



**Edward Timpson MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Councillor John Osman  
Leader of the Council  
County Hall  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA1 4DY

27 March 2015

Dear John,

I am extremely concerned to see that Somerset County Council's children's social care services have been found 'inadequate' by Ofsted for a second consecutive time. It is of paramount importance to me, and should be for any local authority, that children and young people – particularly the most vulnerable – are given the best possible start in life. It is very disappointing to see that the necessary improvements have not been made to make this a reality for children in Somerset.

I am therefore appointing, today, advisers, reporting to the Secretary of State, to oversee the authority's response to the Ofsted findings, assess its plans to improve, and to report back to me as to whether Somerset has the capacity and capability to make the changes necessary for safe and effective provision. I would expect to make a Direction to require the Council to deliver the necessary improvements once I have received a report from my advisers in mid-June.

Somerset will need immediately to ensure that all children receive safe and secure provision and that the recommendations made by Ofsted are acted upon without delay. This should be done alongside the work of the review team.

I am grateful that you and your lead officers, in particular the Chief Executive, have continued to work in close collaboration with my officials.

I attach the terms of reference for the review team. It will be led by Dave Hill, Director of Children's Services at Essex County Council and, in making the assessment of capacity to improve and options for further intervention, will include additional independent support from outside of the local government sector. I will expect the review to conclude and report to me by mid-June 2015.

I am copying this letter to Cllr Frances Nicholson (Lead Member); Patrick Flaherty (Chief Executive); Julian Wooster (Director of Children's Services); Rose Collinson (Interim Director of Children's Services); Jane Haywood (Improvement Board Chair); and Sally Halls (LSCB Chair).

*Your sincerely,*  
*Edward.*

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## **ANNEX**

### **Children's Social Care Advisor Terms of Reference**

The Department's intervention adviser will take the following steps to challenge and support Somerset County Council in the improvement of its children's social care functions and will report to the Minister for Children and Families by mid-June 2015:

1. Examine the causal factors in respect of child protection which led to the findings of the Ofsted report of 27 March 2015;
2. Oversee the authority's response to the findings of the Ofsted report of 27 March 2015;
3. Assess the quality of the authority's improvement plans;
4. Review the authority's leadership capacity and capability to drive forward the changes necessary to achieve adequate performance; and
5. Use the findings of the review to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State as to whether alternative delivery arrangements are necessary for children's services in Somerset to improve.