board, to be represented as a joint Leeds City Council/DCSF initiative, to provide appropriate additional challenge and oversight of Leeds' improvement priorities, and to drive and oversee the necessary improvements in Leeds' children's services;

that the work of the Board be enshrined in an agreed Improvement Plan incorporating not only the key inspection findings from both the unannounced and announced inspections, but also the outcomes of the significant review of children's services leadership, governance and partnership arrangements we ourselves have been conducting over recent weeks;

to include within the Improvement Plan other key performance issues, such as our response to the National Challenge on school performance, improvements on NEETs, and other related children's services priorities, and

finalising the Improvement Plan following the receipt of feedback from the current inspection on Friday of this week. A draft copy of our Improvement Plan is attached – this will be further updated and refined following the feedback later today.

As regards membership of the Improvement Board, we would propose a small strategic Board consisting of:

- an independent chair
- the Chief Executive of Leeds City Council
- the Council's Lead Member for Children's Services
- a senior representative (Divisional Commander) from the West Yorkshire Police
- a senior representative (Chief Executive) from the Yorkshire and Humber SHA or the Leeds PCT
- a business sector/14-19 representative
- an external children's services professional (e.g. a DCS from another authority or Chair of a Local Safeguarding Children Board)

The Board would be attended by key officers of the Council, including our Assistant Chief Executive who would be the key corporate officer supporting the chair, and our Interim Director of Children's Services (see below). We would also welcome the attendance of a GOYH representative and a member of the DCSF Intervention Team should this be considered to be helpful.

As regards the independent chair, I can confirm that in discussion with your officials, we have identified a potential candidate who is agreeable to undertake the role. We therefore propose that Mr Bill McCarthy, Chief Executive of NHS Yorkshire and the Humber, be appointed as the chair of the Board. Mr McCarthy is an ex-Chief Executive of a large city council and has significant experience both in health and local government. We would consider Mr McCarthy to be an excellent appointment as independent chair and we, therefore, seek your endorsement of his appointment.

Plainly, the independent chair will have key reporting relationship with the Council's political leadership, but we recognise the importance of the chair also having an agreed reporting line into the Department so that you can be personally reassured of the positive action that is being taken.

Finally, you will, I think, be aware that our current Director of Children's Services has indicated a desire to retire and, in order to provide greater stability over the next six to nine months whilst we seek to recruit a new Director, it has been mutually agreed that Ms Archer's retirement will now take effect from 31 December 2009. This will allow an interim DCS to be appointed very shortly to oversee implementation of our Improvement Plan over the next crucial few months prior to a new Director being in place. We have already commenced the recruitment process for this interim position and will be liaising closely with colleagues in DCSF and at GOYH on the appointment. We will similarly be involving colleagues from DCSF and GOYH in the permanent appointment when this recruitment process is commenced early in the New Year.

We trust that this letter provides a useful summary of our actions and proposals and leaves you reassured that positive progress is being made in Leeds.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Andrew Carter
Leader of the Council



Councillor Richard Brett
Deputy Leader of the Council