

Birmingham City Council

Report to Audit Committee

18 October 2023



Subject: Assurance Session – Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Families

Report of: Councillor Karen McCarthy, Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Families

Relevant O &S Chair(s): Councillor Kerry Jenkins, Education, Children and Young People

Report author: Becky Shergill, Cabinet Support Officer

Are specific wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No – All wards affected
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 type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" 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 This cover report and related verbal update at the Audit Committee on 18th October will provide assurance regarding Children and Young People's Travel Service and risk management within the Children and Families Directorate.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Audit Committee:

- Notes the report and verbal update regarding the Children and Young People's Travel Service.
- Notes the information provided on the Children and Families Directorate risk management.

3 Children and Young People's Travel Service

- 3.1 Significant historic issues relating to the service led to a loss of trust with parents, providers and other stakeholders which the service has been working hard to rebuild, ensuring that children, young people, and families are kept at the centre of decision-making, and services are provided in accordance with the council's travel assistance policy and relevant statutory guidance.
- 3.2 The service currently supports 5,177 children and young people with transport each day, with a further 200 students supported with Personal Transport Budgets
- 3.3 A transformation programme has led to significant improvements and is moving activity into business as usual. This to include the implementation of a new Application and Eligibility Review Panel to ensure that robust and correct decisions are made in line with BCC policy, with an appeal process set up to support parents who seek to challenge decisions.
- 3.4 With the current DPS due to expire on 31st October 2023, Cabinet approved a new Strategy for a Framework in March 2023 and the internal Procurement Strategy was signed off on 22nd May 2023.
- 3.5 Key procurement documentation has been finalised, we expect that this will bring greater competition to the existing market and anticipate that prices will reduce as a result.
- 3.6 The Children and Young People's Travel Service continues to be supported by Procurement who have significant oversight of the tendering processes.
- 3.7 All the service's processes are clear and robust and have been extensively audited following a whistleblowing complaint which found no evidence of fraudulent practices or "wilful" wrongdoing.
- 3.8 All contract opportunities are tendered through fair, transparent, and compliant processes.
- 3.9 Robust performance management is in place and regular compliance checks are undertaken by the service with action taken where appropriate.
- 3.10 The service's current performance is good and thorough planning for the start of term led to a very strong mobilisation again in September 2023.
- 3.11 This service has been extensively audited by Internal Audit and valuable lessons have been learned: HTST Progress Review (0615/002, final issued 12/05/2022), HTST Review (0162/003, final issued 06/04/2023), HTST Follow Up (0901/016, final issued 28/04/2022) and HTST Early Progress Review (0901/020, final issued 07/06/2023). During these audits no fault has been found, nor recommendation made, regarding favourable conditions for any provider.
- 3.12 Prior to the start of the September 2023 school term, solid progress was made to strengthen our mobilisation plan. This resulted in over 99% of children with allocated routes being taken to school on their first day of term.

4 Children and Families Directorate Risk Management

- 4.1 The Directorate has a Risk Register in place, and it is regularly reported on through the Directorate's Senior Leadership Team Meeting.
- 4.2 The Directorate Risk Register demonstrates alignment with the Corporate Risk Register and regular updates are provided to ensure that the Corporate Risk Register reflects the Directorate's position.
- 4.3 The Improving Services for Children and Families Plan sets out multiple objectives/actions designed to strengthen the Directorate's ability to test and assure arrangements.
- 4.4 The Children and Families Directorate Redesign will continue to secure permanent staffing across fundamental functions and will help to stabilise teams, functions, and outputs. This will achieve a service with the right capacity to provide a compliant service.
- 4.5 The redesign includes a dedicated team to manage risk across the directorate to ensure a robust systematic approach to risk assessment, risk reduction and action planning.
- 4.6 The new permanent Head of Strategic Governance and Planning is now in post and is leading a review of the directorate's current arrangements and the development of a Directorate Risk Management Framework that will be designed to complement and strengthen the commitment and arrangements set out within the Council's Risk Management Framework.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 No consultation was required for this report.

6 Risk Management

- 6.1 The Children and Families Directorate has a Risk Register in place, and it is regularly reported on through the Directorate's Senior Leadership Team Meeting.
- 6.2 The Directorate Risk Register demonstrates alignment with the Corporate Risk Register and regular updates are provided to ensure that the Corporate Risk Register reflects the Directorate's position.

7 Compliance Issues:

- 7.1 **How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?**
 - a) Sound financial management and governance underpins all the Council's priorities, plans and strategies.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this assurance session.

9 Financial Implications

9.1 The financial position of the service will be reported as part of the Council wide quarter 2 budget monitoring process. Detailed forecasting work is being undertaken to include the data for the new academic year, as well as the impact the new framework will have. Whilst it is expected there will be some financial pressure facing the service for the financial year 2023/24, it is planned that this will be mitigated within the wider Children and Families directorate.

10 Procurement Implications

10.1 The Children and Young People's Travel Service is supported by Procurement who have significant oversight of the tendering processes.

11 Human Resources Implications

11.1 There are no human resources implications directly arising from this assurance session.

12 Public Sector Equality Duty

12.1 The Council will ensure that all actions taken in response to these recommendations are in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, promoting fairness and equality for all residents and employees.