

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

17th March 2020



Subject: **BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL ASSURANCE
FRAMEWORK 2019 -20+**

Report of: **THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**Relevant Cabinet
Member:** Councillor Ian Ward, Leader

Relevant O & S Chair(s): Councillor Carl Rice – Co-ordinating O&S Committee

Report author: Jonathan Tew, Assistant Chief Executive
jonathan.tew@birmingham.gov.uk

Are specific wards affected?	Yes	X No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):		
Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, add Forward Plan Reference:		
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:		

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1** In July 2019, Cabinet approved the adoption of an innovative new model of 'progressive assurance' which led to the formation of a quarterly Strategic Programme Board. Specialist external Non-Executive Advisors (NEAs) were appointed to provide subject matter expertise on key areas of improvement activity (aligned to specific risk and professional areas of focus) to support the Council Leadership Team until July 2020.
- 1.2** As part of the agreed governance arrangements with The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Strategic Programme Board will submit voluntary update reports from the Leader to the Secretary of State in Autumn

2019, Spring and Summer 2020. The second update report (including commentary from the NEAs) is attached as Appendix 1.

2 Recommendation

That Cabinet: -

- 2.1** Approves submission of the report, including Non-Executive Advisor commentary, to the Secretary of State to appraise Government of the progress made and residual challenges in Birmingham City Council's improvement journey.

3 Background

- 3.1** Following the final report of the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel in March 2019, the Council considered how best to continue the service improvement and transformation journey and agreed a model of 'progressive assurance' through the establishment of a quarterly Strategic Programme Board (SPB).
- 3.2** The SPB has been designed to maintain impetus around key areas of improvement activity, allow the Council to continue benefiting from external experience, and secure the trust and confidence of local stakeholders and Government.
- 3.3** Membership of the SPB includes all members of the Council Leadership Team (CLT) and five specialist external Non-Executive Advisors (NEAs) to provide advice and input to the Council on key areas of improvement activity as follows:
 - Sean Hanson: Waste management and industrial relations;
 - Javed Khan: Outcomes for vulnerable adults and children;
 - Rob Whiteman: Financial resilience;
 - Max Caller: Risk management; and
 - Donna Hall: Good governance and culture change & Peer support to the Chief Executive.
- 3.4** The SPB has committed to submitting voluntary update reports from the Leader to the Secretary of State in order to provide assurance that the model is genuinely value-adding and that sustainable progress is being achieved at pace. The second report is now due to be submitted.

4 Current Progress

- 4.1** The SPB has now met formally five times (including induction and half-day sessions) over the last six months and CLT are in ongoing dialogue with the NEAs around key lines of enquiry. Following an initial induction session, the Board met formally in October to focus specifically on reviewing the Council's budget position. They met in November to focus on Industrial relations and Culture

change. January's meeting focused on waste management, business planning and budget, and risk management. March's meeting was dedicated to Social Care and Partnerships.

- 4.2 Alongside these meetings, NEAs have been working individually with Senior Officers in their respective areas as detailed in section 3.3.
- 4.3 Additionally, as part of their assurance role, NEAs have met with Elected Members including the Leader, Deputy Leader, portfolio holders and members of the Opposition.
- 4.4 This work collectively has informed their view of the Council's improvement journey and the most pressing strategic, cultural and operational challenges that the Council needs to address.
- 4.5 The second update report from the Leader of the Council has now been developed and is attached to this note for Cabinet review. The report includes an appendix with commentary from the NEAs themselves.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 None required

6 Risk Management

- 6.1 The agreed areas of focus for the NEA roles were, in part, generated by the statutory recommendations published by the Council's external auditor during 2018-19 and the 'risk' NEA is advising specifically around the Council's internal risk management culture and practice. The External Auditor attended the January meeting of the Board in order to assess progress and expressed positive feedback on the work undertaken so far, particularly with regard to financial resilience.

7 Compliance Issues

- 7.1 The recommended decisions are consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies, supporting the Council's stated commitment to improvement.

7.2 Legal Implications.

- 7.2.1 Negligible

7.3 Financial Implications

- 7.3.1 Financial commitments in supporting the SPB model are consistent with the use of Policy Contingency agreed in the July Cabinet report. No additional requirements are envisaged.

7.4 Procurement Implications (if required)

- 7.4.1 None

7.5 Human Resources Implications (if required)

7.5.1 None

7.6 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.6.1 None

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 – Secretary of State Update – Spring 2020

8.2 Appendix 2 – NEA commentary – Spring 2020