



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE Further Actions to Improve Safeguarding Arrangements in Pembrokeshire

DATE 12 June 2012

By Leighton Andrews, Minister for Education and Skills and
Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services

1. In August last year the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and Estyn published the report of their joint investigation into arrangements for managing allegations of professional abuse in Pembrokeshire. The report was extremely critical and we took immediate action, directing Pembrokeshire County Council to ensure that only those who had been properly vetted worked with children over the summer break, and to draw up an improvement plan to address the failings identified in the report.
2. We have provided support and challenge to the Council, firstly in the form of the Ministerial Advisory Board while the Council drafted its improvement plan, and then the Pembrokeshire Ministerial Board (PMB) for the implementation phase. We undertook to keep you informed of progress and have done so through a series of written and oral statements.
3. Despite, at times intensive, support from the PMB, progress in improving safeguarding arrangements for children in Pembrokeshire is still worryingly slow. We are not convinced that senior officers in the authority accept the need to change the culture nor that they respond promptly and effectively to continuing concerns which the PMB raise with them.
4. On occasions, chief officers have appeared either not to have known what is happening in their schools, or known and failed to disclose it or to take action when needed. Even after the media had printed a story of a teacher tying a primary school child's hands behind his back, the Director of Education failed to intervene when the school took inappropriate action, and the PMB had to tell him what he should do. The PMB has found instances of 'time out' and withdrawal rooms in primary schools where children may have been locked in, yet senior

officers claimed to know nothing about these rooms and were slow to act when informed of their existence. Officers still do not share information with elected members to enable them to make informed judgements. Often the elected members must rely on information from the PMB before they are able to act.

5. There are however more positive signs of progress amongst elected members, and we are heartened by the work on revising the constitution and on improving democratic accountability. There are also welcome signs that cabinet members are now beginning to challenge their officers and exert their authority when necessary. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be the sense of urgency that we would expect in addressing the key failings.
6. We have given a strong message to the Council that responsibility rests with elected members and we have met with, and written to, the Leader, asking him how he intends to deal with these repeated failures. That letter is attached to this statement. We have made it clear to the Leader that the situation is so serious that we are minded to issue a Direction as outlined in the letter. We will however consider the Council's response and all other relevant factors before making any decision to issue a Direction.
7. We have waited long enough and we are not prepared to give another warning. We will issue another statement when we have considered the Leader's response and have determined our course of action.