



**Tim Loughton MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Councillor Keith Wakefield  
Leader of Leeds City Council  
Civic Hall  
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21 December 2011

*Dear Councillor Wakefield,*

I am writing regarding the Improvement Notice given to Leeds City Council by the Department for Education on 2 March 2010. This was given to the Council because of concerns about poor performance in delivering Children's Services in Leeds.

Officials from the Department met your Executive Member for Children's Services, the Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and other key officers on 7 November to review progress against the requirements of the Improvement Notice and the recommendations made by Ofsted following its inspection of safeguarding in September.

I have now heard from my officials following this review and I have read with interest the report from your independent Improvement Board Chair, Bill McCarthy and your plans to sustain improvement. I was pleased to hear of the significant improvements you have achieved to date and your commitment and clear plans to achieve a continued focus on safeguarding of children and young people in the City. In particular, it was good to learn about your plans for the "Leeds Children's Services Challenge and Support Panel". I see strong self awareness and expert and peer challenge as crucial to sustaining and building on improvements.

I wanted to acknowledge the hard work of Council staff and its partner organisations in bringing about this marked improvement and in the constructive way the Council has engaged with my officials.

Whilst all the reports acknowledge the strong progress you have made, they do also note some further areas for improvement, including:

- improving the Council's electronic social care record system;
- improving attendance, quality and timescales for initial children protection conferences;
- improving the quality of assessments to help achieve a consistent standard across the service;
- ensuring better information sharing between partner agencies in relation to domestic violence; and
- ensuring the common assessment framework (CAF) is used more effectively by all agencies.

I know that you have an ongoing improvement plan already in place to address these particular issues, which I welcome. I would like my officials to meet your officers again in March 2012, to hear about progress with this and to provide me with final reassurance that achievements have been embedded and sustained.

Whilst I recognise the good progress Leeds has made on safeguarding, I remain concerned about the pace of progress on improving education standards, both at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. Progress has not been as good as we would like to have seen through the lifetime of the Improvement Notice.

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Since March 2010 when the Improvement Notice was given to the Council there has been a change of Government and consequently education policy has changed. I am aware that education standards in Leeds need to improve further and in particular the progress in converting underperforming schools to sponsored Academies has been slow. The Secretary of State believes that in schools where there has been consistent underperformance over a number of years, conversion to Academy status will be the catalyst for rapid progress and transformation. I am therefore expecting to see a commitment from the Council to working with my officials to address the issue of the Council's underperforming schools and for the Council to actively engage in developing Academy solutions for its worst performing schools.

Overall, in light of the commitment Leeds City Council has shown, the improvements made to date and Ofsted's judgement that safeguarding services in Leeds are now adequate with some good elements, and the progress in some of the, focussed aspects of educational attainment identified in the Improvement Notice, I am confirming that I no longer consider the Improvement Notice to be necessary, and am lifting this with immediate effect.

I congratulate you on the progress made with safeguarding to date, and hope to hear that this is supported by further improvements in Education Standards across the City, to raise the life chances of all young people in Leeds.

I am copying this letter to: Councillor Judith Blake - Executive Member for Children's Services, Tom Riordan - Chief Executive, Nigel Richardson –

Director of Children's Services and Mariana Pexton - Deputy Director of Children's Services.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LTP JLP', with a large, sweeping underline that extends to the left and then curves back under the signature.

**TIM LOUGHTON MP**

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