

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

29th October 2019



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

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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 Advisers (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 Management 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 first update report (including commentary from the external advisers) is attached as Appendix 1.

2 Recommendation

That Cabinet

- 2.1** Approves submission of the report (including Non-Executive Adviser commentary) to the Secretary of State.

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 Management Team (CMT) and five specialist external Non-Executive Advisers (NEA) 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 first report is now due to be submitted.

4 Current Progress

- 4.1** The SPB is now active and CMT are in ongoing dialogue with the NEAs around key lines of enquiry. Following an initial induction session, the Board has met formally in October to focus specifically on reviewing the Council's budget position, approach to managing pressures, and realising savings targets.
- 4.2** NEAs have also been meeting with various elected Members (as diaries permit) including the Leader, Deputy Leader, portfolio holders and members of the Opposition.

4.3 These engagement sessions together with review of various corporate and directorate specific plans has informed their initial view of the Council's improvement journey and thoughts on the most pressing strategic, cultural and operational challenges that will need to be addressed if the Council is going to deliver its core ambition.

4.4 The first update report from the Leader has now been developed and attached to this note for Cabinet review. The report includes an appendix with commentary from the NEAs themselves. The commentary demonstrates that the SPB model of progressive assurance is working and generating value for the Council. The NEAs have highlighted specific areas of challenge which CMT acknowledge and are committed to resolve. Some are tactical and can be addressed relatively easily; others are more deep-rooted and will require collective ambition to overcome including that of Cabinet.

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 October meeting of the Board in order to assess progress, and expressed positive initial feedback regarding both the spirit of openness in which the Council is embracing constructive challenge through the SPB, and the Council's response to those statutory recommendations.

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 – Autumn 2019