

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC REPORT

Report to:	CABINET	<i>Exempt information paragraph number – if private report:</i>
Report of: Date of Decision:	Peter Hay, Strategic Director for People 26 January 2016	
SUBJECT:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PEER REVIEW OF THE EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS STRATEGY AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN	
Key Decision: No	Relevant Forward Plan Ref:	
If not in the Forward Plan: (please "X" box)	Chief Executive approved <input type="checkbox"/> O&S Chairman approved <input type="checkbox"/>	
Relevant Cabinet Member(s) or Relevant Executive Member for Local Services:	Councillor Brigid Jones, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services	
Relevant O&S Chairman:	Councillor Susan Barnett, Education and Vulnerable Children	
Wards affected:	All	

1. Purpose of report:
1.1 This report details the findings of the Local Government Association peer review of the Birmingham Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan. The review took place from 16-20 November 2015.

2. Decision(s) recommended:
2.1 That Cabinet notes the findings of the peer review and the important role of local government partners in peer-to-peer support for improvement.
2.2 That Cabinet notes that a refreshed improvement plan will be presented to Cabinet for approval, and be monitored by the Cabinet Member, Children’s Services and the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

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3. Consultation

3.1 Internal

The findings of the peer review have been shared widely with Members and staff.

3.2 External

The findings of the peer review have been shared widely with schools, partner agencies and all those who participated in the review.

4. Compliance Issues:

4.1 Are the recommended decisions consistent with the Council's policies, plans and strategies?

The Council Business Plan 2015+ makes explicit reference to improving support to schools, including ensuring good governance and ensuring Birmingham children are safe and well protected.

The Birmingham Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan was agreed with the Education Commissioner, Sir Mike Tomlinson, and signed off by the Improvement Quartet in December 2014.

4.2 Financial Implications (Will decisions be carried out within existing finance and Resources?)

There is budgeted funding to support ongoing implementation of the refreshed Education Improvement Plan in 2016/17.

4.3 Legal Implications

The Local Authority has statutory duties in relation to promoting high standards in schools and among other providers so that children and young people achieve well and fulfil their potential as defined by section 13A of the Education Act 1996. This includes support for schools causing concern as set out in Part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The Education Act 2002 places duties on local authorities to make arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

4.4 Public Sector Equality Duty

The review was commissioned as a contribution towards improving arrangements for leadership of education, relationships with schools, and governance in schools. This has clear relevance to safeguarding of children and young people in schools, including those who are most vulnerable.

5. Relevant background/chronology of key events:

5.1 The Birmingham Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan was published in December 2014 following a series of reports that identified serious safeguarding and governance concerns in a number of Birmingham schools.

5.2 To help us secure improvements, and as part of sector-led improvement, the LGA were commissioned to undertake this review of the above-mentioned Plan. As part of the review, a team of eight peers with relevant experience and expertise, drawn together through the LGA, undertook a range of interviews and focus groups during the week of 16-20 November 2015.

5.3 The peer team was asked to challenge our progress in implementing five of the twelve workstreams in the Plan:

- Build confidence in BCC's ability to lead the overall system of education through a relentless focus on core duties.
- Ensure that there are robust and effective governance arrangements in place and working effectively in schools.
- 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.
- Work with partners to deliver improvements in schools.
- Drive innovation and improvement through new district structures that promote collaborative leadership and enhance accountability.

In challenging these, we asked the peers to focus on progress, outcomes and impact of our actions.

5.4 The key messages from the review are set out below:

The Council has made good progress in progressing work across all of the five workstreams 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 the lives of children and young people.

- 5.5 In addition to these key messages, they recommended some corporate reflections for the Council 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.
- 5.6 More detailed findings covering the Council's leadership of education, strengthening school governance, safeguarding in schools, improving schools, local leadership and accountability are set out in the appended letter.
- 5.7 The findings recommend that the City Council considers the following actions.
- 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.
 - Provide training and development for all Members involved in scrutinising education with clear line of sight from district level to the Council leadership.
 - 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.
 - Develop the intelligent client role of BCC in relation to the BEP and ensure that resources and ambitions are aligned.
 - Determine an effective accountability model for BEP.
 - 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.
 - Ensure that the Education Improvement Group [a forum comprising senior representatives from the City Council, Ofsted, Department for Education, BEP and the Regional Schools Commissioner's office] provides effective and timely challenge where there is evidence of poor governance in schools.
 - Ensure that the Education Improvement Group facilitates clarity about respective roles and responsibilities of partners to ensure that its positive impact is sustained.

- Encourage BEP to prioritise school improvement based on a single definitive process for identification of schools and their performance.
- Ensure that BCC staff undertaking visits to settings where there are concerns have the skills and authority to take necessary action.

5.8 The outcomes of the review are being taken into account in the future planning of children’s services and a refreshed improvement plan for education. This will be embedded in the Future Council model and the education business plan for 2016/17.

6. Evaluation of alternative option(s):

6.1 The action plan will include a proposal for the future operating model for education.

7. Reasons for Decision(s):

7.1 The review findings are appended to this report as part of a commitment that it should be available in public. The findings provide some assurance of the work already done in putting in place systems for school improvement and safeguarding. They highlight positive recent developments and outline challenges and key issues and will be of importance in the future planning of the service.

Signatures

Date

Cabinet Member, Children’s
Services
Councillor Brigid Jones

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Strategic Director for People
Peter Hay

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List of Background Documents used to compile this Report:

- LGA letter to the Chief Executive dated 7 December 2015.
- Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan.
- Report of the Improvement Quartet to City Council 1 December on the Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan.

List of Appendices accompanying this Report (if any):

1. LGA letter to the Chief Executive dated 7 December 2015

Report Version	6	Dated	8 January 2016
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