



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**WRITTEN STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

TITLE **Safeguarding in Pembrokeshire**

DATE **16 July 2012**

BY **Leighton Andrews, Minister for Education and Skills**

I wish to update Members on the course of action the Welsh Government now plans to implement in respect of the safeguarding of children within the education service in Pembrokeshire.

The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services and I wrote to the Leader of Pembrokeshire County Council on 12 June. In that letter we told him that we continue to have serious concerns about arrangements for safeguarding in education services in the county and that we were minded to issue a direction to the authority. We also asked the Leader what confidence we could have in his senior officers.

The Pembrokeshire Ministerial Board and the inspectorates have reported findings that do little to allay our concerns. Nothing the Leader has said in his letter of reply or in a subsequent email to us convinces us that the Board and the inspectorates have got it wrong. Most of what was contained in that letter was already known to us through the inspectorates and the work of the Pembrokeshire Ministerial Board.

We have very carefully considered the correspondence from the Leader. We have checked and re-checked the facts and taken legal advice. We must know that everything is being done to make sure that children in Pembrokeshire are safe. Having reviewed all of the evidence, we have decided to issue a direction to Pembrokeshire County Council to comply with any instructions issued by His Honour Graham Jones, as Chair of the Pembrokeshire Ministerial Board, that he considers reasonably necessary to ensure that the authority adequately discharges its statutory duty to exercise its education functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Since this direction is issued under the powers conferred by the Education Act 1996, the Board will from now on report to me and my officials.

In issuing this direction I am not absolving the local authority of its responsibilities for safeguarding. It remains the responsibility of the authority, and not the Board, to ensure the safeguarding of children in Pembrokeshire. However, the direction makes

clear why we as a Welsh Government have little confidence in certain senior officers. It is for the Leader and the Authority to demonstrate that the authority is taking its responsibilities for safeguarding seriously in ways which go beyond process management.

I would be disappointed if the Chair were obliged to issue instructions to the authority, as I would take this as evidence of a clear failure on the part of the authority to discharge its safeguarding duties adequately. I will not accept an argument that, because the Chair did not issue any instructions, everything must be satisfactory or that the Board agrees with the actions of the authority. If the authority adequately discharges its statutory duty to exercise its education functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children there should be no need for the Chair of the Board to issue any instructions. I require clear proof that we can all have confidence in the authority.

Separately, but as a further indication of the importance that Welsh Ministers attach to these matters, the Minister for Local Government and Communities has asked the Wales Audit Office to bring forward its re-inspection of the authority.

For her part, the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services will retain a watching brief on the work of the Board and will expect to be kept informed of their progress. She wishes to be advised immediately in the event of any safeguarding issues that arise outside of education.

We are particularly mindful of the fact that a new Director of Social services has taken up post in the authority and we expect that he will bring fresh impetus to these matters and will want to work constructively with the Board and other partners, including working collaboratively with other authorities. In order to support the work of the Board the Deputy Minister will strengthen her relationship with relevant cabinet members and with the new Director.

Meanwhile we expect the PMB to maintain its monitoring of the authority, as well as the engagement in democratic participation with authority members and the support being provided in the transition to new arrangements with head teachers in Pembrokeshire. Those transition arrangements will require the authority to take on both the responsibility and the cost of taking this work forward. We are grateful to all of the members of the Board, and their secretariat, and we congratulate them on the work they have undertaken so far. We expect the Board to remain in place until the end of this calendar year, pending the receipt of reports from the inspectorates, after which the position may be reviewed.

The inspectorates, CSSIW and Estyn, will be conducting their re-inspections in October and their reports, together with the WAO's report, will inform our next steps. We hope that proof of fundamental change will be provided by the inspectorates' reports. We cannot, however, simply wait for inspection reports at the end of the year.

I want to emphasise that we understand the difficult circumstances in which head teachers and teachers in Pembrokeshire have been working. We are aware that the local authority does not provide the clarity or support which they are entitled to expect. I will be meeting with head teachers in Pembrokeshire, along with their union representatives, at the start of the Autumn term to hear from them directly.

The decision to issue a direction cannot be taken lightly, and any direction must be proportionate. For these reasons we have taken our time in considering all the evidence before us. As part of our deliberations we met with the Children's Commissioner and he has signalled his clear support for this action.

It is a great disappointment to us that that we have had to take this step, despite all the good work of the Ministerial Board in providing support and challenge to Pembrokeshire. We hope that the inspectorate's reports will, by the end of the year, bring us better news. If they do not, we will have to consider taking more stringent action.