



BIRMINGHAM
**Safeguarding
Children**
PARTNERSHIP



Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2019-20

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report formally discharges my responsibility to the Safeguarding Partners in Birmingham.
- 1.2 It is my fourth Accountability Report and is a personal reflection, which I have prepared for statutory 'Safeguarding Partners' and which I am sharing with members of the Safeguarding Leaders Assembly.
- 1.3 In this report I seek to provide assurance as to my activity and to reflect on my independent view of progress that the Safeguarding Partnership is making in achieving its Ambition, Purpose, and Priorities.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) adopted locally in April 2019 define the statutory safeguarding partners as Birmingham City Council (BCC), Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group (BSol CCG) and West Midlands Police (WMP). Since children's services are provided by Birmingham Children Trust (BCT), they are treated as the fourth partner.
- 2.2 I meet regularly with the Chief Executives and senior leaders of these partner organisations as well as convening and chairing the Executive Board of the Partnership, convening and chairing quarterly Practitioners' Forums and an annual Practitioners' Conference, and sitting on the Children's Partnership Board and Council Leader convened City Board. I am also a member of the Regional Chairs and Business Managers' meeting which encompasses 14 Local Authority areas and three police forces. I try to operate in a constructive way, drawing on my experience, bringing independence and providing support and challenge.
- 2.3 Through the year, I seek to meet with each of the Sub-Groups and connected forums (Health and Education) and I have induction meetings with any new members of the Board. I meet with the Cabinet member for Children and the Scrutiny Chair, as well as my colleague Independent Chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board.
- 2.4 I attach the Independent Chair role description agreed with partners which I have updated in the light of the new MASA responsibilities. (*Appendix 1*)
- 2.5 I attach a simple chart of the Partnership Sub-Groups and connectedness. (*Appendix 2*)
- 2.6 During the last year, I have been appointed as a Board Member and Trustee of Barnardo's children's charity. I am aware that there could appear to be a conflict of interest should that organisation feature in a serious case or take on a significant local contract. By being open about this unremunerated post I am seeking to ensure that there is no perceived or actual conflict of interest. For a full resume of my current commitments and responsibilities please see my LinkedIn profile.

3. Business Support and Board Members

- 3.1 As Independent Chair, I am hugely dependent on the Business Support Unit hosted by BCT and led by Simon Cross, Business Manager. He in turn is supported by a team of dedicated, experienced programme managers and administrative staff who ensure the effectiveness of our Sub-Groups and delivery of their work programmes. Simon is accountable to Graham Tilby, Assistant Director, who has joined the Trust in the last year. I am grateful for the team's commitment, and their advice and support.
- 3.2 We have just bid farewell to Tony Diaram who led the Learning and Development Programme with flair and delivered two excellent Practitioners' Conferences. He has also teed up this year's Conference with a stellar line up, addressing the theme of Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding. We wish Tony well in his new role.
- 3.3 Board members bring to their role both the responsibilities and knowledge from their day job and a commitment to contribute to the wider safeguarding system. They co-chair sub-groups, are members of other relevant statutory partnerships (Community Safety, Children's or Health and Wellbeing, for example). I am grateful to each of them for their commitment and their confidence in me to convene and chair them as a leadership group. Our judgement was that in Birmingham the active role of an Independent Chair was required by the system to support the sustained improvement agenda. We are not yet ready to have just a "Scrutineer".

4. Our Ambition

- 4.1 When we established the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in April 2019, we articulated our agreed ambition:

"Birmingham is a family friendly city where children will flourish, feel safe, listened to, learn and grow up, able to actively contribute to society."

- 4.2 This laudable ambition can only be a work in progress. It is truly encouraging that this last year has seen inexorable progress from Birmingham Children's Trust and partners to deliver well for children. On 13th March 2020, Ofsted published a letter following a "focussed visit" looking at the "front door" and including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Inspectors found that arrangements are "positive for children and families in Birmingham, who receive an appropriate response to identified needs and concerns." They further commented that "all staff spoken to are positive about working for the Trust and the progress made since its inception." Clearly there is further to go to achieve recognition as a "Good" area, yet there is tangible evidence of progress toward that goal.
- 4.3 The city ambition for children cannot be delivered by the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) alone. So, I am pleased that I am contributing to the wider Children's Partnership, established last year and now at the point of agreeing a Business Case which will see significant investment in its five key priorities: Early Help, SEND, Mental Health 0-25, high cost placements, and school inclusion. Learning from serious cases and audits contributed to the identification of these priorities.

4.4 The UNICEF Rights and Responsibility Initiative, led in the Council by Razia Butt and undertaken by over 200 schools, plays a significant role in equipping young people to understand their rights and to protect one another. Attending the celebration of their work at Birmingham Repertory Theatre is a highlight of the year. I hope I will find more schools have joined over the last year.

4.5 When we are hosted for our Executive meetings in schools or colleges the importance of Birmingham being experienced as a safe place always comes up. With knife crime and exploitation in our midst, there is active concern from young people and can be no room for complacency. This topic has been the subject of discussion at the City Board and is the focus of action from the newly developed Violence Reduction Unit. This year we have undertaken learning reviews following one fatal and another life-changing incident involving teenagers. We published a learning bulletin, "County Lines: Ruining Young Lives" in January 2020. Developing an effective response to exploitation is one of our four priorities and I will discuss progress further below.

5. Our Purpose

5.1 We determined that our purpose was one of convening the four lead safeguarding partners to work in close collaboration with "relevant agencies" to "safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people in Birmingham". Specifically, the new Partnership would provide "system leadership, challenge, and hold organisations to account". We committed to the BSCP creating "a learning culture, sharing good practice and driving improvement in partnership working to deliver better outcomes."

5.2 To deliver on this purpose we have refreshed our subgroups: Learning and Development; Quality Impact and Outcomes; and Serious Cases. Each is co-chaired and has a work programme and a commitment to communicate. Additionally, we have reinforced the value of the Safeguarding in Education, Health Safeguarding and Practitioners' Forums. Under the new arrangements, from the 1st October 2019 the CCG and Public Health took strategic lead for overseeing the review of all child deaths, having a population-wide responsibility rather than a safeguarding one. The Early Help partnership is being refreshed, with accountability to the Children's Partnership recognising that early support for children and families should be universal.

5.3 At a high level, I think there is evidence that BSCP is delivering on its purpose:

- There is a clear set of procedures and arrangements for practice;
- There is a programme of assured learning and development and a vibrant sub-group delivering it and developing new content in response to reviews and demand. The Practitioners' Conference on Neglect last June was outstanding. The quality of keynote speakers and workshops were worthy of a national conference and the feedback reflected that;
- The Serious Cases Sub-Group has responded to the new arrangements for Rapid Reviews and has met the demanding timescales of 15 working days in all eight cases, with the

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exception of one case which was submitted a day late. Simon Cross has led regional work to develop the approach and accompanying guidance, and has been rewarded with sign-off from all 14 West Midlands authority areas and also significant interest from across the country. BSCP is being generous with intellectual property, asking only to be acknowledged in adapted local documentation;

- The Quality Impact and Outcomes Sub-Group, jointly chaired by Birmingham Children's Trust and Birmingham and Solihull CCG, has sustained and further developed the Board Assurance Framework. It has delivered its audit programme, whose focus was derived from issues and outliers in safeguarding performance data. Learning lessons briefings on "Discharge Planning – context is key" (May 2019) and a Mental Ill-Health File Audit based on joint area inspection methodology (Jan 2020), were both productive and identified useful learning for practitioner team discussions;
- Learning bulletins produced after events (e.g. Practitioners' Forums, audits and conferences) or summarising serious cases, are well received. Their house style is recognised and they are pithy and accessible. They are all distributed widely and can be found on our refreshed website;
- We have sustained our habit of considering all "outstanding" reports from across the country. We remain highly visible on social media, taking the opportunity to stay connected and abreast of developments and new initiatives, in addition to sharing our learning and campaigns. This year as well as continuing to promote "Safer Sleeping" and "Safeguarding is Everybody's Business", we eagerly await the positive impact from the Community Trust's "Who's In Charge?" campaign, which is highlighting the serious impact that parental misuse of drink and drugs can have on young children. Sadly this is a feature in all too many serious cases of significant harm;
- Twice a year our Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly is convened at the MAC to discuss a key topic with an external national speaker. They enable senior leaders to be actively involved in influencing the safeguarding agenda, challenge and witness the progress of the Partnership. In April 2019, the Assembly formally launched the new compliant Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. In October 2019, Carlene Firmin addressed the subject of Contextual Safeguarding; a strategic and partnership priority which I will address below. The Assembly provides the opportunity for the wider system including leaders from the voluntary, faith and community sectors and "relevant agencies" to join Executive Board members in deliberation, learning and assurance.

6. Our Priorities

6.1 Strong Leadership and Strong Partnership

- 6.1.1 This year has again seen as much churn as continuity in leadership at a number of levels. The departure of the City Council Chief Executive after a little over a year means that I have now worked with four LA CEOs in as many years, and await the designation of a new Interim. The lack of an established and permanent top team in the Council House is regrettable and is hampering the finalisation of strategic partnership arrangements and

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as importantly, the establishment of enduring relationships to support the sizeable agenda which the City's elected and managerial leaders face. The disconnect between the City Board and other statutory partnerships is illustrative of this point.

- 6.1.2 That said, the continuity in Health Chief Executives and within the top team in Birmingham Children's Trust is providing much needed stability. Together with the DCS, Tim O'Neil, they have developed a shared agenda which is being taken forward by the relatively new Children's Partnership (chaired by the LA CEO with CCG CEO as Vice Chair). With clear priorities and a funded Transformation Team, which is developing a business case to change and deliver services on the ground, there are grounds for optimism that there will be a positive impact on the lives of children.
- 6.1.3 This shared improvement agenda together with growing confidence from the Children's Trust, is encouraging a more confident, proactive and creative approach to big issues. An example of this is the system leadership being provided by Andy Couldrick (CEO, Birmingham Children's Trust) in respect of extra familial exploitation and abuse, sometimes referred to as Contextual or Transitional Safeguarding, which I discuss below.
- 6.1.4 Within the leadership of the Safeguarding system itself, there is developing a growing confidence and ability to constructively challenge as well as support one another. With a new Chief Superintendent for the West Midlands Police Public Protection Unit and a new Chief Nurse in the CCG there has been a welcome injection of curiosity and learning. We held a development session with external facilitation in December 2019 to assist in relationship-building and honest conversations, and its positive impact is evident. There is more work to do to enshrine these positive behaviours in all levels of multi-disciplinary working; still we find case reviews commenting on a lack of information sharing and appropriate escalation of issues.
- 6.1.5 I remain concerned that at a local level in General Practice, Community Health and in schools, there is too much variation in the quality of collaboration with other partners, in information sharing and in mutual understanding of roles and capabilities. This is evidenced in those few serious cases where no-one has been fully seized of the child's real life experience.
- 6.1.6 That said, this is the second largest city and the youngest, and yet it is not an outlier in terms of numbers of serious cases, and this we must remember.
- 6.1.7 All my experience of system leadership and working in partnership tells me that there is no quick fix. The quality of relationships is essential and must be developed over time, supporting a common purpose with some shared values and priorities that all are committed to. In Birmingham, this is a work in progress.

6.2 Continuous Improvement of Child Protection Practice Across the System and in All Agencies

- 6.2.1 From the start of my time in Birmingham I have prioritised support for practice. This is best exemplified in the development of the annual Practitioners' Conference; my commitment to the quarterly Practitioners' Forums; the publication of practice bulletins; and the practice focus of the Quality Impact and Outcomes and the Learning and Development Sub-Groups.

- 6.2.2 The explicit principles underpinning the Partnership are that it espouses a learning culture, effective multi-disciplinary working, a commitment to early help and a focus on families as the best place for children to grow up. These principles are only meaningful if they are led into practice.
- 6.2.3 The findings of external inspection and regulation are encouraging, especially for the Birmingham Children's Trust.
- 6.2.4 Action between the Community Trust, CCG, Public Health and partners to address unsustainable workloads in Health Visiting is beginning to show results and will be positively impacted upon when the Children's Partnership Business Plan becomes an investment and delivery agenda for Early Help.
- 6.2.5 The habits of multi-disciplinary audits, debriefing and learning reviews are being developed. The Serious Cases Sub-Group's 15 working-day Rapid Review process has been commendably responded to by all agencies, and undoubtedly is speeding up key learning from and into practice.
- 6.2.6 Unfortunately, the fast-moving Coronavirus pandemic will doubtless have a significant effect on current practice and brings with it secondary safeguarding implications that have not yet being fully recognised, planned for or mitigated.
- 6.2.7 I have met with our new Probation member on the Executive Board and am assured that the further reunification and reorganisation of these vital risk and offender management services which is underway is seized of safeguarding concerns.
- 6.2.8 The Safeguarding Partnership has been asked to contribute to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) chaired by Professor Alexis Jay. Specifically, the Inquiry is interested in local practice with religious organisations and their approach to safeguarding. We have prepared a statement and are ready to give oral evidence, though the latest Public Health emergency is temporarily halting the hearings. That we can speak with one partnership voice is encouraging; that we have had to concentrate on fundamental practice in mainstream organisations at the expense of more wide-ranging actions is a reality. That said, this year we have forged a positive relationship with Birmingham Council of Faiths and its Chair, Daniel Griffiths. We also welcomed the Head of Safeguarding for the Archdiocese to our December Board meeting and learned of the strengthened approach to safeguarding in very recent times.
- 6.2.9 The focus of the Practitioner Conference in June 2019 was Childhood Neglect with an expert by experience, Jenny Molloy ("Hackney Child") and Professor Anna Gupta of Royal Holloway, University of London, providing the key note speeches. Jenny Turnross, Director of Practice in the Birmingham Children's Trust, introduced the Neglect Strategy which was launched on the day. The eight improvement workshops gave delegates a rich menu from which to choose. Nationally, research, audits and serious cases tell us that neglect is a serious and increasing issue, especially for some young children and teenagers. Therefore the conference was timely.

- 6.2.10 Practitioners' Forums have continued with a range of discussion topics including Honour-Based Violence and Domestic Abuse. Each session has an opportunity for a Q&A with me as Independent Chair and provides for good networking. A bulletin is produced for the benefit of all and is widely distributed and available on the website.
- 6.2.11 One serious case review has been published this year, in December 2019. This addressed the sad death of two-month-old Terri Rae Palmer at New Year in 2017. The briefing note outlining the learning from her review was titled "Just because they say they are not drinking or taking drugs...be curious, seek evidence". It was published once Terri Rae's mother had been imprisoned for thirteen and a half years for manslaughter and GBH. Despite tenacious professional support once potential neglect was identified, no one foresaw the catastrophic injuries that this baby would endure.
- 6.3 Developing an effective multi-agency response to Contextual Safeguarding, recognising exploitation of young people in all its forms
- 6.3.1 The safeguarding threats to young people from outside the home and family have been rising up the professional and political agenda over recent years.
- 6.3.2 The recognition of violence resulting from County Lines; the devastating impact of Child Sexual Exploitation; the development of a knife-carrying culture in some places; and a longstanding gangs problem, sometimes geographic in its focus, often with criminal exploitation as a feature: all these and more come within the orbit of Transitional or Contextual Safeguarding.
- 6.3.3 Locally, the Safeguarding partners have recognised these phenomena and the inadequacy of traditional child protection approaches to effectively meet these issues. Nationally, "Working Together" guidance has highlighted the need for a joined-up and serious response to threats from outside the family.
- 6.3.4 We were very fortunate in having both Dez Holmes (Director of Research In Practice) and Dr Carlene Firmin (University of Bedfordshire) address us at the two Safeguarding Leaders' Assemblies during the year to challenge and enlighten us on adolescence and the developing practice of Contextual Safeguarding. The Birmingham Children's Trust and West Midlands Police have risen to the challenge. The establishment of a multi-disciplinary Practice Hub for recognising and tackling all forms of exploitation is well underway, informed by best developing practice. With joint leadership from social work and police, commitment of other partners and strong sponsorship from Andy Couldrick (CEO, BCT) and the Children's Partnership, prospects are good. That said, the significant number of violent incidents over the past months only underlines the importance of getting a grip on these complex issues. Already the Partnership has published a learning review of two cases titled "County Lines: Ruining Young Lives". The National Panel have also published on this topic.
- 6.3.5 The success criteria for this priority must include a reduction in deaths and serious injury to young people from exploitation and violence outside the family. But the achievement of that aim will require a whole community, indeed a whole society response, and will take time. The necessary ground work is underway. We welcomed meeting Red Thread, an organisation tackling this issue on the frontline in acute hospital settings, when we

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were hosted for one of our Board meetings by Good Hope Hospital, part of the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust. I look forward to visiting the Hub in coming months and take solace from the positive comments from Ofsted when they visited these “front doors” of services recently.

6.3.6 This priority is most definitely a work in progress.

6.4 Evidencing the impact of the new Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership

6.4.1 Sir Alan Wood, the architect of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements which had to be in force by October 2019, is already undertaking a review of the impact of the new arrangements nationally. But for Coronavirus, he was to join us at our Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly on 22nd April 2020; that meeting will have to be postponed.

6.4.2 My own view is that it is too early to tell, or to tell completely. In Birmingham we have been working with the new arrangements for a full year. We had already streamlined our meetings, purpose, principles and priorities. We had influenced the widening of the partnership system with the introduction of the Children's Partnership. We have placed an emphasis on leadership, partnership, practice, learning and communication. We can evidence action and progress on all of these fronts. Our approach to Rapid Reviews has been recognised as valuable well beyond our borders. We have welcomed the emphasis on quickly reviewing with practitioners, identifying learning, and taking action.

6.4.3 However, as a system we are still “requires improvement”. We know that the Early Help, SEND, and Mental Health offers for children, young people and their families require rapid and fundamental development. There are plans, there is commitment, there should be resources ... impact will follow.

6.4.4 So give us another year to demonstrate sustainable impact, I would say.

7. Conclusions

7.1 When I started this look back at the past twelve months, April 2019 - March 2020, I totted up the activity and evaluated the relationships, compared with the intent at the start of the year. My judgement is that there has been progress in service and system quality and responsiveness; there is independent testimony to that. There have been some notable achievements by the BSCP programme team in delivery of its agenda (Rapid Review scheme, Conference; Sub-Groups' delivery). However, I am frustrated that some of the strategic developments beyond safeguarding have not progressed as speedily as I would like.

7.2 What I did not foresee a mere two weeks ago when I started this report, was that I would produce it with the country in virtual lock-down, facing a pandemic and seeking to prevent the worst death toll since the 'flu of a hundred years ago.

7.3 So I end my report thanking everyone for responding calmly and thoughtfully to the new normal with remote working, virtual meetings, and still a fixed focus on identifying and supporting those most vulnerable and at risk of significant harm.

- 7.4 I wish you well and can confirm that I have accepted an extension of my contract to September 2021 at least, determined to build on progress and to see us deliver on our ambition for Birmingham's children.

Penny Thompson CBE

17th March 2020

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Role of BSCP Independent Chair – Leadership of Assurance, Learning, Partnering
Appendix 2: BSCP Structure Chart

Appendix 1:

Role of BSCP Independent Chair – Leadership of Assurance, Learning, Partnering

Key Functions:

- a) Independent convener of all those charged with the wellbeing, including safeguarding, of children and young people in Birmingham;
- b) A champion for children and best practice;
- c) Independent Chair of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Board and Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly.
- d) Supporting and challenging the Birmingham leadership in their quest to achieve a sustainably safe city for children and young people, in the context of family, community and wellbeing;
- e) Modelling openness, challenge, support, mutual respect, professionalism and learning for application by leaders in Birmingham;
- f) Ensuring political and managerial leaders are demonstrably accountable for the resourcing and strategic priority given to the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people;
- g) Ensuring the Safeguarding Partners' leadership role is understood, valued, respected and fulfilled;
- h) Demonstrating a robust approach to evaluation, practice audit & research whose dissemination will support valuable learning for multi-agency leaders, managers and practitioners in their critical roles;
- i) Through robust independent support and challenge, contribute to developing confidence of citizens and the state in the city of Birmingham.

Appendix 2:

Structure Chart

