

Birmingham City Council's Modernisation Journey

March 2019



Making a positive difference everyday to people's lives

Introduction

Since the Kerslake review was published in December 2014, Birmingham City Council has made a number of steps towards modernising and improving the way in which it delivers outcomes for local residents. This journey has included significant challenges in addition to notable successes, and the purpose of this report is to provide an honest self-assessment of the Council's current position alongside a timeline documentary of the key aspects of journey so far to provide context for the Council's starting point prior to and at the point of the Kerslake Review, and for how the changes now planned fit into the Council's overall improvement journey.

KEY FOCUS AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



Key focus areas for improvement

Adult Social Care

In early 2017, the Council's Adult Social Care Service was in serious financial difficulty, was underperforming in critical areas and was not driving through the improvements it badly needed. Partnership working was not developed, especially with Health, and the overall situation resulted in the service consistently ranking among the lowest performing in the country.

Since then, significant work has taken place to improve the service, promote independence and support people to live within their community, and thereby improve their quality of life. This work has included working more closely with partners to develop an overall approach that is customer-focused, introducing new ways of working that build on people's strengths and providing them with choice over their care to enable them to live independently as far as possible. The early signs of improvement through these efforts are now coming through.

The Council and its partners have acknowledged the history of poor partnership working in the city around health and social care, which were highlighted in the recent local system review by the Care Quality Commission. In response, a new drive for improvement has been started through the Ageing Well programme, which will introduce a new model of care that will enable greater independence for vulnerable adults, improving outcomes for them and their families and carers.

Key focus areas for improvement

Children's Social Care

In April 2014, Children's Services had been rated Inadequate in all areas inspected for the second time in two years. The service was led by its third Director in the same period of time and Lord Warner had recently been appointed as Commissioner for Children's Social Care. In this context, the service embarked upon a three year improvement plan, focused on initially on stabilising the service, then getting the basics right, and finally on consolidation and new ways of working. During this period the service faced further sizeable changes through two successive Social Care Commissioners and, most significantly, the creation of the Children's Trust in May 2016. The impact of this work began to be seen in September 2016, when Ofsted rated the service as Requires Improvement for 3 out of the 5 areas inspected, although the service remained judged as Inadequate overall.

Since its establishment, the Trust has kept a clear focus on getting the basics right. This includes strong governance arrangements through the Trust Board, reducing the number of agency staff and turnover of permanent staff (now at 10%), and introducing a development programme for practice leaders to improve social work practice. In their most recent inspection Ofsted rated the service as Requires Improvement, which means that for the first time in more than a decade it has moved away from being Inadequate. As the Minister noted in his letter to the Leader, this is just the start and there are a number of areas where further improvements are needed. The consistent upwards trajectory in this area, however, should be celebrated, and with the Council recently appointing its first permanent dedicated Director of Children's Services in 5 years, the service is now on a stable platform from which to continue its improvement journey.

Key focus areas for improvement

Waste Services

The industrial relations issues surrounding the Council's waste service are historic and well known. The situation continues to affect services and service users, and this is an area of significant challenge for the Council. In February 2019, Cabinet agreed to pursue legal action against the Unite and UNISON Unions on the basis of unlawful real and proposed industrial action. This represents the most serious action pursued by the political and managerial leadership of the Council to address longstanding issues relating to industrial relations in this area.

Alongside these challenges, the service has been on an improvement journey for the last two years. Work in this area has focused on a number of areas performance monitoring through improved data collection and attempts to build closer working relationships with Trade Unions through a Joint Service Improvement Board.

This situation, however, remains difficult and challenging. The dispute is ongoing and the form of and timescales for any resolution are unclear.

Key focus areas for improvement

Homelessness

Homelessness continues to be a significant issue in Birmingham. The impact of welfare reform continues to be felt by individuals and households across the city and the number of rough sleepers and households in temporary accommodation has continued to increase. In the short term the Council is repurposing high-rise blocks into temporary accommodation in order to accommodate the additional demand and has taken targeted action to reduce B&B use, working with the Homelessness Partnership Board to do so.

At a strategic level, the Council is responding to these challenges by adopting a whole-system, collaborative approach based on commissioning positive pathways and integrated provision. This work, which is taking place over two phases, is underway and will shift activity towards supporting households across the life course, preventing crises and delivering an inclusive service for all affected groups, households and circumstances.

This work is beginning to demonstrate positive impact, with reductions in the rate at which families are placed into temporary accommodation and reduction in the number of households in B&B accommodation. The first tenancies under Housing First have been created and early impressions of engagement with health partners has been positive. Difficulties and challenges remain, however. Demand size and complexity continues to increase and the shortage of properties available in the private-rented sector to discharge the Council's duties persists.

Key focus areas for improvement

Children with Special Educational Needs

SEND

We recognise that in their current guise our SEND services are not fit for purpose for a 21st Century Council in a forward thinking city and that they do not allow us to maximise the potential for local residents as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. We also recognise that new ways of working must enable us to deliver better value-for-money services that are both more able to meet child and parental need, but also deliver more flexible, innovative and impactful educational, health and care provision and support for children and families.

The new partnership approaches that are emerging on the back of the Joint Area Review, and in particular our closer working with health commissioners and providers is the bedrock on which Birmingham will drive change at pace in this critical area of our work. Reinforcing this, the recent Ofsted report, and subsequent written statement of action gives the Council and its partners a clear, unambiguous blueprint for delivering this change. Paramount in achieving sustainable change for the city's children, young people and families will be genuine co-production with children and carers in changing service approach; stronger financial and resource control to ensure value for money for all the city's children; and better communications with parent, carers and children about Birmingham's local offer.

Running through all of the above and critical to success in the long term, will be a genuine cross partner approach between Education, Social Care and Health Commissioning partners alongside a renewed commitment to identify and deal successfully with need at a much earlier stage in a child's life.

Enabling improvement across the Council

Digital and Customer Services

The Council's customer services and some of its key back-office functions have undergone significant change over the last five years that have transformed performance and improved the experience of residents when dealing with the Council. In 2014, provision of IT services, Revenues & Benefits and the contact centre were all outsourced and this model had resulted in high-cost, low quality services. The contract was inflexible, which resulted in limited scope for change, modernisation and improvement.

To enable modernisation and improvement, the Council took the decision to in-source these services and so far the contact centre and revenues service have been brought back in-house, with IT services due to follow. Since its in-sourcing, the contact centre has expanded the range of services offered, introduced a 'one and done' approach to improve customer experience, and has shifted a sizeable level of demand to online services. This includes online school admissions, introduction of the online BRUM Account, and a re-design of the Council website.

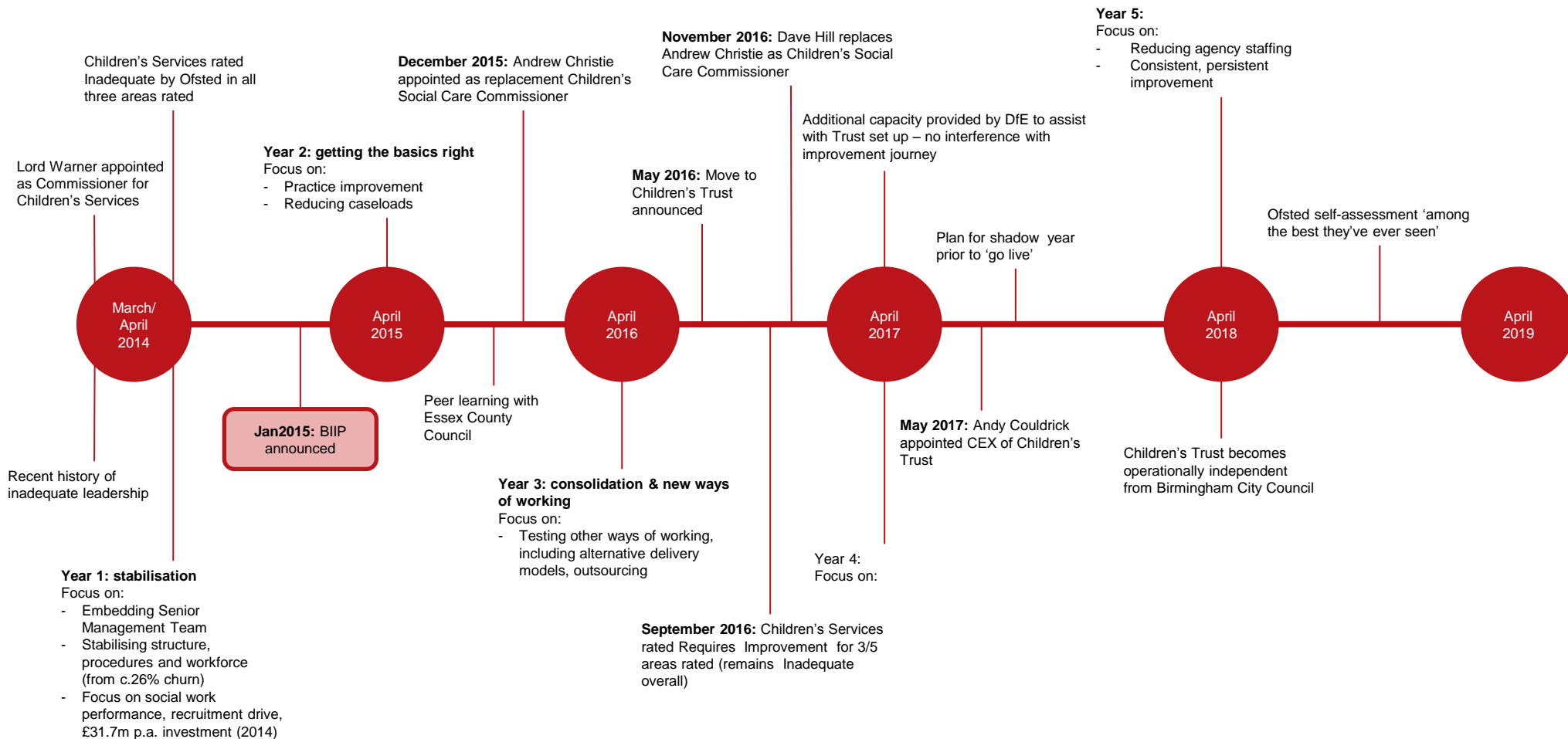
These improvements have resulted in 98% of school admission applications being submitted online, which in addition to improved customer experience has increased call answer rates through releasing additional capacity; improved income generation and debt recovery through the 'one and done' approach; and an internationally recognised, award-winning website. The revenues and benefits service has improved performance reporting, introduced management training and development to stabilise the workforce, and put in place new policies in key areas. The focus continues to be on getting the basics right and building from this base to an excellent customer experience.

THE COUNCIL'S JOURNEY SINCE THE KERSLAKE REVIEW



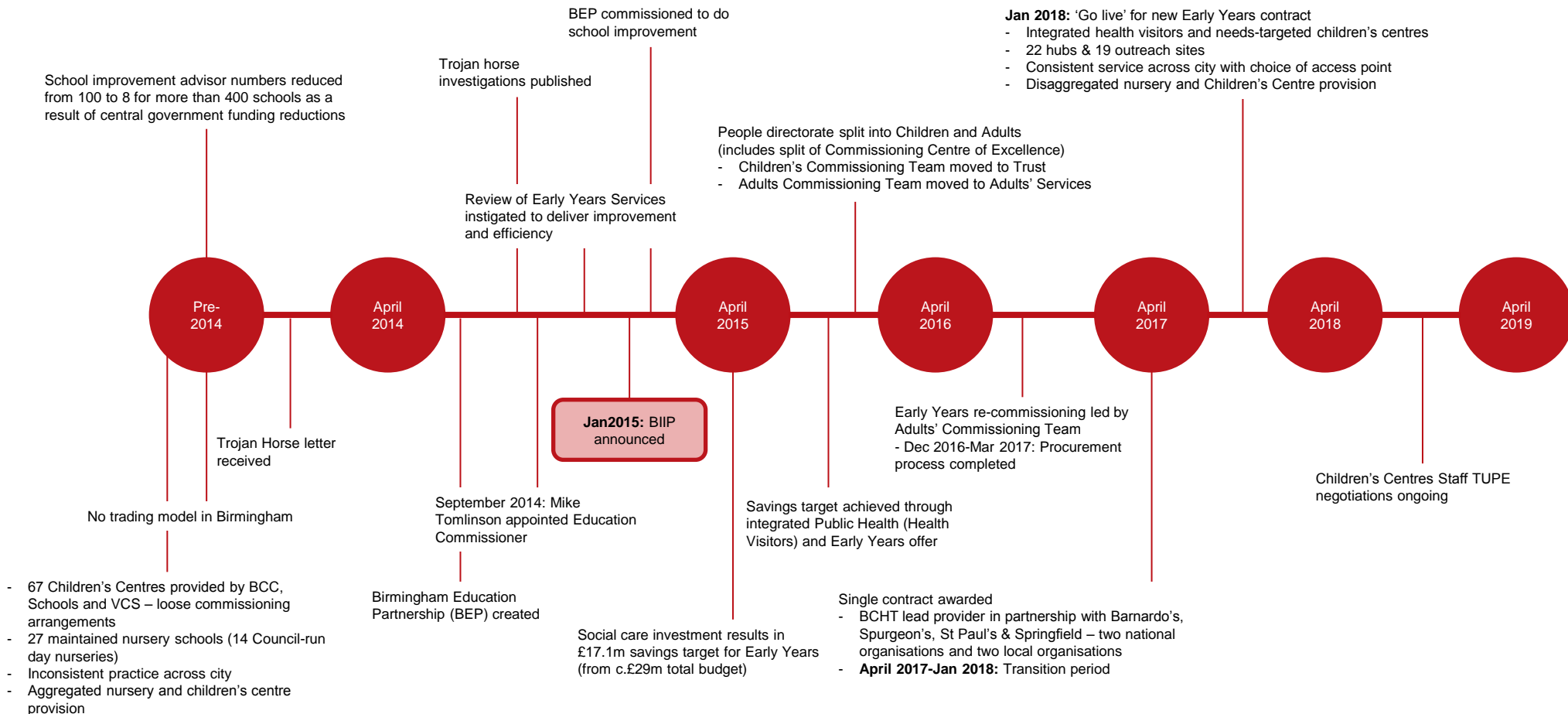
Birmingham is an aspirational city to grow up in

Children's Social Care (1)



Birmingham is an aspirational city to grow up in

Education & Skills (1)



Birmingham is an aspirational city to grow up in

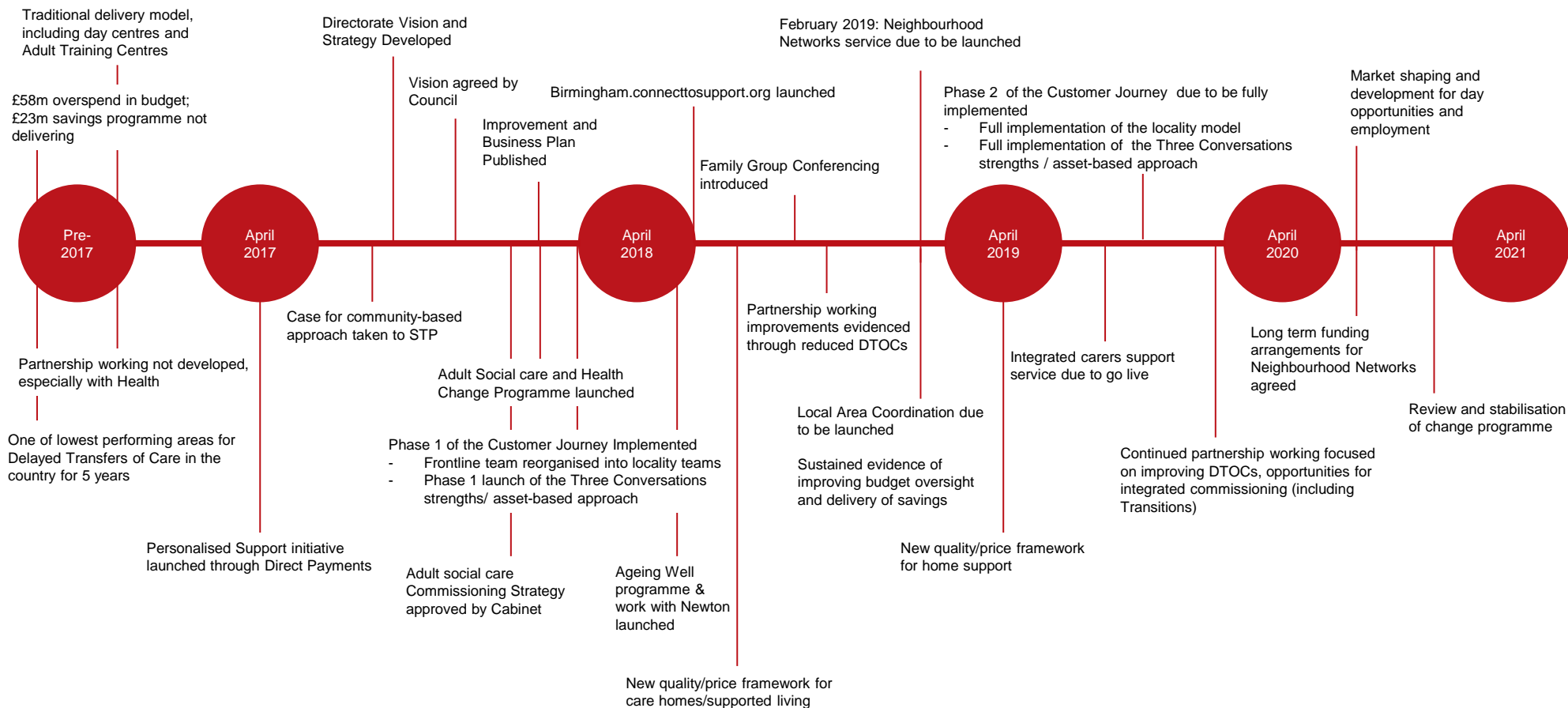
Looking to the future

Birmingham's sizeable and diverse youth population is a source of energy and strength for the city. However, Birmingham's young people face a number of significant hurdles in reaching their full potential. Child poverty levels are amongst the highest in the country, child death rates are high, childhood obesity affects many young people in the city and school attainment remains below the national average. The Council has taken on Board the findings of the recent SEND report by Ofsted and the CQC, and recognises the need to radically improve the support that young people, especially those who are vulnerable, receive.

The focus for improvement and modernisation will primarily relate to system and culture change that drives choice and control for parents and children. This more integrated approach puts collaboration and partnership working at the heart of how the council will work with young people and their families, especially in relation to early intervention and prevention. Additionally, the Council is at the early stages of developing a more collaborative approach across the school estate to develop a city-wide narrative and agree a set of shared priorities.

This model needs to be underpinned by a modern approach to insight and intelligence that drives evidence-based decision making and places the customer at the centre. The service is continuing to build closer links with other areas and enabling functions within the council to develop this approach, which will be key to tackling the major challenges facing the city's children and young people and is a critical part of the Council's strategy for making Birmingham an aspirational city to grow up in.

Birmingham is a fulfilling city to age well in



Birmingham is a fulfilling city to age well in

Looking to the future

Working closely with partners to promote independence is the core of the Council's and the city's approach to supporting vulnerable adults. Central to this approach is the strengths-based, three conversations model which emphasises supporting individuals to remain living within their communities as far as possible.

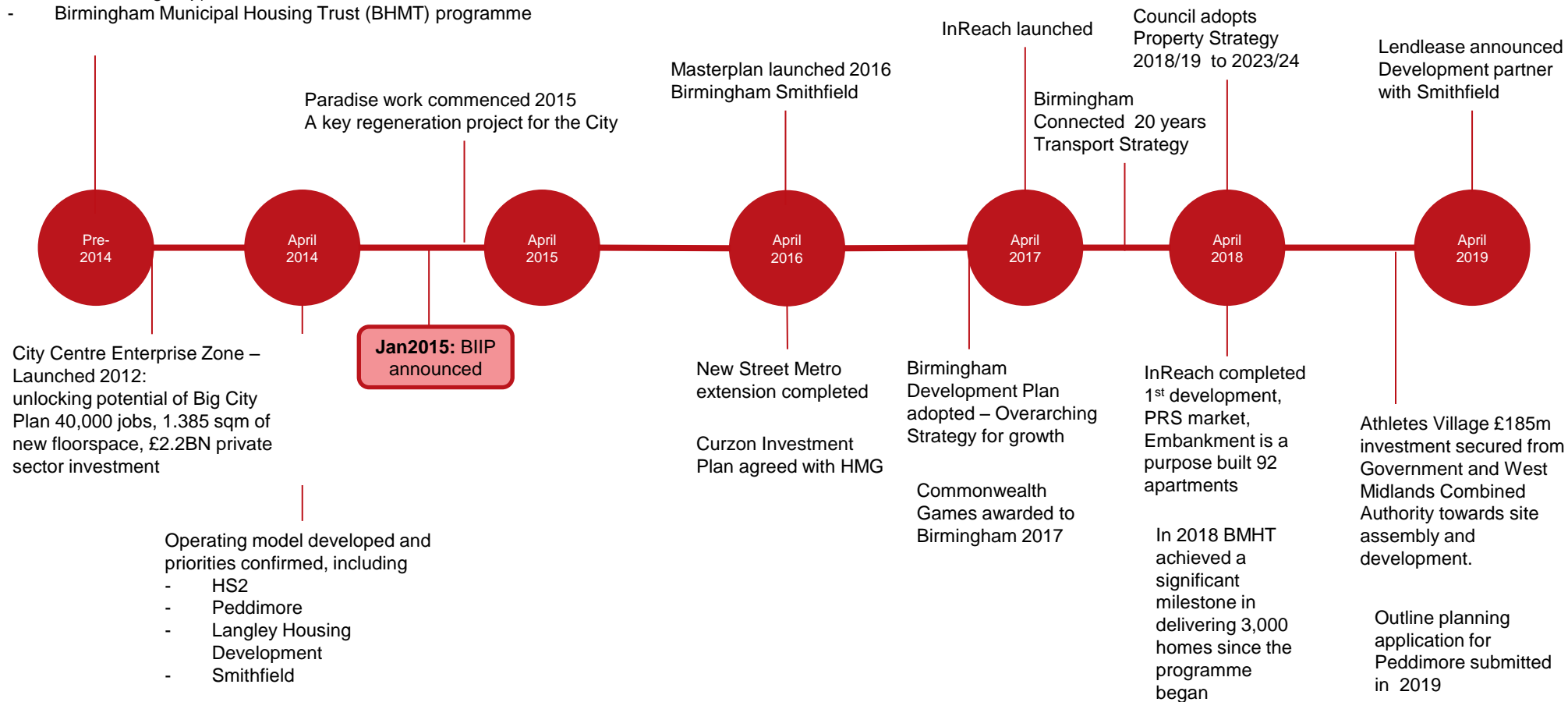
A full programme of work is underway in the council's adult social care service to transition to this model. The work includes redesigning the customer journey, developing neighbourhood networks and developing and shaping the market for day opportunities and employment for vulnerable adults. This work is progressing at pace, with a number of key milestones expected in 2019 and beyond, as outlined in the timeline.

In addition to its internal modernisation programme for adult social care, the Council is taking a leading role within the STP through the Ageing Well programme, working with Newton Europe. This work seeks to reduce the number of service users who require longer-term residential care through a new model due to be prototyped in April 2019 before completing the wider rollout by the end of the year.

Birmingham is an entrepreneurial city to learn, work and invest in

Birmingham Development Plan adopted, with priority focus on:

- Delivering 51,000 new homes by 2031
- £4bn investment infrastructure
- Release of c.700 hectares of Green Belt land (largest in Core Cities group)
- Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BHMT) programme



Birmingham is an entrepreneurial city to learn, work and invest in

Looking to the future

We will focus on creating a 'virtuous circle' whereby learners are supported to develop the skills and behaviours that will equip them to succeed in the future workforce, and at the same time businesses and learning settings will invest in children and young people to ensure that they are provided with high quality guidance and support, and the right skills to succeed. The upcoming Commonwealth Games, combined with the significant inward investment programme on-going across the city, provide the opportunities we need to create and sustain this 'virtuous circle'.

The council's new role at the centre of partnership working, and as a broker and influencer of change, will be central to this. Both in doing this and as the country's youngest big city we will capitalise on our children and young people as perhaps our greatest 'natural asset'.

Birmingham is a great city to live in

The Council has celebrated some important achievements alongside experiencing sizeable challenges in relation to its work in making Birmingham a great city to live in. As discussed previously, specific and significant issues exist in relation to the industrial relations aspect of waste services and this is an ongoing challenge.

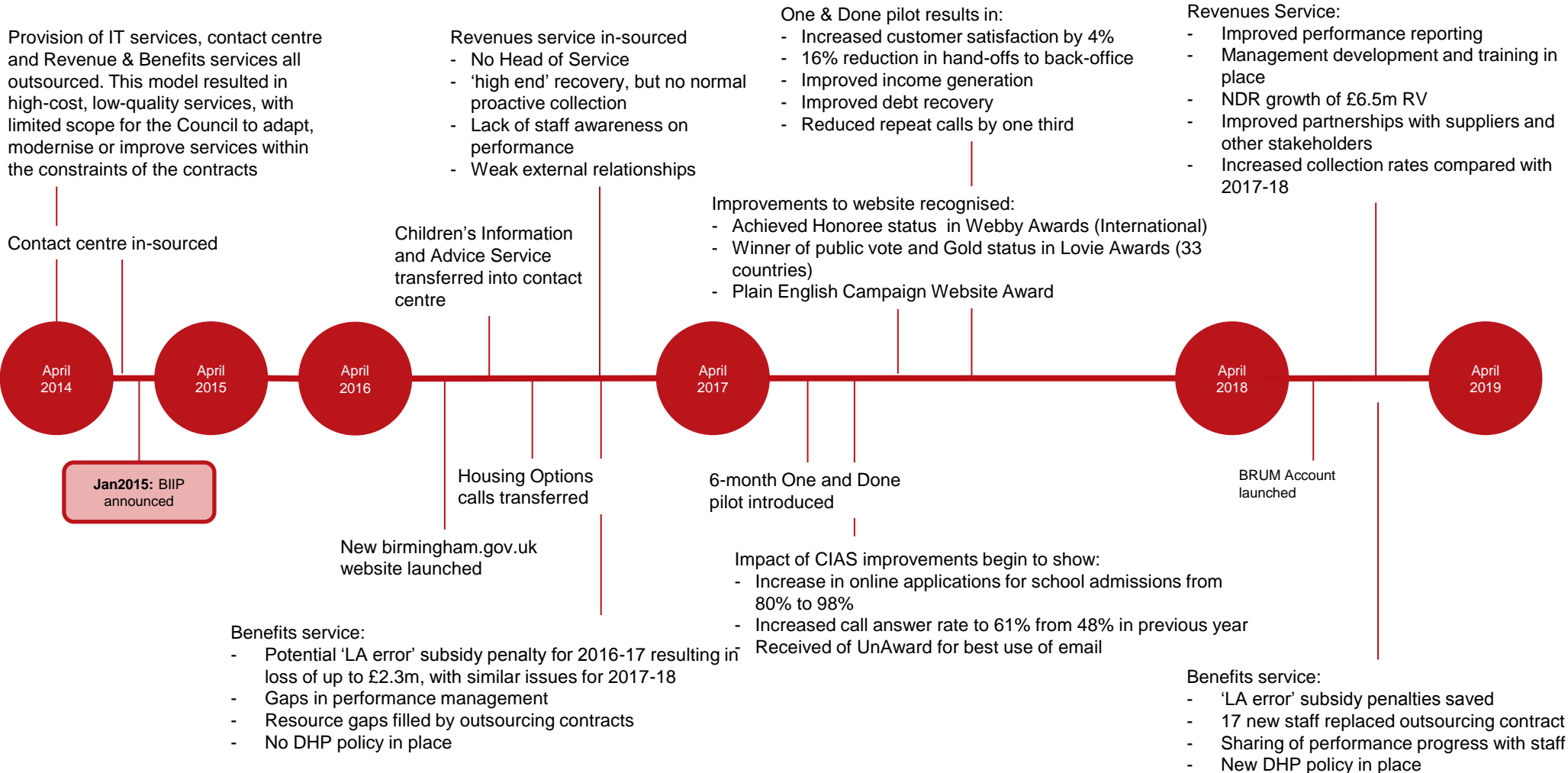
Homelessness and housing provision continues to pose challenges for the Council and the city and the Council is taking action strategically and in the short term to address this. Further details of these activities are discussed earlier in this report in the Council's Current Position section.

An important area of recent achievement for the Council has been the creation of a Clean Air Zone in the city. Air quality is a national issue and is particularly relevant for Birmingham, where poor air quality is responsible for an estimated 900 premature deaths per year. The case for the new zone was approved by Cabinet in December 2018 and is now moving to implementation.

With regard to supporting and strengthening communities, the Council's work through Prevent is recognised nationally as an example of excellent practice. The improvement journey in this area has been built on strong partnership working, both locally and nationally, and on honest, brave engagement with Birmingham's communities. The Council is continuing to seek ways to improve its Prevent work, including developing more capability and support through the Community Safety Partnership.

Enabling the Council to deliver its priorities

Digital and Customer Services



Digital and Customer Services

The Council is on a journey to modernise its customer services and technology infrastructure, and this is set to continue. Building on the successful launch of the BRUM account, more services will be brought into the online platform, which will improve the customer experience as well as result in greater efficiency. Alongside this, the planned insourcing of IT services will enable wider improvements to the Council's technology infrastructure and link closely to our Workforce Strategy, enabling a modern, flexible working environment.

Evidence- and insight- driven decisions and work practices are increasingly becoming central to the way the Council needs to work, and robust data governance is essential in underpinning this way of working. The Council's Information Management strategy, beginning in 2019-20 will ensure that we collect, use and manage data in a way that delivers business need whilst respecting the rights of customers and citizens.

The 'One Council' approach, which is designed to bring together our services around the needs of our citizens and communities, will continue to take effect as we look to consolidate our transport and other services. As a key enabling function, Digital and Customer Services will continue to support this journey.

Enabling the Council to deliver its priorities

Performance Management

Over the past year the Council has overhauled its performance management framework, introducing a new KPI set and benchmarking performance across key areas against Core Cities and national figures. This has resulted in a greater focus and depth of discussion at management team meetings. The Council recognises that the quality of critique and challenge around performance needs to improve; to drive this forward at pace, a series of regular validation meetings have been introduced between the Performance & Insight Team and performance teams across the organisation. The purpose of these meetings is to introduce critique and challenge earlier in the process, in advance of Directorate Management Teams discussing and signing off submissions, and therefore lead to more informed and focused discussions around performance. Early signs are that it is resulting in a joined-up approach to performance across the Council and it is expected to result in improved quality of performance narratives. The first report produced using this approach went to Cabinet in March 2019.

Looking ahead, a set of principles that will underpin a new performance management approach have been agreed by the Council's Management Team. These principles reflect discussions during the Performance 'Tracer' Session held with the BIIP in October 2018, and work is now taking place to develop these into an framework with a view to implementing this in combination with a refresh of the Council Plan Indicators in time for the start of the 2019-20 Financial Year.

Political, Managerial and System Leadership

