

Audit Committee 21 June 2016: Birmingham Education Partnership

1. Introduction and Background

Following Trojan Horse, the City Council (BCC) was required to produce an improvement plan to address the serious weaknesses exposed in its custodianship of education.

The Education Quartet (including the Education Commissioner) approved the Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan on 1 December 2014 and it was subsequently approved by Cabinet in March 2015.

A key workstream of the 2015/16 plan was to strengthen BCC's duties to vulnerable schools as set out in the statutory Schools Causing Concern guidance. The Education Commissioner supported the Council's proposal that the delivery of these duties be commissioned from the Birmingham Education Partnership. Twenty years of international evidence supports the view that the best, most sustainable form of school improvement is where strong schools support the weaker ones. BCC officers, the Deputy Education Commissioner and BEP representatives worked from late 2014 to get the contract in place to commence 1 September 2015.

The original BEP Business Plan (April 2015), outlined expected school improvement resources, which are in place:

- A director of continuous school improvement
- District Leads
- Other support resources (e.g. data manager).

The early signs are that BEP has begun its work for BCC strongly with many schools visited. The formal contract monitoring is now in place and by the end of the school year in July 2016 BCC will have a full picture of year one of operation.

2. What have we (BCC/BEP) done so far?

At the Improvement Quartets of 8 February, 22 February and 9 May 2016 BEP provided "stocktake" updates of work undertaken to date and projected work into the future. The highlights of these reports are:

- For maintained schools 87% have been visited by BEP and 66% academies.
- District Strategy Groups are in place, three held so far providing 82% coverage for maintained schools.
- The BEP staffing and organisational structure are in place, enabling delivery of the contract.
- BEP's framework for packages of support and work with schools is based on a current view of 78 maintained schools requiring such support packages.
- BEP now chair the cross cutting group (which BEP and the BCC Education Assistant Director(s) attend), which enables a focus (drive) on school improvement (SI) and also fosters close working between BCC and BEP for SI.

- BEP also attend the Education Improvement Group, which includes BCC education representatives, the Regional Schools Commissioner and people from Ofsted and the DfE.
- The primary focus of BEP activity has been LA maintained schools, whilst there has been some 1:1 contact and engagement (e.g. via District Strategy Groups) with Academies. Academy school improvement, and related work, will be charged at a suitable rate (to be agreed with the Regional Schools Commissioner and/or individual schools, this is work in progress to establish the appropriate packages and rates).

3. Next steps and what BCC will do to hold BEP to account

BCC have been working with BEP since the start of the contract to establish the Intelligent Client Function (ICF) and Quality Assurance framework and to ensure compliance with the Local Authority School Improvement (LASI) framework.

There was a joint LASI workshop with BCC and BEP on 3 February 2016, which identified clear actions and steps to prepare for an inspection (which is expected anytime from the summer term 2016).

The early ICF work has already started by BEP sharing with BCC details of the work undertaken to date, including the reports to the Improvement Quartet (as outlined above).

The first Contract Management Group (CMG) meeting took place on 10 May which went through the outputs and outcomes expected from the contract. The intention of the contract and CMG is to monitor a broad range of indicators that when considered together give a view of the performance of the School Improvement contract. These include measures of compliance with the contract, of improvement of outcomes and output measures:

- Contractual Compliance - measures such as the recruitment of the required workforce, attendance at performance contract management meetings
- Outcomes - measures that capture the impact on the quality of education and improvement in education outcomes
- Outputs – these are the products of the activities undertaken by BEP in school improvement. These products are evidence of the activity of the BEP – so justify the expenditure and give assurance of the improvement in outcomes which will lag behind the activity.

CMG meetings are planned to take place termly, with the next meeting scheduled for 19 July 2016.

As part of the ICF function BCC will be undertaking Quality Assurance of the BEP work. This is being undertaken by the DfE advisors Calvin Pyke, Jayne Lowe and Peter Cox. Peter ran a short pilot in April and all the QA work will be undertaken in late June, early July, with a report to follow. This will be fed into the next CMG after that.