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Chief Executive

Civic Offices,  
Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU

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Mrs Heidi J Connor  
Reading Town Hall  
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Date: 31 January 2024

Dear Mrs Connor,

**Re: Response to Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths 12.12.24**

Please see below Reading Borough Council’s response to the matters of concern set out in your Regulation 28 Report in respect of Reading Borough Council. The Council accepts your findings in full.

Ruth’s loss continues to be felt deeply by the Reading school community. Following Ruth’s untimely death, we have taken a number of steps to better understand and respond to what impacts on headteachers’ wellbeing, to support their wellbeing and to develop our collective response to an Ofsted inspection.

The remainder of this letter sets out both actions already taken as well as work currently underway to address in order, the areas of concern raised in your report.

**Area of Concern 1**

Reading Borough Council indicated an intention to adopt a much more robust and proactive approach to dealing with Ofsted, particularly where there are concerns about an inspection. This is not in written policy or guidance - which may go some way towards reassuring school leaders that their employer ‘has their back’ - both now and in future years.

**Actions Taken & Underway**

Brighter Futures for Children Ltd (on behalf of the Council) has consulted with Head Teachers regarding a more robust and proactive approach by responding to inspections on behalf of school leaders and Governors, through the termly meeting of Reading Headteachers (Friday 12 January 2024) and via the Reading school primary and secondary phase head teacher associations (week commencing 15 January).

The principle of the new approach is that Brighter Futures for Children will work with school leaders to understand any concerns regarding an inspection and offer to undertake challenge on a school’s behalf before, during and after inspection, based on a robust evidence base. This builds on current practice which supports schools to consider

challenge themselves but does go further, in taking on responsibility for raising the challenge on behalf of schools<sup>1</sup>.

Reading school leaders' and governors' weekly briefing on the 19 January confirmed this commitment, and provided details of what it will look like in practice. The commitment and practice will be written into the revised School Effectiveness Framework, which will be recommended for approval at the Council's Adults, Children's, and Education Committee on 20 March 2024.

The written commitment which will be presented to the Committee for approval includes the following:

- Arrangements for Brighter Futures for Children to identify risk of stress across all Reading schools, in writing, before, during and after inspections, including the mitigations that Brighter Futures for Children and Reading Borough Council will secure to reduce the risks of stress for school staff.
- Arrangements for Brighter Futures for Children to offer to challenge an Ofsted inspection during, and after an inspection, where there is evidence that the judgement or process of inspection is not fair and balanced, rather than solely on the published Education Inspection Framework criteria.
- An offer from Brighter Futures for Children to collate feedback from school staff on inspection conduct to evaluate against the Ofsted Code of Conduct on a school's behalf, or to provide tools and resources for schools to do this for themselves.

## **Area of Concern 2**

Reading Borough Council also did not carry out any form of internal review. I was not made aware of any policy setting out when such an internal review should take place.

## **Actions Taken & Underway**

During the inquest, the Council confirmed that a learning review would be undertaken. The Council has commissioned an independent external reviewer to undertake the learning review. Two co-reviewers were appointed on 5 January 2024. The terms of reference for the review have been drafted and will be shared with Mrs Perry's family before they are finalised. [REDACTED] have been invited to meet with the reviewers to facilitate this. The review will take 12 weeks and is expected to conclude in April 2024. This addresses the commitment the Council made at the Inquest.

As regards any future internal reviews, we recognise that, however rare, there may be exceptional circumstances where a staff member may be harmed in the course of their employment. This is a matter which we will seek to cover within our HR policies. The intended outcome being that we have a policy or process to consider when an independent learning review might be appropriate. We intend to discuss this matter with Union colleagues and take a proposal through our normal channels of Union engagement. The final sign off for all such policies lies with the Council's Personnel Committee which meets quarterly and is delegated to agree all such topics on behalf of the Council. This will be presented to Personnel Committee for agreement on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

## **Area of Concern 3**

We heard in evidence that school leaders have received correspondence from Reading Borough Council about what mental health support options are available. I am concerned

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<sup>1</sup> Schools includes nursery schools and all primary and secondary schools regardless of status.

to know whether there is now written policy or guidance about communicating this, so that this continues to happen in future years.

### **Actions Taken & Underway**

Reading Borough Council is committed to promoting and supporting the welfare and mental health of all its staff including Head Teachers. Brighter Futures for Children undertook a Head Teacher wellbeing and mental health survey in May 2023. Findings from that survey and from Head Teachers' performance management reviews have informed the development of a wellbeing entitlement offer and support package. The wellbeing entitlement offer, and support package was endorsed by the Education Partnership Board on 8 December 2023.

The Head Teacher wellbeing and mental health survey will be repeated annually, and the survey will inform updates to the entitlement offer and support package.

The wellbeing entitlement offer, and support package is being delivered in 3 strands:

- i. We have reconfirmed to Reading school leaders the existing staff wellbeing offer which includes access to the Employee Assistance Programme that provides independent advice, information and support through: 24hr/365 day phone service; 6 telephone counselling sessions for each issue each year; coverage for staff and their dependents (including up to 3 months after leaving the organisation); live chat; telephone debt counselling; monthly webinars; online wellbeing portal and mobile app and wellbeing tools.
- ii. We have extended this wellbeing offer to include coaching, mentoring or executive support. The Community school leaders' and Chairs of Governing Board's weekly briefing on 19 January 2024 included a reminder of the mental health support available through the Employee Assistance Programme and confirmed that this new entitlement to coaching, mentoring or executive support was available.
- iii. Reading Borough Council School leaders at their termly meeting on 12 January were consulted on a proposed Reading Borough - wide Parent Carer and Community Acceptable Behaviour Policy which will be implemented in practice on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024. This policy will complement a proposed Reading Borough Council Zero tolerance and prevention of abuse to staff policy, a draft of which went to Reading Borough Council's Corporate Health and Safety Committee on 18 January 2024.

This offer will be written into the School Effectiveness Framework for consideration by the Council's Adult's, Children's, and Education Committee on 20 March 2024.

**Timetable for implementation:**

**Action**

<b>Area of concern 1</b>	School leaders written to, to confirm commitment to proactively and robustly challenge Ofsted inspections and judgements (based on evidence), including practical arrangements in place	19-01-24 (completed)
	Write into School Effectiveness Framework the Council's approach to challenging an inspection	19-02-24 (completed)
	Agree revisions to School Effectiveness Framework through Reading Borough Council's ACE Committee	20-Mar-24
	Share updated School Effectiveness Framework with school leaders	19-Apr-24
<b>Area of concern 2</b>	Appoint reviewers to conduct an independent learning review	05-01-24 (completed)
	Finalise terms of reference	16-Feb-24
	Conclude independent learning review	30-Apr-24
	Write into HR policy when a learning review should be considered	30-Apr-24
	Consider report and agree action plan through Brighter Futures for Children's Board	23-May-24
	Consider report and agree action plan through Reading Borough Council's ACE Committee	10-Jul-24
	Agree revisions to HR policy through Reading Borough Council's Personnel Committee	11-Jul-24
<b>Area of concern 3</b>	School leaders written to, to confirm wellbeing offer	19-01-24 (completed)
	Write into School Effectiveness Framework the Council's offer of wellbeing support	19-Feb-24
	Agree School Effectiveness Framework through Reading Borough Council's ACE Committee	20-Mar-24
	Share updated School Effectiveness Framework with schools	19-Apr-24

I trust that the above provides you with assurance that the Council has and is taking appropriate action to address the concerns raised.

Yours sincerely



  
Chief Executive