

	<u>Agenda Item: 12</u>
Report to:	Birmingham Health & Wellbeing Board
Date:	24 November 2020
TITLE:	CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE: AN UPDATE FROM BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST
Organisation	Birmingham City Council
Presenting Officer	Andy Couldrick, CE, Birmingham Children's Trust

Report Type:	Information
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1. Purpose:	
1.1	To update the Health and Wellbeing Board on the progress of the Trust and of the ongoing improvements and developments in social care for children and families in the city
1.2	To seek the active support and engagement of the Board and its members in improving our collective Corporate Parenting responsibility for our children in care and care leavers

2. Implications:		
BHWB Strategy Priorities	Childhood Obesity	
	Health Inequalities	Y
Joint Strategic Needs Assessment		
Creating a Healthy Food City		
Creating a Mentally Healthy City		
Creating an Active City		
Creating a City without Inequality		
Health Protection		

3. Recommendation	
3.1	To note the report
3.2	That the Health and Wellbeing Board continues to support and promote strong partnership safeguarding across the city for our most vulnerable children and families

- 3.3 That the Health and Wellbeing Board members ensure that services maintain contact with vulnerable families through future periods of restriction
- 3.4 That the Board confirms partners' commitment to supporting our children in care and care leavers across our services and partnerships
- 3.5 That the Annual Report of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership is formally reported to, and discussed by, the Health and Wellbeing Board each year

4. Report Body

Background

The Trust and the Pandemic

- 4.1 Birmingham Children's Trust was established by the City Council in 2018 to deliver children's social care, family support and Youth Offending Services across the city, following a long period of inadequate service delivery.
- 4.2 The Trust employs 1900 staff: social workers, family support workers, support staff, and supports 8500 families across the city, including 1900 children in care, 1300 children with child protection plans, and 750 care leavers
- 4.3 The ethnicity of the children with whom the Trust works is as follows:

Ethnicity %	Children in Need	Child Protection Plans	Children in Care	2011 Census
White	40	48	52	42
Asian	24	17	11	34
Black	14	9	12	12
Mixed Heritage	15	18	23	10

- 4.4 The Trust is a Community Interest Company, wholly owned and commissioned by the Council, and accountable to an independent Board of Directors
- 4.5 Since establishment, services in the city have improved, and are now rated as 'Requiring Improvement' by Ofsted, the regulator. The Trust's ambition, of course, is to be at least Good by the time of the next full inspection in 2022, and Outstanding thereafter.

4.6 In February 2020 Ofsted conducted a Focused Visit to examine the effectiveness of the Trust's 'front door': the Children's Advice and Support Service, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and our Assessment and Short-Term Intervention service, and found further improvement since the 2018 inspection. We anticipate a further Focused Visit in early 2021

4.7 The key elements of success in the improvement journey so far are these:

- Quality of practice and management
- Partnership and collaboration
- Innovation and development

We have developed and commissioned, since our establishment, a range of new services and interventions designed to support families and keep children safely in their families. We have established a Social Work Academy and a strong practice support and training offer. We have been prominent in building a stronger system partnership for children across the city and this is now stronger than it has been in many years, through the Birmingham Children's Partnership, and the Safeguarding Children's Partnership is effective in holding partners to account for our collective work to keep children safe

4.8 When the pandemic hit, and lockdown ensued in March, social workers continued to visit families in their homes, as well as deploying technology to maintain contact. This was largely effective, and important as a number of partner agencies stopped all face-to-face contact with families at their homes. As higher-level restrictions are reintroduced it will be important that the work and the responsibility for maintaining contact with the most vulnerable children is shared by all partners. The framework for partnership work through the pandemic has worked well and will be maintained as long as necessary

4.9 60% of the Trust workforce are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. As with all organisations, our attention in this area has been galvanised through the summer and we are putting much stronger arrangements in place to improve our performance as an employer and as a service delivery organisation to a richly diverse community

4.10 For a period of time our short breaks care offer ceased. One of the units was temporarily converted, successfully, to provide crisis care for young people. Short breaks have now resumed in all but one of the homes and, for as long as parents want to access them, we will seek to keep them open during the second period of restrictions

4.11 In March work started to create an entirely new early help offer based on 10 localities across the city, providing direct support and supplies to families, as well as grant funding to local community organisations and a new online mental and emotional health support offer. The Trust was prominent in building and supporting the new offer, with BVSC, and this now offers a sustainable footprint for the delivery of a more significant early help offer, supported by the Partnership and funded by the City Council. The Trust will be a key delivery partner of this service which, over time, will also allow us to intensify our support offer to families facing more significant difficulties. Closer working with schools

was an important part of the offer, and we have seen some outstanding examples of support by schools to their most vulnerable children.

- 4.12 During the first lockdown the support provided to 7000 families through this Early Help offer undoubtedly impacted positively on those families and their children and suppressed demand for services from the Trust. Maintaining this offer through this second period of restrictions will be critical
- 4.13 There is an emerging picture from research conducted into this Early Help service, of emotional neglect having a significant impact on children, often associated with family breakdown. It is also well understood that rates of domestic abuse rose steeply during that initial lockdown period. These are issues partners will need to be aware of, and responsive to, during this second period. We know that children's emotional and mental health has suffered during this period, and the roll-out of an online support offer (Kooth) has seen significant take-up
- 4.14 This research also illustrates the effectiveness of the Early Help offer that was rolled out, and points to the importance of an inclusive, local approach that builds on the strengths of community and community organisations across the city, built on co-production rather than command and control.
- 4.15 While schools remain open during the second period of restrictions, this will provide a vital resource for the city's most vulnerable children, few of whom attended school during the first wave of the pandemic. Most schools maintained contact effectively and supportively with their children while they were closed.
- 4.16 A key piece of learning for partners as we move into the second period of restrictions relates to the need to maintain, across partner agencies, face to face contact with our most vulnerable families. In the first lockdown, too many services decided unilaterally to stop home visits, creating a potential safeguarding risk and leading to the onus all falling onto social workers where they were involved. A partnership operational group established then is now addressing this risk for the second period. This Board has a key role in helping to ensure the load is shared and safe contact with vulnerable families is maintained
- 4.17 In relation to the impact of the pandemic and of lockdown on different groups and communities, and on inequalities, the experience of the Trust thus far would include the following:
- In general, poor communities were affected worse
 - School attendance amongst vulnerable groups (for whom schools stayed open) was low for children in care, and for children from communities with a higher proportion of BAME families
 - While contacts and referrals into the Trust dropped, they remained in similar proportions, by ethnic group to usual rates, with some communities, notably Asian, significantly and consistently under-represented
- 4.18 The Children's Trust is a prominent member of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children's Partnership, the statutory partnership charged with overseeing the city's multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The partnership has made significant improvements over the last two years, many captured in its Annual

Report, which would usefully be considered formally by the Health and Wellbeing Board

Corporate Parenting

4.18 One of the City Council's, Trust's, and partners' most important responsibility is to act well as Corporate Parent to our children in care and care leavers. Ensuring young people benefit from good care, good education, support to stay fit and well, opportunities to develop independence skills and live safely as independent young adults, in good accommodation, are responsibilities we share.

4.19 We have a clear understanding, from our young people about what is important to them (through our work with our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Forum) and my strong belief is that the responsibility should extend beyond the Council and the Trust to all of our statutory partners. Our Pledge to children in care and care leavers, overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board, and signed by the Council, the Trust, West Midlands Police and the CCG, commits us to enabling all young people to say:

- I am fully aware of this City Pledge.
- I am settled where I live, and I feel safe and well cared for.
- I enjoy school and I am being supported to fulfil my learning potential.
- I go to college or university or I am in work learning the skills I need for the future.
- I have opportunities to develop my talents, have fun and enjoy my free time.
- I know who I am, where I am from and I am in touch with the people in my life
- with whom I will have lifelong links, relationships and support: they might be
- family, or friends.
- I am healthy, I feel good about myself and I get the help and support that I need.
- I have a good and stable relationship with professionals who support me.
- I know what the next year will bring, where I am going to live and who in my life will support me into the future
- I have someone independent in my life to support me should I wish.
- I am given opportunities to have my say and shape the services I receive.

4.20 Over the last few months, despite the pandemic, great strides have been made in creating a new Vulnerable Adults and Transitions service, between Adult Social Care and the Children's Trust. This new service will greatly enhance our work in supporting vulnerable young people, including care leavers and those with special educational needs, into adulthood and independence.

4.21 As partners there is more that we can, and should collectively do, to honour our commitment: this might include:

- Ensuring children in care and care leavers are identified as a priority for receiving services
- Encouraging staff in our agencies to commit to offer mentoring support to young people as they move toward and into independence

- Offering opportunity through work experience, internships, apprenticeships (the Trust is currently working with 7 young people leaving care as apprentices: the experience has been transformational for them and for us)
- Active engagement in, and support of, the work of the Corporate Parenting Board

5. Compliance Issues

5.1 HWBB Forum Responsibility and Board Update

5.1.1

5.2 Management Responsibility

6. Risk Analysis

Identified Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Actions to Manage Risk

Appendices

The following people have been involved in the preparation of this board paper: