

CARE SERVICES PDS COMMITTEE
28th June 2016

STATEMENT BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CARE SERVICES

In a three week period from April 11th our Children Services (not Education) were inspected by OFSTED under their new inspection regime. The report was published yesterday.

In all areas of reporting (1) Children who need help and protection (2) Children Looked After and achieving permanence – including sub sections (a) Adoption Performance & (b) Experiences and progress of care leavers and (3) Leadership, management & governance. We were judged as 'Inadequate' which is the bottom category of four.

The result was obviously very disappointing and really quite surprising – and there were some points that we felt were unfair. However we could see no future in quibbling – in my experience of schools you certainly never manage to get judgements changed – so we have taken it on the chin, accepted the judgements and resolved to put things right.

We have already been working on a detailed action/response plan to look at what needs to be done to improve all aspects of the service. Resources will be needed but money is not the only answer and it is clear that a culture change is also required. Two of the Report's recommendations on staffing – Appointment of a Director of Children's Services and appointment of additional Social workers to bring down individual caseloads - with the Leader's permission we have already put in train.

An added complication is that 'Inadequate' across the board triggers a reaction from the Department for Education. The Minister has issued a 'Statutory Direction' and has appointed a Children's Services Commissioner to make recommendations to us, review our capacity to improve and by October 1st made a recommendation to the Minister as to whether we have in Bromley the capacity to produce a satisfactory service for our young people or whether the Service should be handed over to an external Trust.

The appointed Commissioner is Ms Frankie Sulke CBE who was until fairly recently Director of Children Services in Lewisham. Obviously she will be around a great deal working with us all and officers will be sparing no efforts to produce a vast improvement – not least in framing our responses/actions to the 18 recommendations in the Ofsted report.

The Leader has set up a 'Service Improvement Governance Board' to be the main driver of change – comprising elected members, senior officers and representatives from some of our partner organisations such as Police and Health.

We issued a press release yesterday emphasising our determination to get things right. I will report progress regularly to Care Services PDS Committee.

We have three months to redress the situation so that we can retain control of this service but more importantly to provide a better service to the young people in the borough.

Perhaps we are all at fault in some way – Lead Members and senior officers, Members of scrutiny, frontline social workers and all others involved. We must all resolve to improve.