



# Children's Trust Background Paper

## 1 Purpose

- 1.1 Andrew Christie, Chair; Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive; Professor Jon Glasby, a Non-Executive Director appointed by the Council to the Children's Trust Board and Jenny Turnross, Director of Practice will be attending to provide an update on the Children's Trust. In addition, Councillor Kate Booth, Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing (Lead Member for Children's Services) will also be in attendance.
- 1.2 This cover note sets out a short summary and some suggested questions for Members to assist with exploring how the arrangements with the Trust and Council are working and whether the improvement journey is on course. It does not set out a definitive set of questions to be asked but suggests a range of questions that could be asked, and to assist Members to think through other possible questions.
- 1.3 Please find attached:
  - Appendix A: Fifth Ofsted monitoring visit – 15 and 16 May 2018.
  - Appendix B: Sixth Ofsted monitoring visit – 14 and 15 August 2018.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The Council has been rated as inadequate in the delivery of its responsibilities to children for some years. The decision was made that a Trust offers greater agility and focus which would improve the chances of delivering excellent social work in an effective and sustainable way. The challenge facing the Council and the Trust is to sustain the improvement work.
- 2.2 The commencement of the delivery of children's early help, social care and related services through the Birmingham Children's Trust on behalf of the Council came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. Previously the Trust had been established for a shadow period (from April 2017 to March 2018) to develop and test the governance arrangements between the Council and the Trust.
- 2.3 'The Trust budget for 2018/19 is £194.1m which includes activities funded from government grant of £10.3m. Also included within the Trust budget is a sum of £10.0m which will meet the costs of support services provided by the Council to the Trust'.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.4 'The Trust is supporting over 8,000 children and young people every day, including 1,900 in care, 1,200 with child protection plans, children with disabilities and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

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<sup>1</sup> 27 February 2018 Joint Cabinet Member and Interim AD Report



2.5 They are also working with some 2,000 families through the family support service and think family programme, as well as supporting young people who have been drawn into youth offending'.<sup>2</sup>

2.6 As stated in the Children's Trust Strategic Business Plan 2018 – 2023:

**The Trust has one focus: we will deliver better services and better outcomes for the city's most vulnerable children, young people and families. We will do this by strengthening the quality of practice across the Trust; by creating the conditions that enable better practice and management; by ensuring that we understand and act upon the performance and quality information we gather about our work; and by engaging and forging strong and purposeful collaboration with children, young people and families, with those we work with, with the Council as our commissioner, with our partners, and with our staff.**

### 3 Responsibilities and Duties

#### The Contract

- 3.1 The Council remains accountable for the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people and for improving outcomes.
- 3.2 Through the Service Delivery Contract the Trust will be responsible for determining how those outcomes of most relevance to its work are achieved and also for the day-to-day running of children's services. The Trust will provide children's services functions on behalf of the Council and will seek to ensure it is meeting the Council's statutory duties.
- 3.3 The contract length is for five years, with a provision to extend for a further five years, following a review.
- 3.4 The contract will include DfE third party rights whilst the Council remains in intervention (meaning some decisions, for example, termination of the contract, would require agreement with the DfE).

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<sup>2</sup> Children's Trust Strategic Business Plan 2018 - 2023

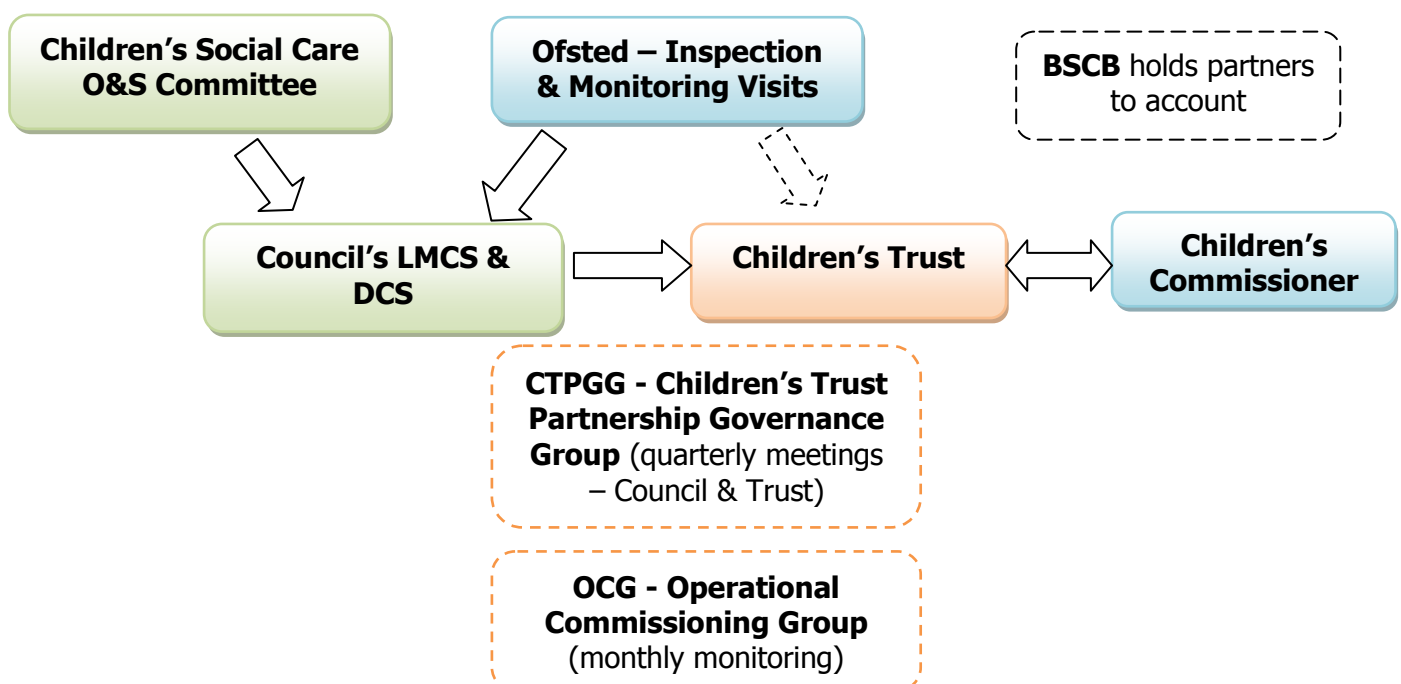


## Governance Arrangements and Accountability

- 3.5 The Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) retains its role in ensuring the effectiveness of co-operation between agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. Penny Thompson, Chair of the BSCB and Simon Cross, Business Manager were in attendance at the Committee's October 2018 meeting.
- 3.6 The Ofsted letter for the August monitoring visit mentions an improvement in multi-agency attendance at conference and core groups, but regular attendance from key agencies remains inconsistent.
- 3.7 The Council will continue to hold the statutory remits of the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) under Section 19 Children Act 2004 and Director of Children's Services (DCS) under Section 18 Children Act 2004. The Council will be the body held accountable by Ofsted.
- 3.8 The Council has agreed a principle covering wide accountability of the Trust. That includes the role of the Lead Member, responding to relevant queries and casework from Members, all Councillors exercising their corporate parenting responsibilities and the **Trust Chair and senior Trust managers reporting to the relevant Scrutiny Committee** and others as appropriate.
- 3.9 The Children's Trust Board is there to provide support and challenge on the direction and strategy of the Trust and consists of a chair and six non-executive directors. Professor Jon Glasby is a Non-Executive Director appointed by the Council to the Children's Trust Board.
- 3.10 It is scrutiny's role to hold the Lead Member (Cllr Kate Booth, Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing) and the Director of Children's Services to account. However, the Chair and senior Trust Officers have and will continue to report to the Children's Social Care O&S Committee. Members of the Committee have visited the Trust and further visits will be programmed, as these allow Members to 'see for themselves' what is happening.
- 3.11 The contractual performance of the Trust is monitored monthly through the Operational Commissioning Group (OCG) and there are ultimately penalties if performance isn't met. The OCG membership is:
- The Council's Director of Children's Services.
  - The Council's Assistant Director of Finance.
  - The Council's Head of the Intelligent Client Function and appropriate members of the Intelligent Client Function.
  - Chief Executive of the Trust.
  - The Trust's Director of Resources.
  - Appropriate members of the Trust's Senior Leadership Team (including its directors).
  - A representative(s) of the Secretary of State up until the end of June 2018, unless otherwise agreed between the Parties in writing.



- 3.12 The Children's Trust Partnership Governance Group (CTPGG) meet quarterly representing the senior tier of performance monitoring. The CTPGG membership is:
- Leader of the Council.
  - Lead Member.
  - Chief Executive of the Council.
  - The Council's Director of Children's Services.
  - Appropriate members of the Intelligent Client Function.
  - Chief Executive of the Trust.
  - The Chair of the Trust.
  - The Trust's Director of Resources.
  - Appropriate members of the Trust's Senior Leadership Team (including its directors).
- 3.13 In addition to the OCG KPIs reports there are bimonthly practice reports.
- 3.14 As the Trust is a Council wholly owned company an annual report is presented to the Cabinet Committee - Group Company Governance.
- 3.15 The Corporate Parenting Board is multi agency and 'works to champion the rights of children in care, and bring about change to ensure improvements in the outcomes for young people'. This is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing and the Corporate Parenting Board's Annual report will be presented to the Committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019.
- 3.16 The below diagram sets out elements of the governance and accountability arrangements.





### 3.17 *Potential Questions*

#### **To All**

- a) What steps, if any, need to be made to improve governance and accountability?
- b) How can scrutiny add value?
- c) What support are you getting or do you need from partners, for example the Ofsted monitoring letter refers to regular attendance from key agencies remaining inconsistent?

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing**

- d) What work has been undertaken or ongoing to ensure Councillors and Directorates are supporting the work of the Trust – for example: Corporate Parenting, homeless families placed in inappropriate accommodation, school exclusions etc?

### **Priorities and Performance Indicators**

3.18 Included within the Children's Trust Strategic Business Plan 2018 – 2023 is information on their Change and Improvement Strategy. This has four essential pillars of change and improvement to enable improved quality of practice leading to better outcomes for children, young people and families:

- Leadership, Management and Governance of Practice.
- Support for Practice and Management of Resources.
- Quality and Performance.
- Partnership and Engagement.

3.19 The Children's Trust's five priorities for 2018/19 are:

- Placements, Choice and Sufficiency.
- Quality and Performance.
- Workforce Development.
- Young People at Risk.
- Effective and efficient processes, systems and support.

3.20 There are 15 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) in the contract (there are other performance indicators that sit below the key performance indicators). Each KPI has a target and a tolerance level.

3.21 The Committee was informed that the Council and Trust will review the targets and tolerances within the year as part of the annual contract review process.



### 15 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) in the contract

No.	Indicator	Target 18/19	Tolerance	Oct 18
KPI 1	% of all referrals with a decision within 24 hours	85%	75–95%	85%
KPI 2	% of re-referrals to children's social care within 12 months	21%	17–24%	24%
KPI 3	% of assessments completed within 45 working days	85%	80–90%	91%
KPI 4	Child in need cases open for more than 2 years	30%	24–36%	28%
KPI 5	% initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days	80%	75–85%	93%
KPI 6	% of children who become the subject of a Child Protection plan for a second or subsequent time within the last 2 years	12%	9–14%	11%
KPI 7	% of children (under 16 years) who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more and in the same placement (or placed for adoption) continuously for 2 years or more	65%	62–69%	67%
KPI 8	% of looked after reviews held on time	96%	86–100%	97%
KPI 9	% of care leavers who are in Education, Employment and Training	55%	50–80%	62%
KPI 10	Average time between LA receiving court authority to place a child & deciding on a match	240 days	220–260 days	168
KPI 11	% young offenders that re-offend within 1 year	45%	30–60%	36.1%
KPI 12	% established social worker posts (including team managers) filled by agency / interim staff	13%	10–15%	14%
KPI 13	% child protection plans ending within 3 months or less	25%	20–30%	16%
KPI 14	Average caseload of qualified social workers	15	12–20	16
KPI 15	% of social workers who have had supervision (in month)	86%	80–90%	90%

### 3.22 Potential Questions

#### To All

- e) Is it felt that the Key Performance Indicators and Tolerances are appropriate?
- f) When will the process start with regard to reviewing the targets and tolerances and at what time/point in the process would Scrutiny be able to have an input if they had a formal view and wanted to make a recommendation to the Lead Member?

#### To the Trust

- g) How are you progressing with your five priorities (Placements, Choice and Sufficiency; Quality and Performance; Workforce Development; Young People at Risk and Effective and efficient processes, systems and support)?



## Staff Recruitment and Retention – Workforce Strategy

- 3.23 The Trust is made up of 1,900 staff. Members of the previous Schools, Children and Families O&S Committee were concerned about the effects of being transferred to the Trust under TUPE on staff morale and welfare.
- 3.24 Members were informed in July 2018 that a staff survey had been undertaken. This had a low response rate with the key message being that staff were reserving judgement as to whether the Trust will make a difference. Another staff survey will be undertaken where it is hopeful that there will be a bigger response rate and positive feedback.
- 3.25 ***Potential Questions to the Trust***
- h) Has staff recruitment and retention improved?
  - i) The Ofsted monitoring letter refers to the new practice evaluation process not having been successfully embedded among frontline managers. How is this being addressed?
  - j) How are staff being supported?

## 4 Scrutiny Involvement and Visits

- 4.1 The previous committees (Education and Vulnerable Children and Schools, Children and Families O&S Committees) had undertaken three Inquiries: Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Children Missing from Home and Care and Corporate Parenting. It was agreed by the previous committee that updates on CSE would be incorporated into updates on Children Missing from Home and Care and these were primarily with regard to preventing repeat missing episodes and utilising the Return Home Interviews (RHI) fully. An update on Corporate Parenting is programmed for the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019 committee meeting.
- 4.2 Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive attended the June informal meeting to brief the new Members on the Trust. The Trust's Chief Executive also attended the July formal meeting to provide a further update and this included performance information, children who go missing, and school attendance and children out of school.
- 4.3 The Committee visited the Children's Advice and Support Service (CASS) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Members felt that seeing how this was set-up was very valuable for the work of the Committee. Especially, how the partners work together and deal with the large number of enquiries they have on a daily basis. The service is a credit and the Committee wanted to thank officers.
- 4.4 Members will be undertaking another visit on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019 to better understand casework. This will include child protection plans, court cases and children in care.
- 4.5 Also, the previous committee had the police in attendance to discuss their involvement in such things as CSE and Children Missing from Home and Care. Is it felt that scrutiny can add value by exploring a particular aspect of safeguarding with partners?



Clive House  
70 Petty France  
Westminster  
London, SW1H 9EX

T 0300 123 1231  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



8 June 2018

Mr Andy Couldrick  
Chief Executive, Birmingham Children's Trust  
1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway  
Birmingham, B4 7DJ  
Po Box 17363

Dear Mr Couldrick

## **Monitoring visit of Birmingham's children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Birmingham children's services on 15 and 16 May 2018. The visit was the fifth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged to be inadequate in November 2016. The inspectors were Peter McEntee, HMI, and Andrew Waugh, HMI.

The local authority is continuing to make progress in relation to services for young people leaving care. However, the stability of placements for children living in long-term fostering arrangements is not as secure as it could be. This is because too many children have multiple contact arrangements with extended family members that have not been appropriately assessed or evaluated. Management oversight, including that of independent reviewing officers, has not been effective in recognising these issues and challenging them.

## **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in services to young people leaving care at 18 years. Areas of particular focus included whether young people were being supported by personal advisers and had appropriate access to services, including accommodation, education, employment and training and health. Inspectors also considered the cohort of children who have been in care for at least two years. In particular, the quality and stability of their placements and the long-term plans to secure their permanence were evaluated. Also considered was whether the voice of children and young people was listened to and taken into account.

A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic case records, supervision files and notes and other information provided by staff and



managers. We had discussions with social workers, personal advisers and a number of young people in the Birmingham leaving care forum.

## **Overview**

There has been progress since the last inspection in services for care leavers. Young people leaving care are all allocated a personal adviser and there has been further investment made in establishing a fifth 18+ leaving care team to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. There is a continuing but not yet effective focus on reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). A significant number of young people benefit from staying put arrangements with former foster carers and also continuing support while completing higher education. Care leavers who need mental health support are benefiting from a new therapeutic care leavers support service (TESS) team. A new pathway plan template is enabling young people's views and aspirations to be better captured, although further work is required to ensure that all pathway plans are completed on a timely basis. Despite a policy that personal education plans will be undertaken post-18, none were seen on this visit and more work is required to ensure that staff understand the benefits of continuing this practice.

Children who have been in the care of Birmingham for two years or more are benefiting from, in almost all cases seen, stable, long-term living arrangements. Comprehensive plans are in place and are reviewed regularly. Contact with birth family is promoted, but in too many cases where multiple arrangements for contact are made with extended family members, there is a potential of increased instability and a greater risk of placement breakdown. These arrangements have not been adequately evaluated or overseen by managers and independent reviewing officers (IROs). In some cases, such contact arrangements are acting as a disincentive to foster parents further securing children's futures through applying for special guardianship orders (SGO). In some instances, children are saying they did not want this level of contact and their views are not being taken into account. Senior managers continue to be aware that further work needs to be done to ensure that services for children are of a standard at which their outcomes are consistently good.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

Since the last inspection, Birmingham Children's Trust has made further progress in improving the quality of its services for young people leaving care. Young people leaving care are all allocated a personal adviser (PA) from the age of 18. Personal advisers know their young people well. They have an understanding of how young people are living and the issues they face. Advisers are aware of, and ensure young people have access to their, entitlements, a range of services and other agency support available. This includes mental health support and counselling through a new TESS leaving care team.

A new pathway plan format introduced this year is a significant improvement on the previous format. Pathway plans seen and in which the young person has co-operated are detailed, and good use is made of the strengthening families model to identify issues where progress needs to be made. The voice of young people and their aspirations are readily apparent. Almost all young people have pathway plans updated every six months, although in a few instances this is not happening on a timely basis. Plans are written in the first person and use language that a young person can easily understand.

Personal education plans (PEPs) are not routinely completed after young people reach 18. Although this is not a requirement, it is good practice to undertake PEPs if young people remain in or enter education at 18-plus. Current practice in Birmingham Children's Trust is to offer a PEP, but no examples were seen where young people were in education at 18 and beyond.

There is an appropriate focus on young people who are NEET. Overall numbers of NEET show a small reduction since the last full inspection. The trust reports that a significant percentage, 37%, of this cohort have a significant barrier to accessing education, employment or training (EET) because of parental status, mental health issues or special needs. The creation of a specialist post to focus and oversee EET is ensuring that all NEET cases are being tracked and followed up through termly meetings with allocated personal advisers, but this has yet to further reduce numbers of NEET. The number of care leavers currently in apprenticeships is now 17 and higher than at the last inspection. The practice of 'taster' days for young people at a variety of employment venues has been successful: 105 young people in the 18–21 cohort are attending higher education at L4 plus, university and postgraduate level.

The vast majority (95%) of young people are living in appropriate accommodation and benefit from priority in public housing allocation. They also receive appropriate financial support and the service has ensured support payments continue to be made while claims for universal credit are being processed. Good levels of liaison with other local authorities works effectively when young people experience accommodation difficulties. Eighty-eight young people are currently benefiting from staying put arrangements.

Good efforts are made to keep in contact with young people, despite this being challenging in some cases. Young people are seen regularly and, between visits, personal advisers maintain a high level of contact by way of texts and phone calls.

There are a wide range of corporate forums engaging with young people and those young people spoken to state that they felt 'genuinely listened to'. For instance, the care leavers' forum is well established and well attended. Additionally, the rights and participation service offers effective support and enables care leavers to challenge poor service delivery.

Children staying in care in Birmingham for two or more years are living in stable, long-term arrangements. These placements have, in most instances, been formally matched and the long-term plan formally approved. Many children have had the positive experience of a single social worker and IRO since their long-term plan was finalised.

Reviews are held regularly, although there was little evidence of young people attending reviews. In some cases, IROs had met young people in placement to ascertain their views, but these meetings were often only the week before the review. In many cases, reviews are being held in schools, despite these being potentially inappropriate venues because of the risk of stigmatisation. In some cases, it was stated by social workers that this was to ensure attendance of school staff. A reluctance by school staff to attend reviews otherwise, as reported in previous monitoring visits, indicates that they have yet to understand their central role as partners in these meetings and as corporate parents.

Social workers visit children regularly in accordance with statutory requirements and sometimes more frequently. Social workers know their children well and often develop positive relationships with them. Life-story books are in most cases underway or already completed. However, they are not always written in a child's language and it is not always clear how involved a child is in the book's creation.

Supervision of staff is, in the vast majority of cases, regular, with managers having a clear oversight of case issues by using the strengthening families approach. Where there are performance issues, these have been identified and are being addressed appropriately. Social workers have reasonable caseloads of between 14 and 17. This is a mixture of cases in proceedings and those where young people are in long-term placements. Some staff report difficulties in managing the requirements of both, with long-term 'stable' cases being adversely impacted as a result. These longer term cases are not being seen with the same priority and focus on practice.

Despite plans being in place and being reviewed regularly, there is a lack of consideration of the potential long-term impact of high levels of contact arrangements for children and how this might affect the future stability of placements. Contact arrangements of up to 12 times a year for multiple family members were evident in many cases and in some for those who had harmed the child. In some cases, this level of contact had been recorded as having a detrimental

impact on young people, but these arrangements were not subject to rigorous review or challenge. Lack of recognition and action by managers and IROs of this issue means that the risk of placement breakdown is higher than it should be. This lack of focus has meant that, in a number of cases, foster carers have been reluctant to consider the further securing of a child's future through an application for SGO. Also, in some cases there has been no consideration by the social worker, manager or IRO of the benefits of an SGO, even when children have been in placement for several years. This means that opportunities to strengthen a child's legal security and bonds with their carers are being missed.

Audits continue to focus on compliance, with little evidence of enquiry into qualitative issues. This means that auditors are in some cases missing key practice issues, which may affect future outcomes for young people. As a result, feedback to social work staff on their practice is limited and can inhibit their ability to understand practice deficits and learn as a result. The trust has indicated that a new audit format is to be introduced in June this year, and this will have a focus on qualitative practice.

The local authority has demonstrated that it has made some further improvements to the quality of social work practice since the last inspection. However, where children in care have long-term plans, there is a risk that a lack of focus on ensuring long-term security will result in instability in the future and poorer outcomes as a result. Further work remains to be done to ensure that practice is consistently good and that the best outcomes for all children are achieved on a timely and consistent basis.

I would like to thank all the staff who contributed to our visit and their positive engagement with the process. I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter McEntee  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
**Textphone** 0161 618 8524  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



7 September 2018

Andy Couldrick  
Chief Executive Birmingham Children's Trust  
1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway  
Birmingham  
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The Trust is continuing to make some progress in improving services for its children and young people. However, a number of areas continue to require improvements in services for children and their families. These include the quality of the Trust's evaluation of social work practice, the consistent engagement of partners in contributing to multi-agency meetings and ensuring that in cases of neglect, over-optimism does not lead to inaction. More work is required to ensure that plans for improvement in children's circumstances are easily understood by parents and that plans detail what the next steps will be when no progress is being made.

## **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made where children are subject to a child in need plan or a child protection plan. Inspectors considered whether thresholds were met and whether plans focused on the right improvements and outcomes for children. We looked at the quality of contributions from partner agencies to making plans and how they are progressed. Inspectors also looked at the quality of managers' decision-making about further intervention when there was insufficient progress in achieving better outcomes for children. Consideration was also given to the quality and impact of the Trust's revised practice evaluation process.

A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic case records and supervision files and notes, and other information provided by staff and managers. In addition, we spoke to a range of staff, including managers and social workers.

## **Overview**

There has been some progress since the last inspection of services for children subject to children in need or child protection plans. No children were seen to be at immediate risk or experiencing significant drift in the progression of work.

Thresholds for children to be considered in need of services or requiring a child protection plan are appropriate and, in most cases, applied in a timely way. More engagement by partners is evident in multi-agency forums, although this is still not consistent and, where it is not happening, limits the effectiveness of these meetings. Plans in general clearly identify the risks to children and are focused on improvements to be made. In a small number of cases where issues of neglect are evident, there is a degree of over-optimism and this prevents decisions being made for further intervention at the right time. In the majority of cases, there is a willingness where appropriate to intervene further if sufficient progress has not been made. Further efforts are required to ensure that all work, including supervision, is well recorded and reflects the quality of work carried out by social workers. The Trust has made a positive step forward by introducing a new practice evaluation process. It is not yet fully embedded and further work is needed to ensure that evaluations of practice are completed to a standard that enables the Trust to fully measure and understand the quality of its practice with children and families.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

The Trust continues to make some progress in ensuring that its services for children and families are continuing to improve. Senior managers understand that further work is required to ensure that the standard of services for children and families in Birmingham continues to improve.

In almost all cases, thresholds for intervention are appropriately applied and no children were seen to be at immediate risk or experiencing significant drift. In a small minority of cases, children remained on a child protection plan for too long. In some cases, this was as a result of partner agency anxiety. Other cases were not subject to consideration at a child protection conference, due to over-optimism about parental co-operation despite a history of neglect.

Assessments of need are timely and lead to appropriate plans for support and intervention. Pre-birth assessments seen are informed by family history and lead to timely interventions, including, where necessary, alternative care arrangements for children.

Child protection and children in need plans accurately identify areas of risk and improvements required. Although outcomes sought are identified, they are often very general and not specific enough to the circumstances of individual children.

This means that in some cases it is more difficult to measure progress towards desired outcomes. Plans are not consistently SMART, with some lacking measurable and time-related objectives. This makes a determination of progress more difficult and contributes to a few children remaining on plans for longer than they needed to.

Future plans for children are not always considered or recorded at case conferences and conference reviews. In some cases, significant decisions on the future direction of plans are taken outside of the conference format within days of a conference having been held and without the conference chair being consulted. In these cases, opportunities are lost to discuss options on a multi-agency basis and ensure that the conference chair has a role in case direction.

While, in many instances, there is an attempt in conferences and plans to explain what needs to improve, the language can still be complicated and difficult for some parents and older children to understand. Some language used is opaque. This is particularly the case in relation to contingency plans, which often contain the phrase 'the Trust will seek legal advice', rather than spelling out how the Trust will respond to increasing risks.

Core groups and children in need meetings are held regularly. Both meetings are used to update child protection and children in need plans, which helps to measure progress. In core groups, this could be enhanced by greater use of a risk scaling tool that is already used in child protection conferences.

During this visit, we saw an improvement in multi-agency attendance at conferences and core groups, but regular attendance from key agencies remains inconsistent. Where attendance is poor, the value of conferences and core groups is limited and progress and access to information, services and resources are hampered. In a small number of cases, schools do not demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in ensuring access to resources for those clearly in need of services. This includes a very late referral to the Trust for a severely disabled adolescent and not prioritising entry to school for a child on a protection plan. Social workers have expressed frustration about the high threshold for access to child and adolescent mental health services (Forward Thinking Birmingham) and long delays in the commencement of services when the threshold is met, delaying improved outcomes for children. Senior managers in the Trust are aware that cross-partnership working requires a continued focus if an effective frontline response to the needs of vulnerable children is to be delivered.

Social workers know their cases well. Children are being seen alone and their views and experiences are captured through age-sensitive direct work. Statutory visits are routinely undertaken within agreed timescales and often more frequently than that. Recording of visits is of variable quality, with the best demonstrating a clear link to the plan of intervention and poorer examples lacking relevance and purpose. Case summaries, chronologies and genograms are not consistently up to date.

Social workers reported that supervision is regular and recorded. However, in examples seen, the record does not always reflect the reported quality of the



discussion. A lack of reflection and analysis in supervision records means that they are less useful as a tool for embedding better practice. Most records identified tasks and actions needed, but often did not specify timescales for completion. This makes it more difficult to measure progress and ensure that priority actions are undertaken in a timely manner.

The Trust has introduced a new practice evaluation process, with a focus on the quality of work undertaken and the impact on outcomes for children. This is a positive move and should encourage and support a dialogue about good practice and achieving the best for children. However, the Trust is yet to successfully embed this process among frontline managers. The current execution of the process is poor, with too many sections of the evaluation template left blank or only partially answered by evaluators. Key sections such as learning outcomes often fail to address issues identified in the evaluation and as such cannot be a positive learning exercise for staff. It also means that the process is not yet contributing to the Trust's overall understanding of the quality of its practice with children and families.

The Trust has demonstrated that it has made some continued improvements in the quality of social work practice since the last inspection. Further work remains to be done to ensure that practice is consistently good and that the best outcomes for all children are achieved on a timely and consistent basis.

I would like to thank all the staff who contributed to our visit and their positive engagement with the process.

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Yours sincerely

Peter McEntee  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**