

Mark Rogers
Chief Executive and Director of Economy
Council House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B1 1BB

7 December 2015

Dear Mark

Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan peer challenge

On behalf of the Peer Team, I would like to say what a pleasure it was to be invited into Birmingham City Council to deliver a peer challenge of your Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan. The Team felt privileged to be allowed to conduct its work with the support of you and your colleagues and partners.

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced councillor and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and were agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Birmingham City Council were:

- Phil Norrey, Chief Executive, Devon County Council
- Cllr. David Simmonds, Elected Member Peer, Local Government Association
- Sally Bates, Head Teacher, Nottinghamshire
- Steve Belk, Associate, ex Executive Director of Learning and Standards, Hackney Learning Trust
- Siddique Hussain, National Leader of Governance
- Ian Keating, Local Government Association Policy Lead for Education
- Robin Tuddenham, Director of Communities, Calderdale Council
- Anne Brinkhoff, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

Scope and focus of the peer challenge

'Education has the power to transform lives. Every child in Birmingham has the right to a fantastic childhood and the best preparation for adult life in the modern world'. Published in December 2014, your Education and Schools Strategy and

Improvement Plan builds on several pieces of work, including the Clarke and Kershaw reports triggered by Trojan Horse, along with transformation already under way in education services. The strategy is delivered via 12 work streams with an identified lead overseeing an action plan for each of these.

You asked the peer team to challenge progress with implementing five of the work streams:

1. Build confidence in BCC's ability to lead the overall system of education through a relentless focus on core duties
2. Ensure that there are robust and effective governance arrangements in place and working effectively in schools
3. Work with schools to ensure that all children and young people in Birmingham learn in an environment that is safe and promotes their overall wellbeing
4. Work with partners to deliver improvements in schools
5. Drive innovation and improvement through new district structures that promote collaborative leadership and enhance accountability

In challenging these you asked us to focus on progress, outcomes and, where possible, impact of actions.

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focused. As peers we used our experience and knowledge to reflect on the information presented to us by people we met, things we saw and material that we read.

This letter provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation delivered by the team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting this feedback, the team acted as fellow local government and education officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. We hope this recognises the progress Birmingham City Council have made during the last year whilst stimulating debate and thinking about future challenges.

1. Key messages

The Council has made good progress in progressing work across all of the five work streams and there is confidence amongst members, officers and partners that the basics are being put in place for a strong and effective city-wide system of school improvement. Stronger professional leadership of the service is making a significant impact and is seen by many as crucial. Governance is now high on

the agenda and has a higher profile with schools and other stakeholders. The Council provides good training and support on Safeguarding and practice in data management and audits has improved. The Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) is widely regarded as the right vehicle for school improvement with good buy-in from schools. These are robust foundations for an education system that will transform lives of children and young people.

In addition to our feedback on each of the five work streams, there are some corporate reflections for you to consider:

- Following the leadership election, Birmingham needs to demonstrate the political will and corporate capacity to ensure its resources are focused in shaping and delivering a shared vision which reflects its ambitions for the 'the youngest city in Europe'.
- The political and managerial leadership of the City need to rigorously pursue the delivery of a shared ambition and vision for Education.
- Organisational transparency needs to be developed so that members, managers and partners can see the implementation of decisions and support growing self-awareness.
- Birmingham needs to develop a relationship with its schools that reflects its ambitions for the City and which ensures the delivery of its core responsibilities.

2. Birmingham City Council's Leadership of Education

The Lead Member and Executive Director have brought clear and consistent leadership to Education within the City Council. This includes the main priority of delivering the Improvement Plan with focus on getting the basics right in relation to School Governance and Safeguarding. The Cabinet Member has a clear ambition for the City Council to work with all schools that educate Birmingham's children, regardless of governance and accountability arrangements. Headteachers welcome the strong professional leadership of the Executive Director of Education. He is successfully building links and relationships with all schools and is strengthening the network of school forums to provide an effective mechanism for system wide leadership.

There is a growing sense of confidence in Birmingham about the leadership of the education system. Birmingham is the largest single tier authority in Europe with 446 schools, and with a growing number of Academies (currently 29%) and Free Schools (currently 4%). The fragmentation of the education system brings challenges to system wide oversight and improvement. Although borne out of intervention, the Education Improvement Group has provided an important and

recognised forum for those accountable for school improvement and the regulator to come together to maintain oversight of school improvement in the City. Looking beyond intervention it will be beneficial to ensure that this structured oversight continues.

Relative to the majority of other education systems, the funding base for schools is strong. Birmingham has settled Equal Pay and Private Finance Initiative (PFI) issues with schools to the advantage of the education system, and schools enjoy an extremely favourable funding position compared to others, with the exception of London Boroughs. For some years, Standards Grant funding to the level of £15 million has been part of the Designated Schools Grant and has, with oversight through the Birmingham Schools Forum, been distributed to individual schools. While the peer team acknowledges significant cost pressures for many partners in the system, including the Council, we believe that the system is resourced to deliver school improvement and must prioritise existing funding to best effect.

There are sound foundations for an effective self-improving education system, including maintained and academy providers and consortia, with well-established and proven arrangements. We heard about strong formal and informal partnership arrangements between schools with established arrangements to support teaching and learning, drawing on a wealth of resources within the system such as the Teaching Schools and Leaders of Education. There are good arrangements for managing exclusions through groups of schools working together, although there was concern that too many exclusions still occur. The BEP, although still in its infancy, is bringing improved oversight, co-ordination and targeted support.

The Council's relationship with schools is improving and we heard evidence of more responsive and personalised services. Examples are School Governance, HR and Payroll, ICT as well as Safeguarding which were presented as services that are engaged and pro-active.

Communication with schools is vastly improved and valued. Starting from a low base, the Council has now developed a system that permits direct and pro-active communication with all schools across the City. The 'School Noticeboard', a weekly newsletter, provides purposeful information, resources and guidance and is valued by headteachers. A good example is the Council's response to the terrorist events in Paris on 13 November 2015, where a special edition provided strong messages of civic leadership in addition to resources for use in schools. Headteachers commented positively on the existence of more pro-active communication and direct engagement from BCC's senior team, including the Executive Director.

The Council now needs to set out its vision and ambition for the education system that will underpin the school improvement strategy post-intervention. The

peer team consider that at the heart of this lies a decision about the kind of relationship the Council wishes to have with its schools and what this means in practice. For example, what is the distinctive role and responsibility that only the Council can provide? What will this look like in practice? What services will the Council continue to provide and why? How will they be funded and sustained? Articulating clarity in its relationship with schools will enable the Council to move to setting the agenda as opposed to responding to crises.

Continuity in the professional leadership of the service is widely regarded as crucial. Given the Clarke and Kershaw reports as well as the below average performance of many schools in Birmingham there was a strong consensus that a period of stability and strong professional oversight is required for the Improvement Plan to be delivered with maximum impact.

The role of 'district' arrangements in scrutinising education is confused. Scrutiny arrangements in the 10 Districts are unclear, inconsistent and not well resourced. There is confusion about the respective roles and responsibilities of District Scrutiny arrangements and the work of the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee with regards to effective scrutiny of local education performance. While local scrutiny is powerful, the approach needs to be consistent and it is important to ensure a clear line of sight from District level to the Council leadership.

The Schools Forum needs to be further developed to undertake a more effective role in educational leadership. The Forum oversees over £1 billion of Dedicated Schools Grant per annum which requires members to make significant strategic decisions. Members of the Forum acknowledge and welcome the change in officer leadership and the recent work to develop the Forum which has led to more trusting relationships. However, this needs to be supplemented by training to ensure that all members understand their brief and the complexity of school finance. There was a request for more effective administration of the Forum, including quality and timeliness of reports and for discussions to be commensurate to finances involved.

Partners including Ofsted, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the DfE need to be clear about their respective roles and responsibilities and how they work together. We heard different descriptions from partners about what their and others' responsibilities are. Given the complex schools landscape and an increase in Academies and Free Schools, it is crucial that partners are clear about their and partners' roles and responsibility so that they can work together to deliver their core purpose – the best education for children in Birmingham.

3. Strengthening School Governance

Governance is now high on the agenda and has a high profile with schools and other stakeholders. Individuals we spoke with about governance reported that they had seen a significant improvement in the quality and quantity of advice and guidance given by governor services. There was clear evidence of an intensification of monitoring and risk rating governance in maintained schools. However, this is only just getting underway and it is difficult to assess its impact. The governor services team clearly relish the challenge of spearheading new initiatives such as the schools audit which will put a clear focus on the quality of governance as well as on financial issues.

Governor services are generally very well regarded, with a significant majority of all types of schools buying in and high levels of satisfaction expressed in the evidence presented. Governor services reported that some 85% of schools subscribe to their traded services and included a majority of academies, although take up in this sector was lower. Take up by maintained schools is close to 100%, while 58% of primary academies and 47% of secondary academies buy into the service. There was widespread agreement that the service is pro-active, easy to access and provides high quality advice and guidance on a range of matters, including regular briefing, general and specialist training, model policies, skills audits and legal matters. This reach and positive feedback is encouraging progress. It will help to ensure a sound foundation for Governing Bodies in Birmingham Schools to fulfil their strategic role of providing clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction, holding the headteacher to account for educational performance of the school and ensuring that money is well spent.

Communication and support to Governing Bodies regarding safeguarding is extensive and timely. Conversations with headteachers, clerks, governors and the voluntary sector unanimously praised the communications and training on safeguarding provided by governor services through its commissioned provision Services for Education. Direct support on safeguarding to governors is also provided and well-received.

The selection of Birmingham City Council (BCC) nominated governors is much improved. We saw strong evidence that the process for nominating BCC governors is rigorous and more transparent. Applicants are required to complete a comprehensive application form and provide references. Due diligence checks are carried out and applications are reviewed at the School Governor Nomination Committee which includes councillors, headteachers and governors. However, vacancy rates are high at 25% of all LA Governors. While the Service is actively marketing governor positions, this needs to continue at pace in order to provide a sufficient pool of high calibre LA Governors.

Interim Executive Boards (IEBs) have moved their schools forward. We interviewed two chairs of IEBs of schools in very challenging circumstances and

who had been significantly underperforming schools and there was strong evidence of improvement in achievement, safeguarding and leadership. Governor services reported a much greater and more thoughtful use of IEBs in recent years to drive school improvement, together with appropriate and timely support. Appointments to these are carefully planned with involvement from governor services, the executive directors and academy sponsors. This shows a more strategic approach to using effective governance to challenge school leadership and drive school improvement.

While governor services measure the number and frequency of schools who are engaged and the feedback with individual services, there is as yet no evidence of the extent of the take up and penetration of the services or more importantly the impact their work is having across the cohort of schools. Given the scale and reach of governor services and the Birmingham Governors' Network (BGN), we consider that this is an area that should be developed, possibly in the form of a broader evaluation that would also inform the future direction of the Service. It may well be that national organisations such as the National Governance Association or one of the local universities could support this.

Working relationships between governor services and representative governor networks need to be further clarified and strengthened. Conversations with Birmingham Governor Services, Birmingham Governors Network (BGN), National Governors' Association (NGA), headteachers, clerks and leaders of the voluntary sector highlighted a disjointed approach and increasing reluctance among some groups to work together. For example, there is no agreed approach to sharing information and data about governing bodies who may need support, nor is there a coordinated approach to training and development. In the past this has led to situations where there is duplication of training or networking sessions in one part of the City or none at all in another part. Building on the recommendations in the recent review of the BGN by the NGA, the peer team consider the need to clarify roles and responsibilities of the BGN vis-à-vis Governor Services is a key task which needs to be articulated. Both organisations should work to their respective strengths and consider the needs of the system as a whole.

There is a gap in providing quality assurance of clerking services. We heard from governors, headteachers and clerks that this is a gap in the current market. Clerks in particular would value a mechanism for regular networking and training for clerks. Given the importance of professional clerking to enable professional governance this might be an area of future business development for governor services.

The BEP should take a higher profile in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of school governance across the City. It is the GB's role to tackle significant under performance in their schools through robust challenges over a long period of time. People we spoke with were committed to BEP and wanted to see it

strengthen and work for the benefit of the districts but felt their monitoring role in effective governance could be the 'central' oversight needed. Although the infrastructure of BEP is in place, the scope of BEP and resources available to it currently limit its effectiveness without the addition of extra responsibilities such as monitoring governing body effectiveness.

There is an inconsistent approach to the adoption of the school governor model code of conduct, including the recommendations on lengths of service and the number of schools a single governor can serve on. The nationally promoted Model Code of Conduct for school governance is extensively distributed and adopted but in many cases with a proviso that the requirement to limit 'long serving governors' be removed from the code. Governor Services and Birmingham Governors Network need to not only adopt the national position, endorsed and informed by NGA guidance, across the whole school population but put in place a robust system of measuring compliance and in turn help spread good practice in governance across to other schools.

4. Safeguarding in Schools

Safeguarding training and development for staff across the system is strong, embedded and of high quality. The Council differentiates between a universal, targeted and specialist offer drawing on Home Office training products and more local resources. Targeted responses follow identification either by schools, Ofsted or through s175 (Safeguarding) audits, and the Council has created a bespoke support where serious weaknesses have been identified, including case management, CSE, FGM and forced marriage. There are robust plans to develop the function with a proactive focus on engaging schools with the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award, supporting schools to pro-actively weave the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child through the life of the school, and to adopt a train the trainer approach to ensure business continuity with 60 schools and multi-agency partners trained to deliver Prevent training.

Section 175 audits have moved from a low return and awareness to 97% completion using the newly launched on-line tool, and variations in quality are being addressed. Safeguarding audits are carefully reviewed and contribute to the overall assessment of schools through the Education Data Dashboard. Headteachers report that the format and process of the Safeguarding audit has much improved with a tailored 'Birmingham version' that was developed with input from school leadership. Schools report that the requirements are clear and they felt that guidance on safeguarding audit processes and policies from the Council was responsive and of good quality. They were positive about the engagement and support to Governors.

Schools report that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) delivery model 'Right Service Right Time' is widely understood and backed up by effective

training. It is supported across the system and MASH as the 'key in the lock' to appropriate and effective support to children and families is increasingly understood. Looking forward, care needs to be taken that shifting operational practices among individual agencies do not stymie effectiveness.

Headteachers we spoke with demonstrate high levels of awareness of what is required in Safeguarding and appreciate the guidance issued by the Council. There is a clear line of sight on audit and high levels of engagement. Over 70% of schools have accessed or booked Prevent training for the spring term in 2016. Designated Safeguarding Leads understand the complex and dynamic landscape of safeguarding practice, for example Prevent, FGM and CSE across all age groups and are resilient and inquisitive. They welcome the responsiveness of the Council and value the quality of advice and resources that are made available. There is good work across safeguarding and governor services to ensure that Safeguarding Governors understand their roles and responsibilities and have access to training and support.

Data collection and management is supporting safeguarding in schools. Information from the safeguarding audits will be used to ascertain any weaknesses in safeguarding policies or practice and will feed into the Education Data Dashboard to contribute to a systemic assessment of schools against a range of criteria. Data is balanced with qualitative knowledge and helps to identify schools that require targeted or specialist support.

Key officers are making a huge difference. The Resilience Advisor and the Safeguarding Advisor work together very effectively to bridge and broker support for schools and blend skills sets to ensure that bespoke support is available across universal, targeted and specialist responses. They are held in very high regard by everyone we spoke with.

The fragmentation of schools' ICT and data systems is creating a risk around information exchange and data security. There are now a range of data systems available for schools to purchase which are of variable quality. Our conversations identified concerns about some systems, while cheaper, offering a lesser quality in information exchange and data security which impacts on the ability to effectively share information across the system and highlight safeguarding concerns.

There are concerns within the system about the sustainability of the improvements, given that some roles are short-term and other personnel are changing. The temporary nature of the Resilience and Safeguarding Advisors were mentioned in particular, whose roles are seen as critical in the medium term to support schools. We understand that the Chair of the Safeguarding Board is coming to the end of her term. This is a high profile position and care needs to be taken to ensure a strong replacement in a timely fashion. The Board's recent

Annual Report demonstrates insight into the challenges Birmingham faces, and effective leadership of the Board will be a key part of the improvement journey.

There are significant concerns across the system about children missing from home or care, from education, or because they are unknown to the authorities. This was expressed by all of the stakeholder groups to the peer team. Linked to this is a concern about growth in the unregistered, unregulated and supplementary school providers exacerbating on-going risks, for example around Prevent, CSE and FGM. There is an expectation amongst partners that the Council will provide strong leadership in establishing a city wide risk assessment of all settings, but acknowledge that this must be a shared responsibility.

The 'fuzzy space' between Children's Social Care and Education was highlighted by internal and external stakeholders. This concerns the inevitable lack of clear demarcation between Education and Children's Services. Filling this space will require practitioners from both services to develop better knowledge of each other's policies and practice, and to develop a shared understanding. Managers have an important role to facilitate this process.

There is a gap in a systematic roll out of Council Safeguarding training and risk assessment across the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector. This is an area of concern that needs to be addressed.

5. Improving Schools

The BEP is widely recognised as the right vehicle for school improvement. BEP was established in November 2013 when headteachers from across Birmingham came together to create a collective voice for the city's schools. Since 1st September 2015, BEP has been commissioned by the Council to carry out school improvement. Central to its mission is to ensure that no school in Birmingham is isolated. Headteachers and other stakeholders we spoke with, including the Regional Schools Commissioner, are supportive of the BEP and subscription levels are high from across all schools in Birmingham. It is widely regarded as the right approach to developing a system-led and system wide approach to school improvement. There is a keenness for it to explicitly seek to grow its own leaders.

BEP has begun to establish District Networks, which are crucial in developing a comprehensive understanding of schools within its remit. At present there are eight District leads (serving headteachers) who are seconded three days a week to build knowledge of schools in each district, and to enable BEP to provide school improvement support. They are supported by district engagement coordinators who are working across the ten districts to strengthen existing connections and build infrastructure with partner organisations. These are good foundations to build an effective self-improving system for school improvement.

BEP is developing a comprehensive understanding of schools in its remit. It has established a School Improvement Commissioning Group, involving a core group of recently serving headteachers. The board meets regularly to gain a clear view of the city and help drive forward school improvement in Birmingham. Positively, we heard that BEP is using its knowledge to re-categorise schools in order to better target interventions and support.

We heard some evidence that BEP is providing effective and professional advice to schools. We heard of a number of schools which moved from 'requiring improvement' to 'good' following work with BEP and who felt that support had been based on robust understanding and knowledge of schools with timely and well written analysis and recommendations.

Schools benefit from the Birmingham Curriculum Statement that was issued for the start of the new academic year on 1st September 2015. It sets out that all children will experience a broad and balanced curriculum enabling them to grow and learn in an environment without prejudice or inequality. It further describes the shared values that underpin Birmingham's approach to community cohesion with clear reference to the Equality Act 2010 and a statement that adherence to these values is non-negotiable. This has provided schools with strong and explicit policy guidelines for all children in their care.

Senior education staff are maintaining a high degree of involvement in schools which is regarded as positive by many. Schools value the greater presence of the Executive Director and his team which includes visits to new headteachers, attendance at Forums and the establishment of a new group including the chairs of each of the Schools Forums. A range of formal and informal networks ensure good engagement of the Council across all schools.

The school audit team within the Council has started a comprehensive audit programme of its maintained schools. This focuses on effective governance, specific areas of safeguarding, including Section 175, attendance and RE & Collective Worship, and financial management. This will provide independent assurance to schools and the Council.

Consideration needs to be given to the robustness and the effectiveness of performance management information and the coherence of process for identifying schools at risk. The newly created Education Dashboard (EDD) to identify schools at risk has ensured information on schools is shared. However schools expressed a concern about the quantity and quality of the data and also how it was collected. The BEP also have a process for identifying schools causing concern using attainment data and we believe the duplicate systems are confusing. Whilst the 'Cross-cutting Group' is regarded by many as a useful internal forum to co-ordinate and manage an appropriate Education Service response to complex, cross-cutting challenges in schools, there is a

misconception amongst schools about its purpose and the quality of information it uses to make judgements. Looking forward the peer team considers that the BEP should prioritise school improvement based on a single definitive process for identification of schools and their performance.

BEP has limited resources to support the large number of schools requiring assistance. As of June 2015, 15% of all Birmingham schools are rated by Ofsted as 'requiring improvement' and 8% as 'inadequate'. Given the redistribution of school improvement funding to schools via the allocation of the Standards Grant to the DSG, it is appropriate for schools to contribute to the cost of BEP and the sector led improvement system more generally. At the moment, BEP receives £1.8m school improvement funding from the Council, and has a subscription system whereby schools pay a premium of £1 per pupil. Going forward, there is a need to consider the resources required to deliver a school improvement system that is fit for purpose and can meet the current and future needs in Birmingham appropriately within the context of financial pressures for the system as a whole, and how the system as a whole will finance it.

There is a gap around improvement support for Early Years. There are conflicting views about the role of BEP in providing support to pre-statutory age providers, including maintained nurseries and PVI settings. Birmingham has a strong and mixed economy Early Years sector. The Council is currently developing a quality improvement proposal as part of its Early Years Review. This will be a key part in a system wide discussion about the extent of the improvement offer, who provides it and how it will be financed.

Building on its strong start, there is considerable scope for BEP to further develop its system leadership. This includes engagement with, for example, Academy Sponsors, Teaching Schools, Local and National Leaders of Education, National Leaders of Governance to broker the right support for schools in order to manage resources well across the system and for the benefit of all children in Birmingham.

Schools perceive that some services provided by the Council are not properly performance managed or evaluated. The Council's Property Services is universally regarded as unresponsive and not providing good value for money. Partners are keen for the Early Years Review to progress at pace, and we heard concerns about the timeliness of the education, health and care plans, and the advice and support for dealing with exclusions.

6. Local Leadership and Accountability – the Ladywood Pathfinder

The Council is commissioning the BEP to provide a local partnership service from January 2016 to be delivered via the District teams. This approach is currently

piloted in Ladywood District where the BEP is engaging the schools and other partners to better identify local priorities, co-design and agree local solutions with service providers on issues such as mental health and school nursing, commission services and work collaboratively with other schools to ensure greater value for money, and to support schools in understanding the full range of services and resources available to them in their District.

This local approach and focus shows potential for helping to influence some of the wider determinants of school success. Following a 'taster session' in March to enable early dialogue between schools, BEP and officers from the Council and the NHS, a programme of single topic workshops has been arranged to facilitate engagement with schools and service providers, as well as a third sector marketplace event in September. Feedback from schools, council services and providers has been positive, and there are some good examples of a more bespoke Ladywood offer, for example for 0-25 Mental Health; and an emerging offer for School Nursing.

The Director of Partnerships in the BEP has provided good leadership in brokering relationships between schools and other service providers. He is enthusiastically establishing links and networks and is successfully facilitating better contact between schools and service providers, establishing a system whereby schools can access the right support for children to learn well and for their organisations to flourish.

To date, a high proportion of schools in the pathfinder district have not yet actively engaged with the networking events and workshops. The first interim evaluation report shows that the work had extended to 28 of the 80 schools in the pathfinder District by June 2015. Providers saw the 'Third Sector Marketplace' event in September as an energising and exciting event and a good opportunity to promote services and generate referrals; however they felt that the reach needed to go beyond the 'usual suspects' and it was necessary to continue to use a range of methods to engage with all 80 schools in the pathfinder district.

The leadership roles of the Council and the BEP in particular in the pathfinder district need to be clarified. Strong leadership from the Council's commissioning team has been invaluable to bring about early dialogue between schools and service providers and the emerging Ladywood offer for 0-25 Mental Health but could lead to a perception that the pathfinder is commissioner driven as opposed to community led.

7. Recommendations

Based on what we saw, heard and read we suggest the Council considers the following actions. These are things we think will build on your main strengths

and maximise your effectiveness and capacity to deliver future ambitions and plans for school improvement.

1. Develop a clear education vision and strategy that align BCC's ambition, resources and desired outcomes for the City's children with its wider objectives
2. Provide training and development for all members involved in scrutinising education with clear line of sight from district level to the Council leadership
3. Develop a comprehensive risk assessment for Birmingham as a whole that incorporates all settings, including information relevant to the phase and sector, and this is a shared responsibility with partners
4. Develop the intelligent client role of BCC in relation to the BEP and ensure that resources and ambitions are aligned
5. Determine an effective accountability model for BEP
6. Using learning from the Ladywood pathfinder, further develop the partnership role of BEP to enable schools to better meet the needs of young people within the City
7. Ensure that the Education Improvement Group provides effective and timely challenge where there is evidence of poor governance in schools
8. Ensure that the Education Improvement Group facilitates clarity about respective roles and responsibilities of partners to ensure that its positive impact is sustained
9. Encourage BEP to prioritise school improvement based on a single definitive process for identification of schools and their performance
10. Ensure that BCC staff undertaking visits to settings where there are concerns have the skills and authority to take necessary action

9. Next steps

The Council will undoubtedly wish to reflect on these findings and suggestions before determining how the system wishes to take things forward. As part of the Peer Challenge process, there is an offer of continued activity to support this. I look forward to finalising the detail of that activity as soon as possible.

We are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge to date. Helen Murray, Principal Adviser for the West Midlands is the main contact between Birmingham City Council and the Local Government Association. Helen can be contacted at Helen.Murray@local.gov.uk and can provide access to our resources and any further support.

In the meantime, all of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish you every success going forward. Once again, many thanks for inviting the peer challenge and to everyone involved for their participation.

Yours sincerely

Anne Brinkhoff
Programme Manager – Local Government Support
Local Government Association

Tel: 07766251752
anne.brinkhoff@local.gov.uk