



**Rt Hon Dawn Primarolo MP**

Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families.

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7 December 2009

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your and Richard Brett's jointly signed letter of 4 December following the productive meeting myself and Vernon Coaker had with you on 9 November.

During our meeting we explored the issues currently facing the Council. The challenges are wide-ranging and include school attainment, the very high proportion of young people not in employment, education or training and, most concerning, those related to your looked after children and safeguarding services, which have already been raised through the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment, and looked after children provision.

You and your colleagues have clearly considered the issues and we discussed at length the measures being put in place by the Council to improve services. It was reassuring to learn that the Council is considering its strategic and corporate approach to the improvements needed as well as at a more fundamental operational level. These measures will go a long way to providing the level of services children and young people should expect.

Nevertheless, I made clear at the meeting that because of the wide-ranging issues across children's services I was keen to support the action being taken and that I was minded to establish a more focused Improvement Board with an independent chair and external challenge. I am pleased that you have responded quickly following



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our meeting and acted swiftly to nominate an independent chair. I am not clear, however, why Education Leeds are not represented on the Improvement Board, given the fact that the Improvement Board's remit will consider all of children's services.

Your proposal that the Board should drive and oversee the necessary improvements across children's services through a substantial improvement plan is sensible. I agree that the plan should incorporate the findings of the unannounced inspection; the outcomes of the review the Council is currently undertaking of its leadership; and governance and partnership arrangements. It should also reflect Ofsted's judgement of 'performs poorly', as you indicated in your letter to me, and which will be announced on Wednesday, as well as the outcomes of the full safeguarding and looked after children inspection, to be published in January.

I will need to be reassured that sufficient attention will be given to rectifying any safeguarding issues raised through inspection evidence and that appropriate and challenging measures are taken to address the other significant areas of weaknesses across children's services.

Also, where concerns are raised at the local National Challenge Board about the delivery of your recently submitted National Challenge plan, I will expect those concerns to be considered at the Improvement Board as part of the wider improvement process.

My officials here in the Department and in GOYH will work closely with you on developing your improvement plan further and I would expect the Improvement Board, through the chair, to formally agree the plan and to advise me on its robustness and implementation by March 2010.

You have suggested Bill McCarthy, Chief Executive of NHS Yorkshire and the Humber, as independent chair. I am happy to agree to Mr McCarthy's appointment and my officials will be in touch with you to make the necessary arrangements and agree Mr McCarthy's precise remit. Mr McCarthy will, as you say, need to have a reporting relationship with the Council's political leadership. With regard to reporting progress to myself, I will expect [bi-monthly] reports on the performance of children's services and that progress is on track.

We agree the improvement plan must be robust and be an effective instrument to help deliver the step change in performance that is needed. Given the importance of this, I am at the moment minded to issue an Improvement Notice which will set out the targets and milestones I will expect the Council to deliver. I will write to you in due course with a draft Improvement Notice for your comments. Once agreed, the improvement plan will need to set out how the specific targets in the Improvement Notice will be delivered. I am sure you will understand that when the outcome of the safeguarding and looked after children inspection is known, I will need to carefully consider Ofsted's judgements and decide whether there is any further action that needs to be taken to improve services. I will write to you as soon as possible after I

have considered all the evidence.

I very much hope that we can now move forward in partnership to improve local provision. I am copying this letter to Cllr Richard Brett, Stewart Golton, Lead Executive Member for Children's Services, Paul Rogerson, Chief Executive, Bill McCarthy, Chief Executive of NHS Yorkshire and the Humber, John Battle, Hilary Benn, Colin Burgon, Colin Challen, Fabian Hamilton, George Mudie, Greg Mulholland and Paul Truswell.

Kind Regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dawn Primarolo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and 'P'.

**DAWN PRIMAROLO**