



Edward Timpson MP

Minister of State for Children and Families

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Councillor Bill Dixon MBE
Leader of the Council
Darlington Borough Council
Station Road
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15 June 2016

Dear Bill,

Children's Services improvement review – Darlington Borough Council

I am writing to you further to your meeting on 17 May with my officials to discuss Darlington council's improvements to its children's services.

I am pleased that you are now making some progress in the initial phase of your improvement journey. This though was initially slower than I would expect. I hope that everyone working across your service now understands the need for urgency in making improvements. The strengthened leadership and governance arrangements and improvements in both practice and performance management are encouraging. I will, however, expect at your next review to see evidence that the newly found pace of improvement has been maintained.

I welcome the strong commitment throughout all levels of the council to continuing the next phase of the improvement journey and embedding long-term, sustainable change. I understand there are a number of priorities to address, including further recruitment of experienced permanent staff to increase workforce stability, embedding consistent and high quality practice, continued strengthening of management oversight and leadership of practice and the implementation of a new ICT system.

You will, I am sure, be aware that the government will not accept failure in children's social care delivery. We will not hesitate to remove council control of services where improvement plans do not translate into real improvements in protecting and caring for the most vulnerable children in our society. Though I do not consider it necessary to take such steps in Darlington at this point, it is essential that you are able to demonstrate continued improvement when my officials return in November to re-assess your progress.

I am copying this letter to: Councillor Cyndi Hughes (Children and Young People Portfolio); Ada Burns (Chief Executive); Suzanne Joyner (Director of Children's and Adult Services) and Alison Murphy (assistant interim Director of Children's Services).

Yours sincerely,
Edward

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