Rochdale MBC’s progress under its current Improvement Notice

I am writing with regard to the Improvement Notice issued to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council in April 2014.

It is clear from the Ofsted thematic review of child sexual exploitation (CSE) published November 2014, the Ofsted single inspection report in December 2014 and recent quarterly reports from Audrey Williamson, chair of Rochdale’s Improvement Board, that Rochdale has made strong progress in addressing issues raised in Ofsted’s inspection of child protection arrangements in December 2012. This represents a significant improvement in safeguarding and child protection for children and young people in the borough and I commend the hard work of Council staff and partner organisations in bringing this about.

Having considered the evidence from the Ofsted reports, progress reports from the Improvement Board chair and advice from officials, I confirm that I no longer consider it necessary for the Improvement Notice to remain in place, and I am lifting it with immediate effect.

Audrey Williamson’s last two reports and advice from officials have shown how Rochdale and partners have been swiftly addressing the recommendations from the last Ofsted inspection. I am pleased by the way Rochdale has been participating since January 2015 in the cross-government work to combat CSE and has shared its good practice with other councils and partner organisations.

It is clear that you, together with Rochdale’s Chief Executive, Steve...
Rumbelow, have pledged your continuing support for further improvement and Rochdale’s continued prioritisation of children’s social care budgets in its financial planning. I note that Rochdale and partners are keen to maintain the benefits of joint working established by the Improvement Board. You plan to run a Getting to Good Board, chaired by the Chief Officer of the Clinical Commissioning Group, which will bring together among others the heads of the LSCB, Corporate Parenting, Health and Well Being boards and the Children and Young People’s Partnership. The board will support and challenge the implementation of the various inspection action plans – including Ofsted, HMIC and CQC – and hold partners to account. I should like to know how successful this innovative arrangement is in securing further improvement across the borough and have asked my officials to arrange a visit later in 2015/16 to assess its impact.

These plans and commitments will be critical in ensuring Rochdale and partners maintain constructive partnership working to further improve safeguarding and child protection across the borough. I would like to hear about Rochdale’s continued progress in meeting Ofsted recommendations for care leavers and have asked Audrey Williamson to submit a report to me in October. I also expect you to continue reviewing child protection and child in need cases to ensure vulnerable children and young people receive the right care at the right time and look forward to Rochdale continuing to share its experience and good practice in tackling CSE.

I have noted that the Safeguarding Children’s Board (RBSCB) continues to provide leadership and scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements in Rochdale. In light of their recent decision not to publish the DfE funded redraft of the serious case review (SCR)YP1-7, I would like to know more about the wider issues for SCR publication and I have asked my officials to meet the RBSCB in the coming months to gather views from board members.

I am copying this letter to Councillor Donna Martin (Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families), Steve Rumbelow (Chief Executive), Gail Hopper (Director of Children’s Services), and Audrey Williamson (Improvement Board Chair).

Yours sincerely,

Edward Timpson MP
Minister of State for Children and Families