

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report formally discharges my responsibility to the CEO of Birmingham City Council, Dawn Baxendale, on behalf of the Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing and also to safeguarding partners.
- 1.2 This is my third Accountability Report and will be the last under the current arrangements, which will be replaced by new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA) under the banner of Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership in April 2019.
- 1.3 I will address the key priorities agreed by the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) Executive to review progress.
- 1.4 I attach the role description agreed with partners for the Independent Chair (Appendix 1).

2. Introduction

- 2.1 As Independent Chair, I benefit from the hard work, experience and commitment of Simon Cross, BSCB Business Manager, and by the BSCB team of Administrative Staff and Programme Managers, hosted by the Birmingham Children's Trust. Simon is accountable to the Assistant Director responsible for Child Protection, Performance and Partnerships. Simon manages the team and is responsible for the effective management of a budget comprising the contributions of safeguarding partners. This year, I have been personally supported by Deb McCabe-Smith whose efficiency, positivity and good humour have been very much appreciated.
- 2.2 The start of this financial year saw the formal launch of Birmingham Children's Trust as the main provider of Children's Services. The Trust has played a full and significant part in the city's Safeguarding Children Board, with Charles Greer, Assistant Director Child Protection, Performance and Partnerships, co-chairing the Serious Case Review (SCR) Sub-Group and Dawn Roberts, Assistant Director for Early Help, Family Support and Youth Justice co-chairing the Quality, Impact and Outcomes (QIO) Sub-Group, and the Early Help and Safeguarding Partnership (BEHSP). I am grateful for Dr Jane Armstrong's co-chairing of the SCR Sub-Group and for Detective Chief Superintendent Claire Bell's undertaking the role of Vice Chair of the Executive for another year.
- 2.3 The new senior managerial leadership of the Council; newly configured Clinical Commissioning Group for Birmingham and Solihull; the merged University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust and Birmingham Community Health Foundation Trust, have begun to have a positive joint impact, giving the wellbeing and safety of children, young people and their families a significant priority.
- 2.4 During the past year I have met regularly with Dawn Baxendale, Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, to discuss partnership progress in line with her accountability for safeguarding, and as part of my wider advisory role on partnership development. Dawn Baxendale has personally taken responsibility for chairing the Community Safety Partnership and refocusing the Partnership on a small number of key priorities. This is a really positive development. Dawn is also chairing the Birmingham Children's Partnership, to which I am pleased to contribute with independent support and challenge.

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

- 2.5** I have also met with Councillor Kate Booth, the new Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing and Councillor Mohammed Aikhlaq, the new Scrutiny Chair.
- 3. Progress against BSCB Priorities – Strong Leadership; Strong Partnership**
- 3.1** 2018/9 was the second year of our revised Governance arrangements for Safeguarding Children.
- 3.2** The Executive Board has met six times; chaired by me and hosted by partners, giving opportunities to hear about Safeguarding in practice from the Police, a special school, the University Hospital Birmingham, and Birmingham's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), amongst others. It was encouraging and instructive to meet with 'Redthread' at the meeting hosted by the University Hospitals Birmingham Trust and to learn of this organisation's work with young people who have been victims of violence. This device for engaging with partners and symbolising our commitment to frontline practice seems to be appreciated. Certainly, our meetings are lively and participative, with good attendance and contributions from partners.
- 3.3** The bi-annual Safeguarding Leaders Assembly (17th April and 16th October 2018) has also provided the opportunity for consideration of key issues, e.g. adolescence and contextual safeguarding, and an opportunity for Leaders to gain and give assurance as to the importance of working together to safeguard our most vulnerable citizens.
- 3.4** The Board's Sub-Groups have continued to function effectively, with co-chairing providing shared ownership and increased resilience.
- 3.5** A number of Serious Cases have been reviewed over the year but publication awaits the outcome of criminal proceedings in three cases. Six Serious Case Reviews cases are currently in train and will be formally transferred over to the Birmingham Safeguarding Partnership on 1st April 2019, under the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- 3.6** The Quality, Impact and Outcomes (QIO) Sub-Group, which I led until handing over to Jenny Turnross, Director of Practice for Birmingham Children's Trust in January 2019, highlighted a number of issues through the year including: homeless accommodation for vulnerable children and the high numbers of primary school exclusions. In both cases, senior managers responded with speed and seriousness. These issues remain and are serious especially in the light of increased knife crime incidents involving young people. The concerns around exploitation of children and the subsequent development of a contextual safeguarding approach is a much-needed and welcome development in the city.
- 3.7** The Learning and Development Sub-Group was co-chaired by Michelle McLoughlin, Chief Nurse, Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust and George Pejic, Performance and Development Manager, Youth Offending Service, until December 2018. This group is responsible for ensuring delivery of a programme of multi-agency training and events. An especial highlight of the year was the annual Practitioner Conference in June, which was a huge success - oversubscribed; highly rated and topical, helping to cement our strategic commitment to adopting 'contextual safeguarding' as the means of approaching the exploitation of adolescents. We have agreed that the Executive should play a more active role in setting expectations for this largely operational Sub-Group. Indeed, the last Safeguarding Leaders Assembly agreed that we should give more emphasis to joint / multi-agency training, and to development opportunities which cement collaborative working together arrangements.

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

- 3.8** The Safeguarding in Education Group was chaired by the previous Director of Children's Services (DCS), and is currently chaired by Julie Young, Assistant Director, Children and Young People. I attended on the 19th March 2019. I see this group as vital to ensuring that the large and diverse Schools network in the City is properly tied into the safeguarding arrangements for Children, indeed, is properly tied into the strategic arrangements for the wellbeing of all Birmingham's Children.
- 3.9** The senior Health Safeguarding Forum in the city has been subject to changed leadership over the year, and I have not gained reassurance that there is a properly effective arrangement for communication and coordination across all health organisations and their many professionals. Addressing this will be one of the priorities for the newly appointed Chief Nurse for Birmingham and Solihull (BSol) CCG, on whose interview panel I served in February. I look forward to welcoming Helen Jenkinson to her vital role later in the year.
- 3.10** Birmingham's Early Help and Safeguarding Partnership has historically reported into the BSCB more because of the lack of an effective Strategic Partnership body taking a holistic view of Children's needs for Education, a Leisure and Culture offer, Ways to Wellbeing, preparation for Citizenship and Employment; indeed, a safe city in which to grow and flourish. Now that its work to develop updated guidance on access to services has been completed, and 'Right Help, Right Time' is in operation, it is timely to refresh the Early Help Partnership purpose and ambition, as well as its accountability. I fully support the reporting arrangements of the BEHSP into the broader Birmingham Children's Partnership (see paragraph 3.11).
- 3.11** Since arriving in Birmingham with a role to convene partners and support and challenge them to improve effectiveness in partnership working for safeguarding, I have encouraged the development of a strategic forum whose focus is the wider needs of Birmingham's Children. This year, happily, has seen the start of the development of such a leadership body: the Birmingham Children's Partnership (BCP). With four meetings held to date, there is agreement that this body, chaired by the Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, must provide leadership which enables a common purpose and agreed behavioral values to underpin shared priorities. Already there is a commitment to early help and tackling violence in communities.
- 3.12** The Early Help Partnership stands poised to be a positive operational group to oversee the implementation of the updated Early Help Strategy and to take forward some of this ambition. Equally, the newly refocused Community Safety Partnership (CSP) also now chaired by BCC's Chief Executive, has a mandate to act for young people. I fully support the CSP as the lead partnership for coordinating the safety in the streets for young people.
- 3.13** The BCP was supported in its early development by a well-attended and ambitious 'Improvement Forum,' organised by BSol CCG on 26th November 2018. A number of us contributed on the day, and I was left with a certainty that improvement was now a shared and owned commitment; no longer something expected by many of every other organisation but their own.
- 3.14** A further partnership development through this year has been the ambitiously titled 'City Board' which has now met three times (19th September 2018; 11th December 2018 and 25th March 2019). The City Board involves a range of leaders from the city's Public, Voluntary and Private sectors, convened but not led by the city's Leader of the Council; it is still working out its role and priorities. It would be helpful to see the Health and Wellbeing Board have a specific remit from conception to grave, supported by a Joint Service Needs Assessment (JSNA)

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

with effective leadership from Public Health, as well as the Directorate of Adult Social Care. I look forward to meeting with the new Director of Public Health, Dr Justin Varney, to take forward discussions.

- 3.15** In January 2019, Tim O'Neill took up his post of Director of Skills and Education (DCS) in Birmingham City Council. We are meeting on a monthly basis in the early phase of his tenure and I have appreciated his interest and support of developments underway.
- 3.16** As we move into the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for Birmingham, it does seem to me that the City's political and managerial Leaders have grasped the need to take concerted action to work better together and to provide the steer for those in their organisations to do the same. There is an opportunity for the Health and Wellbeing Board to provide a key multi-agency Governance role in these arrangements, in a way it has not done to date.
- 3.17** The proposed multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for Birmingham have been developed from a starting point that acknowledges the need to build on progress; to continue to focus on Leadership, Partnership and Practice and not to see structural change as an end itself. Having made changes in safeguarding partnership arrangements fairly recently and consistent with national changes, the three Safeguarding Partners (BCC, WMP and BSol CCG) have agreed that the way forward should be strengthened by the wider partnership arrangements referred to above and sustaining the meaningful engagement of 'relevant agencies.'
- 3.18** The Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) will launch in April 2019, and this will be formally marked at the Safeguarding Leaders Assembly on 10th April 2019. Its priorities have been agreed: There will be a continuation of the first two priorities from the BSCB, namely, Leadership/Partnership and Improving Child Protection Practice in all agencies. In addition, the BSCP will prioritise the development of a multi-agency response to contextual safeguarding (bringing together the arrangements to address all forms of Exploitation and Missing) learning from research and best practice. Finally, the Partnership will seek to evidence a positive impact of the new partnership arrangements.

4. Progress against BSCB Priorities: Continuous Improvement of Child Protection Practice

- 4.1** Throughout the year, we have continued to focus on improving practice in all organisations and across the whole system. We aspire towards a system-wide learning culture.
- 4.2** Multi-agency audits and learning lessons reviews have been captured in easy to digest bulletins. This year, we published "Missing, Perhaps Exploited?" in May, which highlighted important learning from a multi-agency audit of cases involving children missing from home or care. Poor school attendance and exclusions were a key factor in all of the cases. In June 2018, we published "I want to be left alone...I resent the involvement of services" – a Learning Lessons Review involving the tragic death of a three-month old baby, whose cause of death could not be ascertained. The case involved a vulnerable single parent who came from Pakistan in childhood to live in the UK, with learning difficulties and a history of emotional ill-health, which was characterised by overdoses and substance misuse. "Seeing the Bigger Picture" – outlining key learning points from an audit of cases involving children vulnerable to neglect, was published in February 2019. The audit outlined a need for professionals to consider the journey of a child, taking into account the whole family, ensuring that all relevant support services are engaged and acknowledging that some families may need a programme of extended support which may not fit into the current system.

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

- 4.3** The Quality, Impact and Outcomes Sub-Group scrutinizes all 'outstanding' Ofsted reports published from across the country, taking note of anything we could be doing that we are not. The Executive Board examines any relevant inspections from services in the City – this has led to discussions on Community Health services; Police Public Protection performance; Probation services; University Hospital Birmingham; 'Forward Thinking Birmingham' Child and Adolescent services and the Children's Trust services. Most of these reports have charted the need for improvement, and all have reinforced the importance of the whole system approach to improvement which is now being embraced.
- 4.4** An important landmark was passed in January 2019 when children's services in Birmingham moved out of the 'inadequate' category that they had inhabited for over a decade, into 'requires improvement'. This was a significant achievement for BCC and Birmingham Children's Trust and was also something that partners had contributed to, and which must be built on to achieve first the 'good', and then the 'outstanding' services that the country's second city - its youngest city - deserves.
- 4.5** I have convened and led Practitioner Forums on a quarterly basis (13th April, 18th September and 11th December 2018 and 12th March 2019), offering an open forum for any frontline practitioner to bring issues or suggest future topics. Usually attended by about 30 practitioners from across the city, we have covered a range of topics, including: 'Right Help; Right Time'; Exploitation within the Roma Community; community safety; absence and exclusions, Female Genital Mutilation and most recently, school attendance. We are hoping to increase the number of social work and police staff who attend, and the Director of Practice in the Children's Trust is promoting the Forum as a valuable working together development.
- 4.6** In June each year, we have now instituted an annual Practitioner Conference. On 26th June 2018, the conference was over-subscribed, well attended and garnered terrific feedback. Its focus was Exploitation and the contributions of Sammy Woodhouse, an expert by experience, and Dez Holmes, Director of Research in Practice, proved first class. They were a catalyst for Birmingham to make the move towards developing its approach to 'contextual safeguarding,' recognizing that a simplistic Victim/Perpetrator paradigm does not work for sexual and criminal exploitation, trafficking and 'missing' children.
- 4.7** Another catalyst for this development was the regional County Lines / Criminal Exploitation events run by West Midlands Police and the Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People partnership on 11th June 2018. In this development, the role of leaders in the Children's Trust and WMP cannot be underestimated. They have seen the research and evidence from elsewhere and have worked hard together to recognize that a new way of working is needed. An exploitation strategy is work in progress and new partnership and operational arrangements are under development. In its most recent inspection, Ofsted recognised the value of this work, and we have agreed that reporting lines into both the Safeguarding Partnership and Community Safety partnership will be necessary.
- 4.8** On a quarterly basis, I attend the West Midlands Independent Chairs group and we share intelligence and learning. One concrete example recently was a paper prepared by Barnardo's on their work with members of the Roma community around exploitation. The insights from the work and the attention it provoked were useful in a specific large scale local operation. It is gratifying to see the effectiveness of regional procedures in the West Midlands and to recognise the positive work on the early development and adoption of the 'Rapid Review'

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

process, which has gained sign-up from all fourteen authorities in the wider West Midlands region.

- 4.9** Anecdotal evidence I receive through the Practitioner Forum has given me some optimism that a learning culture is beginning to take hold. One example is the practice in the Family Support service of systematically looking to learn from examples of good and successful work with families. Another is the extent of case discussion and evaluation that is underway routinely within organisations. There is more to do to expedite the multi-agency audit and evaluation process organised by the QIO group. I am hoping that as QIO Chair, Jenny Turnross will get hold of this!
- 4.10** Recognizing the themes from Serious Cases and Learning Lessons reviews, we have determined that Neglect is an issue for more focus, to help practitioners with recognition and effective interventions. Work on a revised Neglect Strategy is well underway and Neglect will be the theme for our next Practitioner Conference in June 2019.
- 4.11** During this year, the Serious Case Review Sub-Group has increased their focus on bringing 'Learning into Action' by dedicating every other one of their monthly meetings to exactly this topic. I applaud this step and see it as a very concrete way of demonstrating that whilst we cannot change the past, we can learn from it to benefit others in the future.

5. Progress against BSCB Priorities: Embedding Early Help & Early Intervention into mainstream partnership activity

- 5.1** Of our three priorities, this is the one that I can be least confident about, other than to refer back to my earlier section on challenging partners to take a wider leadership focus for children and young people. Early help is not the primary business of safeguarding; rather, it is an organizing principle which should be adopted by all agencies on business grounds, as much as on moral ones. Investment in prevention and earliest help provides a saving on more expensive services downstream.
- 5.2** In Birmingham we have an enthusiastic Early Help and Safeguarding Partnership. I am hoping that the BCP will take on the accountability for Early Help and agree with the Partnership some expectations with resources attached to enable prevention and Early Help to thrive.
- 5.3** At the Safeguarding in Education group, it was clear that Early Help activity in schools far outstrips those recorded on the system and attracting payment from the Government's 'payment by results'. There are ambitious targets to improve recording and to build on recognition of Early Help as a key phase of multi-agency activity. Increasing numbers of primary exclusions provide just one example of cases where joint assessments of need and support would be indicated.
- 5.4** It has been remarked at the Executive Board that Birmingham is fortunate in having an Early Help offer from the police and I fully endorse this.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1** In addition to delivering against the expectations of my role description and providing evidenced progress against Board priorities, I have also had some personal goals.

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

- 6.2** My third year as Independent Chair of the BSCB has been dominated by my determination to influence the wider partnership arrangements of children in the city. In this regard, I am really delighted to be part of the newly launched Birmingham Children's Partnership, with its developing purpose and ambition to improve the outcomes for children and young people.
- 6.3** From this development, I at last see partnership arrangements being led, coordinated and jointly owned by several executives across public services. As a result, I would expect the recognised progress of the past year to accelerate and gain in strength and depth. There really is a commitment to making the second city a place where young people are supported to flourish in education, relationships and to become contributing citizens, proud of their place.
- 6.4** Over this year, I have seen good evidence of partners addressing performance and service issues, and really taking the feedback from regulators and service reviews seriously to drive improvement. This is especially the case for Birmingham Community Healthcare Trust, Birmingham Children's Trust, Birmingham City Council's Homelessness Service and police Public Protection Unit.
- 6.5** As new organisations, the Children's Trust and Birmingham and Solihull CCG have had opportunities to set out their stall, and in both cases, partnership and improving practice have been key priorities. Both organisations are still making final appointments to their structures, and show signs of strengthening capacity and capability to take forward delivery of ambitious agendas.
- 6.6** It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the sterling work of the BSCB Business Support Team, under the leadership of Simon Cross, to complete all the practical arrangements and documentation to support the move to compliant multi-agency safeguarding arrangements from 1st April 2019. In addition, Simon has led the regional work to establish an effective approach to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Both have been substantial pieces of work with tight deadlines and both have been delivered to a high standard.
- 6.7** Finally, it should be noted that inevitably, the austerity agenda of recent years has taken some toll on the public service offer in Birmingham, and on the living conditions and income levels of some of its most vulnerable citizens. It cannot be a coincidence that the city is experiencing a rise in exploitation, youth violence and chronic neglect. In the face of these challenges, the response of agencies must be to work better together, to harness community spirit and capacity in a shared ambition of an improved quality of life for the most vulnerable and indeed, for all Birmingham's children.

Penny Thompson CBE
Independent Chair, BSCB
March 2019

Appendices

Appendix 1: Role Description for BSCB Independent Chair

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2018-19

Appendix 1

Role of BSCB Independent Chair – Leadership of Assurance, Learning, Partnering

Key Functions:

- a) Independent convener of all those charged with the wellbeing, including safeguarding, of children and young people in Birmingham;
- b) A champion for children and best practice;
- c) Supporting and challenging the Birmingham leadership in their quest to achieve a sustainably safe city for children and young people, in the context of family, community and wellbeing;
- d) Modelling openness, challenge, support, mutual respect, professionalism & learning for application by leaders in Birmingham;
- e) Ensuring political and managerial leaders are demonstrably accountable for the resourcing and strategic priority given to the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people;
- f) Enabling the council's lead agency role to be understood, valued, respected & fulfilled;
- g) Demonstrating a robust approach to evaluation, practice audit & research whose dissemination will support valuable learning for multi-agency leaders, managers and practitioners in their critical roles;
- h) Through robust independent support and challenge, contribute to developing confidence of citizens and the state in the city of Birmingham.