



Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Councillor John Hart
County Hall
Topsham Road
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28th October 2020

Dear John

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT ON WAY FORWARD FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DEVON

I am writing following the report from the Children's Services Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil, on the way forward for children's services in Devon. Eleanor has carried out her review, which I understand has been very much assisted by the open and honest approach the council has taken to engaging with the Commissioner and my Department. I recognise that working with the Commissioner at the same time as responding to the COVID-19 pandemic will have caused additional pressure. I appreciate your cooperation, flexibility and contribution during this difficult time and thank you and your staff for all they are doing at this time.

I believe the report paints an accurate picture of the challenges currently facing the services and gives a clear account of the issues that have led to its decline back to inadequate.

The Commissioner's report shows a promising picture of children's services in Devon and it is helpful to see the steps the council has taken and the progress which is beginning to be evident. However, there is clearly more to be done to embed change and broaden the improvement work in line with the vision for children and young people. In addition, I am concerned about the additional risk facing Devon as senior leadership changes over the next few months.

The Commissioner has made a strong case that the Council has sufficient capacity and capability to improve itself, within a reasonable timeframe. However, I recognise that there are challenges ahead for Devon with the DCS and social care AD recruitment, and as the response to COVID-19 continues.

I have, therefore, asked that Eleanor remains in place as Commissioner to monitor progress for up to a further six months. Eleanor will report to me regularly and will confirm at that point whether the progress made by the Council against her

recommendations is sufficient and improvements sustainable. The Council will continue to be subject to the Statutory Direction.

I am copying this letter to Councillor James McInnes, Phil Norrey, Jo Olsson, Ben Bradshaw MP, Geoffrey Cox MP, Simon Jupp MP, Anthony Mangnall MP, Anne Marie Morris MP, Neil Parish MP, Selaine Saxby MP, Sir Gary Streeter MP and Mel Stride MP.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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