

# Audit Committee Cabinet Member's Assurance Session: Children, Young People and Families

Areas for discussion and notes



**BE BOLD BE BIRMINGHAM**



# Included in this presentation

- Portfolio responsibilities
- Update on External Auditors' recommendations
  - Children's Travel
  - SEND
- Extract from Directorate Assurance statement
  - SEND sufficiency

# Portfolio responsibilities

Lead Member for Children's Services	<p>Political accountability for all the local authority children's services, including education and children's social care.</p> <p>This post is required by law to hold direct local accountability for the effectiveness, availability and value for money of the local authority's children's services (particularly education and children's social care).</p>
Safeguarding Children and Young People	With statutory partners, the safety and wellbeing of all children.
Children's Services	Leadership, strategy and effectiveness of children's services – responding to the needs of all children and young people, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and their families and carers.
Overseeing the Children's Trust	Oversight of the 'client side' role of the Children's Trust to ensure the delivery of agreed outcomes, KPIs and finances within the legal and contractual framework agreed
Overseeing Early Years	Ensuring a sufficiency of places and a citywide Early Years Health and Wellbeing offer.
Corporate Parenting	<p>Political leadership on improving the lives of looked after children.</p> <p>Ensuring all Council members, officers and services understand and actively promote the Council's responsibilities to looked after children</p>

# Portfolio responsibilities (cont)

Lead Member for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion	Lead Member on the SEND agenda across children's agencies and holding officers and partners to account for the delivery of the Birmingham SEND Strategy.
Education of Children and Young People	Political leadership on strategic and statutory duties, including school improvement, school places and travel to and from school. Oversight of Dedicated School's Grant
Youth Engagement and Youth Service	Youth Engagement and Youth Service, along with Lifelong Learning (post 14 skills and adult education) – Clear progression and vocational pathways from education into further and higher education and employment. Provision of all-age guidance, skills development, training and work experience to meet the economic needs of the city now and in the future.
Skills and Entrepreneurship in Schools	Development of 14-19 career pathways, enterprise and entrepreneurship in Birmingham schools.

# External Auditor's Report recommendations (Children's Travel)



## Key Recommendation #01

Independent  
reports into issues  
related to the  
Home to School  
Transport Service

(Improving  
economy,  
efficiency and  
effectiveness)

<b>Recommendation</b>	The independent inquiry that the Council commissioned into the Home to School Transport Service made a series of recommendations that amounted to a significant level of change within the Council's service provision. We recommend that the Council continues to prioritise implementation of the agreed recommendations to address the systemic issues identified.
<b>Impact</b>	The independent inquiry noted that, as the school term in September 2020 began, it became apparent that the basic service provision was inadequate and was not meeting the needs of children, parents or schools. In particular, concerns were noted in relation to safeguarding.
<b>Auditor judgement</b>	The recommendations made by the independent reviewer will result in a significant change to the operations of the service, and should be a priority to the Council.
<b>Summary findings</b>	<p>The Council commissioned the independent inquiry due to known issues in the operation of the service. The inquiry identified eight operational reasons for the service failings in September 2020, seven systemic issues, and some supporting causal factors.</p> <p>Further detail is included on page 23.</p>
<b>Management Comments</b>	The service recognises the requirement to implement the recommendations contained within the report, a number of these have been commenced and new senior interim management appointed to deliver the change and improvement.

# External Auditor's Report recommendations (Children's Travel)



## Key Recommendation #02

Independent  
reports into issues  
related to the  
Home to School  
Transport Service

[Governance]

<b>Recommendation</b>	The independent report that the Council commissioned into the assurances given to Council and its Committees in early 2020 in relation to the Home to School Transport Service identified significant issues within the service, and made a series of recommendations to address these. We recommend that the Council continues to prioritise implementation of the recommendations to address the underlying issues identified.
<b>Impact</b>	The independent review identified significant issues within the service. The full report is still legally privileged at the time of writing this Auditor's Annual Report.
<b>Auditor judgement</b>	The findings of the independent reviewer indicate a significant weakness in the assurance arrangements surrounding the service, and should be a priority to the Council.
<b>Summary findings</b>	<p>The Council commissioned an independent review which identified a number of significant issues for the Council to address, many of which were issues already known to the Council and not adequately addressed. The report was shared with all Councillors by the Director of Children's Services in September 2021, but due to sensitive information contained within the report the circulated document was redacted.</p> <p>Further detail is included on page 23.</p>
<b>Management Comments</b>	Agreed, the service will continue to prioritise implementation of the recommendations to address the underlying issues identified as those affecting the service. They are being incorporated into a service improvement plan which will be signed off and monitored by the DCS and her leadership team and reported to members as part of the usual reporting processes - Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Audit Committee.

# Children's travel – start of term headlines

- Significant progress has been made to mitigate the issues that affected the start of the academic years in 2020 and 2021.
- Comprehensive preparations took place over the summer and the team have been based in designated space at Woodcock Street so that issues could be dealt with promptly and schools visited if necessary.
- Performance has been consistently strong since the start of term.
- 99.5% of routes ran successfully on the first full day and the routes running successfully increased to 99.7% then 99.9% in the days that followed and have remained there consistently.
- Encouraging feedback was received from stakeholders including special school headteachers at the start of term.
- It has been recognised that communication with families, schools and providers has significantly improved.
- The press and social media activity was notably down on previous years and the team received far fewer enquiries and complaints from families.

# Children's travel

- An Improvement Programme was launched in March 2021 to implement the recommendations contained in the Audit report.
- The programme's workstreams are matched to the six themes identified as core areas of concern in the report and also incorporate areas of additional focus on contracts and commercial management, financial efficiencies and policy and compliance.
- The programme board, governed by Sue Harrison, meets on a monthly basis. Progress is reviewed against key performance indicators and is underpinned by an evolving benefits strategy.
- A change to the structure of the service has strengthened the management team and aligned processes enabling the team to work together more effectively.
- Additional work is being undertaken to ensure the service has the right organisational design with key roles, responsibilities, target culture, and leadership to drive improvement within the department.
- Staff capability and capacity is being increased through training, organisational redesign, and enhanced service redesign to deliver the service expected by parents and schools.
- We are building better ways to communicate and are creating focus groups and feedback loops to co-create with children, parents, carers, and suppliers, ensuring the right mechanisms are in place to communicate more effectively with children, parents, carers, schools, and staff.
- Communication with stakeholders regarding changes to service delivery is now much more timely.



# Children's travel (cont)

- There is now a better understanding of responsibilities and what the appropriate governance and oversight should be to allow leadership to have improved confidence that the service is performing well and safely.
- A fixed term Assistant Director role with strategic responsibility that provides the department with direction, focus and robust leadership to ensure effective delivery. Recruitment is underway for this post.
- New safeguarding initiatives, policy and procedures have been introduced to improve governance.
- New processes to strengthen DBS assurance have been agreed. This involves the DBS checking process being undertaken by BCC.
- Complaints are being dealt with efficiently or effectively, are within the timelines of complaints handling data. This function has also recently been moved to the Customer, Communications and Engagement team to ensure alignment with our child centric approach.
- Procurement standards are currently being reviewed with the aim of increasing the quality of services received from operators. The need for improved requirements of suppliers have been taken into account as the programme looks at a suitable replacement for the DPS and additional terms and conditions that can be added to contracts when the current system finishes in 2023.

# Children's travel (cont)

- A new procurement model will look at issuing four-year contracts on an annual basis. This will provide greater consistency in the marketplace and enable new contracts to be reviewed and issued with terms that are suited to market conditions, taking into consideration various variables and cost drivers.
- Contracts will offer suppliers stability and consistency whilst also being heavily weighted towards performance.
- The effort to increase standards now more robust penalties. A historic lack of penalties and fines meant providers were not adequately held accountable for shortcomings and were not always deterred from continuing any bad practices.
- Enhanced quality assurance checks have been put in place to ensure providers meet required standards and promote safeguarding of children.
- A robust mobilisation plan has been delivered successfully, building the foundations for the future transformation activity that will take place with the service.
- We are developing an enhanced, child centric service in a manner that is efficient and economically viable.

# Feedback from the start of term

*"I just wanted to applaud you all for the hard work that you have put in over the summer to finalise our routes. Today was by far the best September return we have had to date."*

**Birmingham Special School**

*"I want to thank you for your support with this. It has been a welcomed change."*

**Parent (following a complaint)**

*"I want to pass on my thanks to travel assist and all their colleagues for all the hard work behind the scenes as we have had a good first week from a transport perspective."*

**Birmingham Special School**

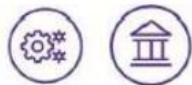
*"I just wanted to say a big thank you for putting my guide back on my route it's all running smoothly again now. Appreciate it so much"*

**Parent (following a complaint)**

*"You are a star. Seriously, I feel you have always been on the ball with your service!!!! Spot On!"*

**Transport Provider**

# External Auditor's Report recommendations (SEND)



## Key Recommendation #03

Arrangements in  
relation to  
required  
improvements in  
SEND services

(Governance &  
Improving  
economy,  
efficiency and  
effectiveness)

<b>Recommendation</b>	As a result of the failure of the Council to address the significant weaknesses identified in the SEND service by Ofsted and the CQC in June 2018 a Commissioner was appointed by the Secretary of State in October 2021. We recommend that the Council works with the Commissioner to deliver the recommendations in the Commissioner's report, to be published in Spring 2022, in addition to delivering the actions in the SEND Improvement Accelerated Progress Plan which are the responsibility of the Council to address these significant weaknesses to ensure that an adequate SEND service is provided to Birmingham's children, young people and their families/carers.
<b>Impact</b>	The Council's SEND service is considered by its regulator to be inadequate and failing Birmingham's children, young people and their families/carers.
<b>Auditor judgement</b>	Based on our review of the Council's governance arrangements, to ensure that the necessary improvements set out in the WSOA were made and the findings of the revisit undertaken by Ofsted and the CQC in May 2021, we are not satisfied that these arrangements were adequate.
<b>Summary findings</b>	<p>We believe that monitoring of the completion of actions in the WSOA and the monitoring visits by the DfE and NHSE lacked sufficient focus on benefits realisation, impact and outcomes which would have underpinned the required improvements in the service.</p> <p>Further detail is included on page 26.</p>
<b>Management Comments</b>	Recommendation agreed and we will be working with the appointed commissioner to deliver the recommendations.

# Update

- [An Accelerated Progress Plan](#) is in place and the SEND Improvement Board meets regularly.
- The DfE appointed SEND Commissioner, John Coughlan, has [published his first report](#).
- The recommendations made by the Commissioner have been fully accepted by the council and an action plan is in place to ensure these are addressed.
- Following the publication of his report, the Commissioner held briefing sessions with a range of stakeholders, including directorate staff and members.

# Extracts from Directorate assurance statement

## Safeguarding and Early Help (s11 return)

*Audit Report (0145/011, 04/10/18) identified that although improvements had been made in since 2016, the arrangements for compilation and submission of the return, organisational changes, in particular to directorate structures and the introduction of the Children's Trust, had adversely impacted on embedding the process.*

# Safeguarding and Early Help (s11 return)

Earlier this year CLT agreed:

- That Sue Harrison, the Council's Director of Children's Services, will undertake the role of City Council senior board level lead to take responsibility for City Council safeguarding arrangements
- To establish a Corporate Safeguarding Network, comprised of nominated safeguarding leads representing all Directorates to take leadership responsibility for safeguarding children within their respective Directorate and drive improvements to safeguarding arrangements for children including safer recruitment, staff training etc. across the Council.
- The Corporate Safeguarding Network will support and monitor progress of a Safeguarding Children Action Plan – the plan will be informed by outstanding action from previous Section 11 Audits and additional action identified including action from internal audits.
- Progress on action to be reported to CLT on a quarterly basis until actions are completed, thereafter an update on the work of the group would be provided quarterly.
- That the role of Directorate Designated Safeguarding Leads is included in the Safeguarding Action Plan and will be taken forward by the Corporate Safeguarding Network.

CLT also supported the development of the draft Corporate Safeguarding Policy on 6th June 2022 - the Corporate Safeguarding Network is currently finalising the Policy in readiness for it to be presented to Cabinet for formal sign off in the New Year.

# Corporate Safeguarding Network – Next steps

- Actions regarding Corporate Safeguarding have been incorporated into the Improving Services for Children, Young People and Families Plan
- Progress will monitored by the Improving Services for Children, Young People and Families Board which has an independent chair.
- We will continue to provide updates to Audit Committee for assurance purposes



# Extracts from Directorate assurance statement

## SEND Sufficiency

*There are significant pressures in respect of the sufficiency of special school places within the city and there is an urgent need to develop a five-year plan that will underpin the commissioning of appropriate special school places for SEND pupils. Officers are working on the strategy and pupil place forecast with a view to providing a first draft during April 2022.*

# SEND Sufficiency update

- A draft SEND Special Schools Sufficiency strategy is currently being reviewed by officers.
- The work on this strategy has incorporated school census data from January 2022, impacting the planned timescales but ensuring the most up to date post-pandemic data was included.
- The strategy will go to Children and Families Capital Board as part of the robust governance arrangements that are in place.

# Application for new SEND free schools

- In the recent [special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\) and alternative provision \(AP\) green paper](#), the government set out plans to build 60 new centrally-delivered special and AP free schools across the country.
- Local authorities were invited to bid for up to two new special schools. Following the recent review of our SEND forecasts, Birmingham City Council has asked for special dispensation to bid for three given the demand we are experiencing and expecting to continue.
- BCC has submitted initial pre-applications (expressions of interest) for the following SEND free schools:
  - Two autism spectrum condition (ASC) designated 3-19 schools of 400 places each. One located in the north of Birmingham, the other in the south of Birmingham.
  - One social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)/ASC designated 14-19 school with 120 places, located as near to the city centre as possible.
- An initial [consultation](#) was launched on 8 September and will run until 5 October 2022.
- Further consultation will be undertaken if our applications are successful (the deadline for applications is 21 October 2022).

# Current Special School Expansion plans

School	Needs type for new cohort	Additional Capacity	Expansion proposal	Timetable
Baskerville School	ASC/ Complex-Secondary	20 new places ((2 x 8) + (1 x 4)) + 4 replacement places (to address overcrowding).	Modular On-site build	Sep-22
Oscott Manor	ASC- Secondary/ Post 16	28 places for Sept 2022.	Ryland Road Nearby Site	Sep-22
Queensbury School	SLD/ ASC - Post 16	84-96 total places. (20 for Sept 2022; 64-76 for Sept 2023)	Temporary + Osborne Road Site refurb	Sep-22 to Sep-23
Pines School (The)	ASC	10 places for Sept 2022, additional 20 places for Sept 2023.	On site expansion x 2 Portacabins and improvements	Sep-22 to Sep-23
Uffculme	ASC	10 places.	Modular On-site build	Sep-22 to Sep-23

# Future Projects

- Ongoing discussions with special schools to create additional capacity
  - Expansion and changes to age range
  - Relocation, expansion and change in designation
  - Relocation of Post 16 provision
  - Rationalisation of site to create additional capacity
- Resource Bases
  - Focussed work with mainstream schools to fill gaps in our resource base provision through Expressions of Interest