



08 March 2018

**SENT VIA E-MAIL**

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

**Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel**

Significant changes are continuing to take place in Birmingham. These are set to bring fresh opportunities and some new challenges in the years ahead.

As you will know, a new Council Leader and Deputy Leader were elected in the autumn of last year. Dawn Baxendale (currently Chief Executive at Southampton City Council) has been appointed as the Council's new permanent Chief Executive and will join the Council in April. A new Assistant Chief Executive and a new Corporate Director of Finance and Governance have joined the Corporate Leadership Team. During the summer, permanent leadership appointments will be filled as existing fixed term positions near their end.

These significant leadership changes are taking place in the context of the Children's Trust being established in April following three months of running as a shadow Trust; the Council experiencing its first all-out elections in May 2018; and the number of city councillors reducing to 101, 19 fewer than at present. In addition it has been announced that Birmingham will be the host city for the Commonwealth Games 2022.

In the light of these changes and context, the Council and the Panel have reviewed our position and propose moving to a more collaborative approach. This joint letter from the Panel and the Council reflects this change.

We have started to explore how we might re-shape and strengthen our relationship. Panel members and the Panel's adviser have met with all of the Council's Cabinet members and a range of senior officers. We are working to develop a new and more productive relationship between the Cabinet, Corporate Leadership Team and the Panel.

The Council actively welcomes the challenge and constructive support provided by the Panel and intends to engage with it regularly and in an open and honest way. This will enable us to explore jointly reporting in future to you and the City about the Council's progress, planning and learning.

Our aim now will be to develop a shared understanding about the improvement priorities that the Council will focus on in the months and years ahead and to reassess and reset the baseline position. The Council has recognised that there exist significant aspects of its organisational culture that are inhibiting progress and these will be explicitly addressed to ensure that the Council is well placed to deliver its improvement priorities as effectively as possible. We intend to work together to prepare a progress report for publication in June. This will be an account of the Council's achievements and successes since the Kerslake review. But it will also be an honest account of the position in relation to significant areas where the improvements are yet to be achieved and where the Council acknowledges that more needs to be done if it is to serve its residents well on all fronts.

With support and advice from the Panel, the Council intends to publish a suite of improvement plans. Progress on delivering all of the plans and the impact of the changes they bring about will be rigorously tracked and evaluated.

The Council also recognises that it has not yet brought its day to day expenditure into line with its revenue. Balancing its revenue budget has therefore required, and continues to require, substantial draw down of the Council's reserves. This position is not sustainable and high quality strategic financial management and difficult decisions will be required to achieve financial sustainability.

We understand that if more collaborative working as proposed is to be successful, this will require all elected members and officers of the Council and the Panel to demonstrate high levels of transparency and self-awareness in evaluation and reporting.

Meanwhile, progress is continuing to be made on key priorities including the development of a new community cohesion strategy which will be consulted on soon. Local partners have also responded positively at a recent city partnership summit, contributing to a debate about a vision for the city. Partners from all quarters expressed a strong commitment to build more confident and integrated partnership working in the future. The shared goal of wishing to optimise the benefits of the Commonwealth Games 2022 is helping to bring fresh optimism and pace to local partnership working.

We will welcome any observations you may wish to provide and would like to meet with you to discuss the Council's plans for the future.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Ian Ward  
**Leader of Birmingham City Council**



John Crabtree  
**Chair, Birmingham Independent  
Improvement Panel**