



Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30 November 2022

Update

1. Introduction

2022 has proved a challenging year for the Children's Trust. The combination of chronic workforce shortages, rising demand and complexity of demand for our services, and the failure of the placements market to meet need and offer value for money are all themes identified in the Government-commissioned Independent Review of Children's Social Care, published earlier this year, and they are all key challenges for our system in Birmingham.

Demand at our front door – CASS and MASH – has grown through the year. The impact of Early Help across the city has been to mitigate that demand: without Early Help our statutory services would be experiencing a much greater burden. That there is now a waiting list for Early Help demonstrates the scale of demand for support for families in our communities.

Numbers of children in care have risen, in line with the Trust's forecasts. What was harder to forecast was the combined impact of increased complexity of need, contraction of mental health services and beds, and the changing nature of the largely privatised care market, which is not offering sufficient, reasonably-priced care for young people with the most complex needs.

Despite these challenges, the Children's Trust has maintained a front door that works effectively and in a strong multi-disciplinary context; a more stable (fewer agency staff) workforce than our statistical and regional neighbours; and efficient and effective child protection/safeguarding service; and a care offer in which children are largely stably placed, and where social workers have largely manageable caseloads and are well supported.

We continue to be attractive as an employer of newly-qualified social workers, and have a very strong offer for staff in their first year of practice. We struggle to retain more experienced workers because private agencies offer our staff hourly rates that are impossible for us to compete with.

We have developed a deep and broad preventative offer since we were formed, with a range of services aimed at enabling and supporting families to care safely and well for their children avoiding the need for alternative care. Our rate of children in care is, as a consequence, significantly lower than statistical neighbours and other core cities (Birmingham: 76 per 10k, compared with statistical neighbours 86 per 10k, core cities and West Midlands 85 per 10k), and we can evidence substantial cost avoidance as a consequence. Family Group Conferences, Safer Families, Breaking the Cycle and Edge of Care are just some of the services we have developed to support family decision-making and stronger family care for children.

Despite this, we face, as does almost every other children's social care service nationally, significant financial challenges and we are working with the Council to address and resolve this issue, this year and going forward.

March 2023 marks the end of the first five years of the Trust's operation – we were established in April 2018 – and we are in the process, with the Council, of reviewing and renewing the contract: we began life with a 10-year contract with a 5-year review point. The Council does not have the choice to end the contract and bring the service back 'in-house' because there is still a Government Direction in force. Instead the Council is exploring the options available in relation to the next contractual term with the Trust. The quality of relationship between the City Council and the Children's Trust is undoubtedly one of the factors that has enabled our progress to date, and the importance of our ongoing work as strategic partners cannot be underestimated. The new contract will emphasise this context of a strategic relationship between the Council and Trust. A Cabinet decision on the contract will be sought in February/March 2023.

Performance against the contractual performance indicators has in the main been strong throughout the first two quarters of the year. Two indicators have remained consistently off-target and out of tolerance:

- the % of agency social workers (including team managers): reflects the workforce challenge referenced above.
- average time between a child coming into care and being placed with an adoptive family: this is a cumulative indicator measuring a 3-year period: current performance is good, and the PI will reach its target.

Our residential care offer has developed and continued throughout the year. Camborne children's home received a full inspection in May which judged it to be Inadequate. But a subsequent monitoring visit on 20 July reviewed the progress made since the full inspection and confirmed that out of the 10 requirements made at the last inspection, four have been met and progress has been made in respect of the other requirements. A full enquiry has been undertaken in relation to the judgement and an action plan is in place to address the outstanding areas for improvement. In August, Ofsted found our children's home Warwick House to be overall Good. Following a visit to Edgewood in September the home was judged Requires Improvement having previously been judged Good overall. The issues raised were in relation to the jointly regulated CQC/ Ofsted provision within the home that provides overnight respite for children with complex health needs. Re-commissioning work is underway to resolve the regulatory conflicts that have arisen from this jointly registered element of the home.

We are awaiting Ofsted registration on a new unit we are opening, that will help us respond to the urgent needs of young people needing care in an emergency and for whom the market cannot provide. We are also bidding for DfE capital to develop additional, similar facilities. Birmingham is also leading a longer-term project with DfE, on behalf of the region, to develop a secure care facility for the region.

Our adoption service is now part of a Regional Adoption Agency, a partnership with a local Voluntary Adoption Agency. It will be subject to inspection by Ofsted later this month (an inspection started last month but was abandoned due to illness in the inspection team). The service is currently rated Good, as is our Fostering service, likely to be re-inspected soon. As well as the regulatory inspections of these and our residential services, since the last full inspection we have had two Focused Visits, looking at our CASS and MASH arrangements and services for children in care, and a 'test inspection' (informal, not published, but no less rigorous a test) of our services for care-leavers. All of these have reported positive progress and left us with clear areas for ongoing improvement.

We anticipate a full ILACS inspection of children's social care in the next six months. Work is underway in both the Trust and the Council to ensure we are able to demonstrate our best

in this inspection. Internal and external audit and evaluation of practice undertaken gives us confidence that our practice services continue to improve.

The Trust is working actively with the Council to develop a coherent response to the Cost of Living crisis and the challenge of keeping warm this winter. We are concerned to ensure that family poverty is addressed and supported rather than referred to the Trust as a type of neglect. We are working with BVSC to ensure that Household support Funds are delivered quickly and efficiently to young people and families experiencing hardship.

We have delivered some innovative holiday schemes in some of our most challenged communities, utilising Holiday Activities with Food resources and working in partnership with the Council, StreetGames, our delivery partners, and local voluntary organisations. We will continue to do this over the winter, utilising further HAF resources as well as the Household Support Fund, and working with our third sector partners including Bfriends, our own established charity.

2. Progress

Our work has continued to embed quality in our practice and develop our offer to children and families across the city, working where we can in partnership with other agencies and organisations. We can point to progress in the following areas:

- developing and embedding the city's **Early Help** offer, a multi-agency and multi-sector development supporting families earlier. There are strong examples of innovative partnership practice across the city.
- embedding our **Stronger Families programme**, aligning and investing in Trust and third sector services that support families to care for their children.
- we have established a strong response to **exploitation and contextual safeguarding** (referring to threat of harm to young people outside of their families): the multi-agency EmpowerU Hub leading on supporting victims, tackling perpetrators, disrupting networks, with oversight from the Contextual Safeguarding Board, co-chaired by a Director in the Trust and an Area Commander from West Midlands Police. An important element of our work has been to work in partnership with parents and families, in and with their communities, recognising the expertise and experience that needs to help to shape and inform our work.
- the Trust is playing a key role in rolling out the **Safe programme** in Birmingham: a school-based anti-exploitation programme. Schools, alternative provision, police and the Violence Reduction Partnership are working together to deliver greater school-based responsiveness and support.
- we are working with Adult Services to develop the work of the **Preparation for Adulthood** service, filling a gap in provision for young people becoming young adults and in need of advice and support. We are also partnering to improve the Transitions offer as young people with additional needs move from Children's to Adult Services.
- we are implementing and embedding our **Practice Model** for the Trust, built on the importance of relationship-based practice. Our model has been adopted for wider implementation across the Children's Partnership.
- we are leading work on **Domestic Abuse and Mental Health** as we seek to develop

and strengthen our services and the Partnership offer to children, young people and families.

- we continue to commission and deliver support to families and communities through our HAF offer, reaching hundreds of children every holiday, and to push financial support to families and young people through the Household Support Fund, as we contribute to the wider efforts to tackle the Cost of Living crisis.
- our charity, Bfriends, is beginning to demonstrate its value in supporting the Trust's offer to children, young people and families. In addition, we can point to contributions from our corporate partners, of close to £1m in additional resource, cash and kind, to deepen our offer.

3. Performance

Across 9 of 15 of the indicators in the contract performance has been sustained in the first six months of the year.

At September 2022, the KPIs for use of agency staff and the average time between the Trust receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and deciding on a match continue to be off target/outside tolerance range for the reasons stated above.

The KPI for referrals with a decision within 24 hours was at 74% in April 2022, just outside the tolerance of 75-79%. This was a consequence of Adults "go live" on Eclipse and capacity issues which have since been addressed.

At September 2022, the KPI for percentage of social workers who have had supervision (in month) was 79%, up from 71% the previous month but just below the tolerance of 80-90%. We expect to see supervision frequency continue to rise month on month. The percentage of assessments completed within 45 days dropped out of tolerance by 1 percentage point. This was an anticipated result of a change in practice for administrative staff to 'start the clock' for assessment at the earliest point.

Summary of Trust performance April to September 2022

KPI	Measure	Number of months where target met or within tolerances April-September 2022	% where target met or within tolerances April-September 2022
1	% of all referrals with a decision within 24 hours	5/6	83%
2	% of re-referrals to children's social care within 12 months	6/6	100%
3	% assessments completed within 45 working days	5/6	83%
4	% Initial CP conferences held within 15 working days	6/6	100%
5	% of children who became the subject of a CP plan for a second or subsequent time within the last 2 years	6/6	100%
6	% of children (under 16 years) who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more, and in the same placement (or placed for adoption) continuously for 2 years or more	6/6	100%
7	% children experiencing 3 or more moves in a year	6/6	100%
8	% of children in care reviews held on time	6/6	100%

9	% of care leavers who are in education, employment, and training (EET)	6/6	100%
10	% of care leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (19-21)	6/6	100%
11	Average time between a child coming into care and being placed with an adoptive family (A2)	0/6	0%
12	Number of children who have been adopted in year or who leave care	N/A	43 against a target of 85 (Sept 22)
13	% of agency social workers (including team managers)	0/6	0%
14	Average caseload of qualified social workers	6/6	100%
15	% of social workers who have had supervision (in month)	4/6	67%

The Trust's Annual QA and Performance Report, shared with the Council, provides a fuller account of performance and highlights areas of success and issues requiring attention.

As well as the performance measures, the Trust has a well-embedded Quality Assurance framework, overseen by the Practice Hub. This includes a wide range of performance audits, the learning from which feeds back into practice to drive improvement. Reports on our quality assurance work are shared at the Council-Trust Operational Commissioning Group.

The feedback we get from children, young people and family members about the work we do is a key strand of how we 'measure' how we are doing. Our Rights and Participation service plays an important role not only in advocating for our young people, but in ensuring their voices are heard clearly and continue to shape the services we offer

4. Priorities

Our priorities for 2022/23 were published in our Business Plan, agreed earlier in the year by the Cabinet Committee – Group Company Governance. They are produced below and reflect our intentions around embedding, strengthening and deepening our offer and our collaboration.

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
Quality of Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remains a priority for the Trust Maintained trajectory of improvement leading to better services, better outcomes, and an improved Ofsted judgement Further refine and embed the Trust Practice Model and assuring its implementation Continued focused work on improving the quality of practice in our work in and for the family courts, minimising delay, assuring case progression (Practice and Legal Service) <p>Progress 2021/22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and Practice Evaluation evidence improving practice

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused Visit October 2021 by Ofsted reported positively on quality of services and practice
Designing Trust Services to Improve the Child's Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaping Practice to minimise transfer points and maximise consistency • Ensuring the whole system operates effectively and efficiently • Shaping support services to maximise support to Practice and to front-line practitioners, embracing efficiency and innovation in our operating model • Using our new accommodation footprint to enhance the working environment, create productive and trauma-informed spaces, and spaces where children, young people and families are welcome
Stronger Families Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remains a priority for the Trust • More support to keep young people safely within their families • More children and young people cared for in their families rather than by 'stranger carers' when they cannot live with their parents <p>Progress 2021/22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families Together Plus service embedded • Edge of Care service hours extended to support Out of Hours activity to support children and families • Further increase in delivery of Family Group Conferences: 600+ in 2021/22 enabling effective family decision-making • Stronger Families targets achieved (Care admissions etc.) although challenges in relation to complexity of need/risk presenting
Maintain delivery of services and workforce wellbeing in the ongoing Covid pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintained strong business continuity arrangements • Services prioritised to deliver statutory accountabilities and ensure the most vulnerable are regularly seen and supported, working with partners across the system
Further improve Placement Sufficiency, and develop Trust Residential Care offer to children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased placement choice and sufficiency • Improved offer for young people with complex needs, in partnership with the NHS (CAMH) • More foster carers recruited, assessed and approved

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More adopters recruited, assessed and approved (through the new Regional Adoption Agency)
Support the establishment of Bfriends, the new charity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all proper governance arrangements are in place • Ensure the charity has necessary infrastructure support to enable it to start to deliver its priorities • Agree appropriate trustee arrangements are in place • Support fundraising/income generation in the charity
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services delivered in ways, and by a workforce, at all tiers, that reflect the needs and experiences of the population we serve, equitably and fairly • Anti-racist practice embedded in our work • Staff feel equitably valued by the organisation in which they work; staff have the same opportunities for development and progression; HR activity reflects the workforce • Targeted work is undertaken to encourage support and progression for staff from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities • Bias and discrimination is unacceptable and is routinely addressed
Recruitment and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust reputation and profile further enhanced and widely promoted (local, regional, national) • Improved pipeline of social workers joining the Trust • Improved retention and progression of social workers (Linked to the 'Child's Journey' redesign priority)
Support to Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop 'communities of practice' across the Trust, enabling collaborative learning, learning and support • Continue to enhance our wellbeing offer and ensure it is understood and accessible • Explore new development and support models for leaders, managers and front-line practitioners, with external partners
Strategic and Operational Financial Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement actions emerging from the CIPFA and C.Co reviews, jointly with the Council's Finance partners

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance financial management at all levels of the trust • Improve efficiency and value for money • Successful implementation of 1B (Oracle) and optimisation of Target Operating Models for HR, Finance and Business Support (and linked to Journey of the Child)
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and enhance Trust presence and contribution to all key partnerships across the city • Advocacy for the most vulnerable in these partnerships • Drive closer, more effective operational partnership working in all contexts: information-sharing; collaboration; trust and confidence
Participation and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the reach and scope of our engagement with children in care and care leavers • Establish routine engagement with other service user groups: children in the child protection system and their families; children in need etc. • Build greater co-production in our service development • Continue to focus on building engagement and connection with our staff through the Employee Forum, Wellbeing Forum, Equalities Forum and our communications models

In achieving our ambition in the coming year we recognise we have some key dependencies: changes and ongoing improvements not directly in the gift of the Trust but critical to our ongoing improvement. These continue to include:

- ongoing SEND improvement.
- school places, attendance and exclusion as they impact on vulnerable children with whom we are working.
- service, support and care for children and young people with complex needs.
- deeper, stronger integration: early help; contextual safeguarding; Preparation for Adulthood etc.
- implementation of an effective integrated commissioning model: Trust, Council, NHS.
- the continuous need to build stronger collaborative working: West Midlands Police, NHS, Council, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council.

We want to work with our partners, and across organisational boundaries, to drive improvement in these and other areas to further enhance the positive impact we can collectively make for the city's most vulnerable children and families. The Children's Partnership has a defined set of priorities that integrate well with the Trust's, and the Trust will play its part in supporting the Partnership's work.

5. Corporate Parenting

The Corporate Parenting Board and the associated team within Birmingham Children's Trust has overseen and delivered a range of activities over the last 12 months. The following achievements should be noted:

- the Holiday and Food Programme (HAF) hub model has been held up nationally as a good practice model for delivery and has impacted on thousands of children and young people across the city.
- the Birmingham Children's Trust apprenticeship programme has been developed and 14 Apprenticeships for Care Leavers across a wide range of opportunities are in post.
- our Participation Strategy now has an active working group and is making progress against the strategy to ensure that the voices of children, young people and our families are heard and are central to decision making.
- a new mentoring service has been developed.
- the 'Future You' films were shown at the Council House as part of the Commonwealth Wealth Games (CWG) programme of civic events on 3 August 2022 and the audience included Elected Members, partners, young adults and staff. The Future You films are now part of a structured training programme for Members.
- young people in care, care leavers, carers and families benefitted from a generous allocation of tickets to enable them to enjoy, and be inspired by, the summer's Commonwealth Games
- development and consultation on the Care Leavers offer is underway both internally and in partnership with the West Midlands Participation Groups. This work is looking at what the best offer is nationally and regionally and then aligning our updated offer to this. A core component of this will be establishing a multi-disciplinary care leavers resource hub, ideally located in the city centre.

The Corporate Parenting Board has developed a new structure and governance, ensuring the Board is more accountable and impactful. The structure ensures children and young people's voices are central to the Board and the young people's successful Take-Over Board is now a permanent feature in the meeting cycle. There are plans in development to broaden the take-over sessions to include senior council leadership forums.

The key priorities of the Board, driven by the voice of young people, continue to include:

- standards of accommodation – too much variation in quality of accommodation; some is excellent, some is not good enough.
- mental health and emotional wellbeing – waiting times for mental health services are a concern, as is the variation in how young people experience the quality of these

services. While Forward Thinking Birmingham continue to be responsive to crisis, waiting times for routine appointments and preventative support continue to be high.

- digital poverty – everything is online, accessing jobs, training, finances, employment, training and study. The cost of internet and access to devices is a growing issue for care leavers across the city. The Trust is rolling out a response.
- the support for young people taking on apprenticeships should level up with those on higher education pathways. Work on this is now being led by a National Graduate Trainee working with the Trust, and will report into the Board.

6. Resources

The contract sum which will form the basis of the Trust's revenue budget for 2022/23 is £229.2m.

The Trust faces significant financial pressures in 2022/23 as a result of a combination of factors:

- the Trust began the year with a revenue deficit 'baked in' to its budget. Demand and complexity have made it impossible for us to address this in-year.
- forecast, but unfunded, growth in numbers of children in care.
- a significant rise in the complexity of need of those in our care, for whom the market fails to provide placements and who require, as a result, bespoke high-cost care packages. When the 2022/23 Budget was set, there were 27 children in our care whose packages cost more than £5k per week. That figure has risen, in-year, to 81 children.
- unprecedented price increases across residential care and supported accommodation. While the profile of children in lower tariff care settings continues to gradually shift in the right direction, the overall unit cost in care has increased by 13% which is predominantly driven by the significant shift in supported accommodation (+87%). This is a national issue largely created by the legislative changes that have driven more demand to the residential market. This in the context of post covid staffing shortages and the cost-of-living crisis has served to stifle supply in a context of increasing demand. A recent analysis in Eastern regions has calculated the cost increase of supported accommodation at 312%. While the Trust is affected by these national issues it is evident that we continue to compare favourably against other core city benchmarks.
- contributions to the costs of placements for children in care from Education and Health are very low in Birmingham. This is subject to active discussion with partners.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, commissioned by Government and published earlier this year, identified a national deficit in the funding of children's social care of £2.5bn. Government's response is awaited.

The Trust continues to work with the Council, both officers and politicians, to share understanding of these pressures and agree a way forward. The Trust continues to provide

value for money through efficient and effective services to support families, but we recognise our responsibility to do all we can to operate within the cash window given, when we can, and to be open and transparent with the Council when we cannot. This we will continue to do.

7. Risks and challenges

We know this year will bring challenges:

- demand for our services has returned to greater than pre-pandemic levels and we know that there is growing need in our communities.
- finding a good, and good value, care placement for every child who needs one remains a challenge.
- the complexity of need we are encountering, including the compounding factor of the pandemic, is an unprecedented challenge.
- our resources, and those of partners, are, and will be, stretched.
- recruitment and retention is getting no easier with a regional and national shortage of social workers and a predatory independent agency sector.

We are well-placed to continue to rise to these challenges and maintain the trajectory of improvement we have set hitherto, maintaining effective collaboration with the Council and all of our partners.

Andy Couldrick
Chief Executive
Birmingham Children's Trust

November 2022