



Annual Report

2022 - 2023

July 2023



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST



This Foreword is an extract from the Birmingham Children's Trust Business Plan 2023/24

As children and young people in care and with care experience, having a sense of belonging and identity is important. Our groups meet regularly throughout the year and all our groups come together in the school holidays as well. We decided to come up with a name for all our groups. We split into smaller groups and came up with some great ideas; we all chose the one we thought was best. We decided on: **U&U - United and Unique 'Empowering minds of the future'**

Our goal is to:

- Educate people about our experiences
- Make change
- Provide for everyone
- Empower those who feel isolated
- Improve mental health
- Boost people's confidence
- Give them experiences they'll never forget

Why do we attend?

There are lots of reason we attend our groups:

"It's nice to talk to people who get it...people in the same situation as you and not be judged. Outside they might judge you, but not here"

When we are together at the participation meetings, we feel listened to, we are around other people, with similar experiences and we can share our views. It's good to have a voice and to feel that we each make a difference and make change together.

Children & young people making change

We have a great relationship with the Practice Academy and key people in the Trust. They enjoy working with us and really listen to what we say and we feel like changes happen. Our groups are recognised by so many people and organisations who now come to us and we have shared our views about LOADS of different topics, making lots of change.

We make change in lots of different ways and we look at what things are most important to change and these become **Our Campaigns**. Professional honesty is

one of these. We know you think you are protecting us but it's our life and we want and need to know. We have also done lots of work to improve children's experience of coming into care.

We have done a huge amount of **Co-Production**, where the Trust and other organisations want children to work on specific things. We have influenced the Trust's Practice Standards, designed the animation for the Practice Model (one of us even went to the studio and did the voice over!) and influenced the Child's Journey work. We have a Children's Rights Officer who knows what we want and who sits on working groups for us and keeps our views central.

Our young parents have done so much work and have co-produced the Perinatal Pathway work with the NHS. This is making sure young parents get the right support they need both before and after pregnancy. There is still work being done, which includes developing training videos for midwives.

We have done lots of work on health and mental health, which is something that we are all really passionate about. We have helped in the design of the new Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Hub (a single point of access to all services) as well as the new TESS therapy space and 18+ drop-in service. We are working with the NHS to design their new Priority Card for care experienced young people which gives them access to a better level of service and encourages 'trauma informed' thinking.

On top of this we have done loads of **Consultation**, where we are supported to share our experiences so that people see things from our shoes. We have helped with the new fostering service welcome into care pack, introduction profiles for foster carers and social workers, introduction video for the IRO service, the Local and Regional Care Leavers Offer, Annual health reviews for the children in care nurses and so much more!!

We have continued **interviewing** for lots of positions from social workers to senior managers. We have also had impact through our **training** offer. This takes our voices and experiences (through in person, video and audio clips) and directly challenges how attendees think and work. Oh, and we even presented to **Ofsted** on all the work we have done, we think they were left impressed!

The year ahead

We work on all these things, knowing that we are making a difference and that the Trust really listens and works hard to make the changes that we say we need. There is so much more to come for this year, one of the campaigns we have just started is on Transitions and when we leave care. We have two 'Takeover Boards' a year at the Corporate Parenting Board and this will be something we hold our corporate parents responsible for!

Signed on behalf of all our children and young people's groups and forums

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1. Introduction

In March 2023 the Trust was inspected by Ofsted and as a result social care services in Birmingham are now judged to be Good. This comes after a decade of 'Inadequate' judgements up to 2018. In effect, services have improved to Good in a five-year, single inspection cycle. That two of these five years were spent in unprecedented circumstances of pandemic, lockdown and post-pandemic readjustment, the achievement is all the more noteworthy.

In March 2023 Birmingham City Council decided that rather than enact the second five year term of our contract they would instead agree a new 10 year contract term. This reflects the confidence that has built in the Trust over its first five years of life, as well as the depth of relationship with the Council, across both elected members and officers.

Neither of these would have been possible without some exemplary leadership and management, and without the commitment of every single member of the Trust team. The feedback we received from inspectors about the commitment, dedication and skill of the people in the Trust with whom they met was remarkable and consistent, and as Chair and Chief Executive we could not be more proud of everyone.

As we embark on our next set of challenges and priorities our aim is to continue to drive ourselves to be the best we can be. Our focus on quality of practice is unremitting, and we will of course respond to the recommendations Ofsted have given us. In addition, we must complete our work on the Child's Journey programme, using the intelligence we have gathered to shape the organisation for its next phase to deliver maximum effectiveness, efficiency and value for money.

The improving quality of relationship between the Council and the Trust was recognised by Ofsted, and we want to further deepen this critical strategic partnership, as well as with other key partners, across the public and third sector, to cement and drive improving service and outcomes for the city's most vulnerable children, young people and families. The Year of Change for Children is a key opportunity to promote this.

We have reached an important milestone as an organisation. We can be pleased, and proud, but no less determined to push on, to be the best we can be as we continue our journey.

The coming year brings much change for the Trust: a new contract with the Council, the DfE Improvement Direction lifted, our formal Regional Partnership support to Solihull, and significant leadership changes, as Andrew Christie retires, Andy Couldrick moves from Chief Executive to Chair, and as we look to recruit both a new Chief Executive and a new Director of Practice.

This report, we hope, sets out a firm and confident base for the Trust that enables us to embark on these new challenges and opportunities with confidence.

Andrew Christie
Chair



Andy Couldrick
Chief Executive



2. Summary of the Trust's performance

The Trust has performed well, in 2022/23, in relation to the contractual performance indicators.

Areas of particularly strong performance in the year have included placement stability for children in care; care leavers living in suitable accommodation; timely reviews for children in care and initial child protection conferences.

Challenges have included:

- timescales for adoption: the indicator measures over a three-year period. Evidence supports that current performance is good and the performance indicator will improve over the course of the coming year as a result.
- agency social workers: this has remained persistently higher than we would want. While we perform better than regional and statistical neighbours, we continue to refine and improve our offer to make the Trust an attractive place to come, and to stay, to build a good social work career.

Summary of Trust performance 2022/23

PI	Measure	Number of months where target met or within tolerances last 12 months	% where target met or within tolerances last 12 months
1	% of all referrals with a decision within 24 hours	11	92%
2	% of re-referrals to children's social care within 12 months	12	100%
3	% assessments completed within 45 working days	11	92%
4	% Initial CP conferences held within 15 working days	12	100%
5	% of children who became the subject of a CP plan for a second or subsequent time within the last 2 years	12	100%
6	% of children (under 16 years) who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more, and in the same placement (or placed for adoption) continuously for 2 years or more	12	100%
7	% children experiencing 3 or more moves in a year	12	100%
8	% of children in care reviews held on time	12	100%
9	% of care leavers who are in education, employment, and training (EET)	12	100%
10	% of care leavers who are living in suitable accommodation (19-21)	12	100%
11	Average time between a child coming into care and being placed with an adoptive family (A2)	0	0%
12	Number of children who have been adopted in year or who leave care	N/A	N/A
13	% of agency social workers (including team managers)	0	0%
14	Average caseload of qualified social workers	12	100%
15	% of social workers who have had supervision (in month)	8	67%

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

As well as the performance measures, the Trust has a well-embedded Quality Assurance framework, overseen by the Practice Hub. There is a wider range of performance audit undertaken, and the learning from audit feeds back into practice to drive improvement. Reports on our quality assurance work are shared at the Operational Commissioning Group.

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

A refreshed set of KPIs has been agreed for 2023/24.

3. Governance and relationships

The Trust is owned by the Council. But its day-to-day operational delivery is controlled by the Trust Executive Team which is accountable to the Trust Board in order to ensure operational independence. The role of the Board is to set the strategic aims of the Trust, oversee the management of the business and hold the Executive Team to account. It is the responsible body for the performance of the Trust in terms of delivering its legal and contractual obligations and achieving outcomes for children in Birmingham.

With the removal in May 2023 of the statutory Direction children's social care and family support services are no longer subject to Government intervention.

The governance arrangements for the Trust are set out in the Articles of Association and its scheme of delegation. The Service Delivery Contract details how the Trust will work with the Council to ensure the priorities and objectives specified within the contract are delivered, how decisions are made and how the Trust is held to account. The Council retains "reserved powers" for certain significant matters including, for example, approval of this Business Plan.

The Trust Board of Directors has a wide portfolio of expertise and knowledge in children's services, commercial, financial and other disciplines. The Board provides support and challenge on the direction and strategy of the Trust. The volume of work generated for Trust NEDs, and a wish to improve the diversity of the Board, has led to agreement to increasing by one the number of NEDs supporting the Children's Trust, in agreement with the City Council and DfE.

The Board will therefore consist of a chair and 8 non-executive directors, one of whom is appointed by the Council. Details of current Board members are available on the Trust Website at:

https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/who_we_are.

The Trust Board has established the following committees:

- Finance and Resources.
- Performance and Quality Assurance.
- Workforce.
- Nominations and Remuneration.

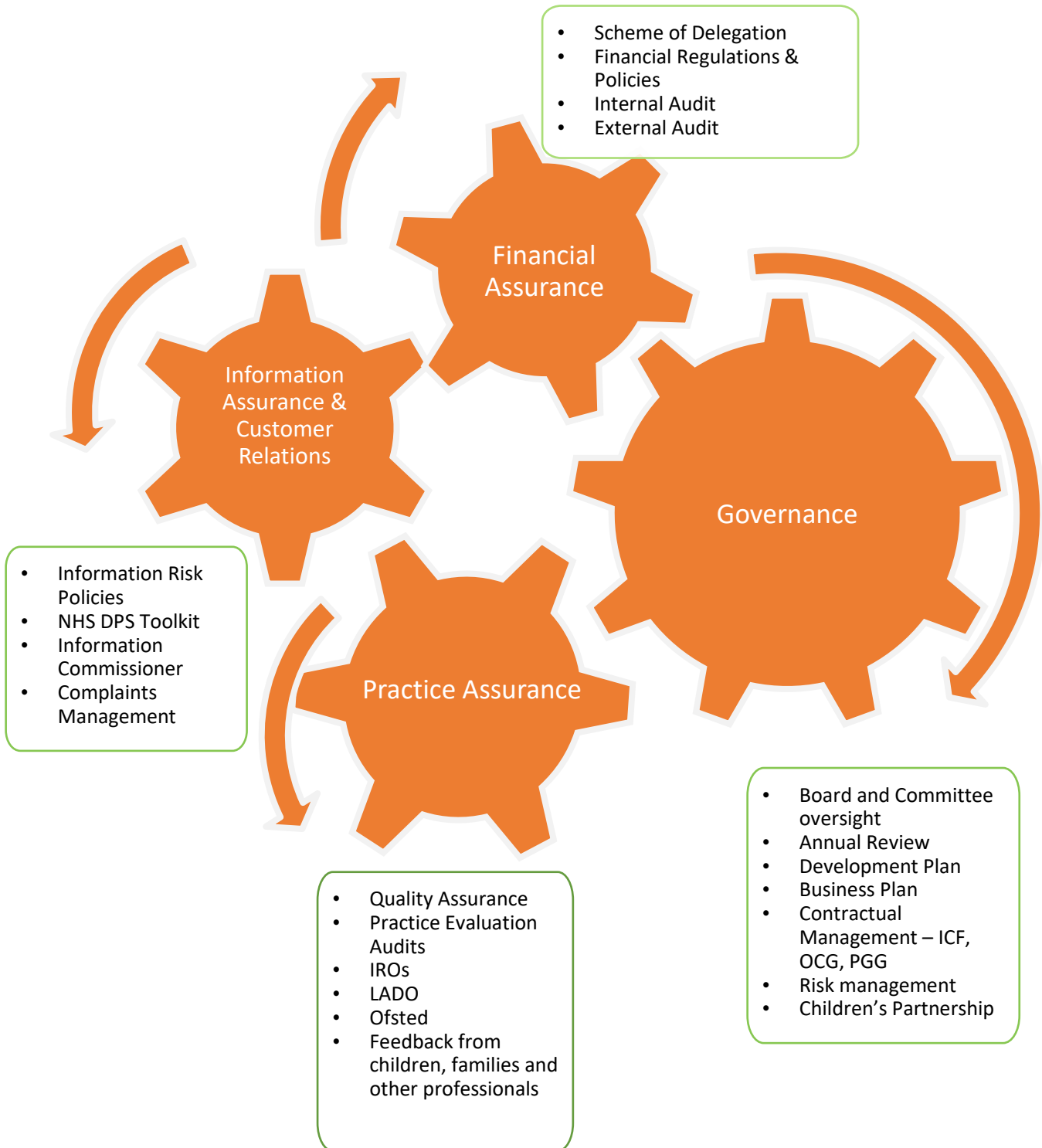
The governance arrangements between the Council, Trust and DfE, have worked effectively during the Trust's first five years. The framework of Operational Commissioning Group, Trust Partnership Governance Group and routine engagement at Overview and Scrutiny, alongside regular meetings between the Trust Chief Executive and the Council Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Lead Member, have together proved successful in ensuring that the Council is well informed, and the Trust held accountable for delivering the right results and the

necessary improvements.

The Trust's Executive Directors consist of the Chief Executive, the Director of Practice, the Director of Commissioning & Corporate Parenting and the Director of Finance & Resources. The Executive provides management oversight of operational activities of the Trust under a scheme of delegation approved by the Trust Board.

Quality Assurance Framework

The framework below sets out how the Trust assures itself about performance, governance and other key matters.



4. Summary of the Council's performance of its obligations

The Council retains statutory accountability for children's services, and continues to provide and commission all those services for children that are not within the Trust: education support, school safeguarding, special educational needs and disabilities, school admissions and place planning, virtual school for children in care, and early years services.

Improved outcomes for children, young people and families depend upon the Council and the Trust establishing and maintaining strong and effective partnership and joint working arrangements.

These 'dependencies' have been set out in the Service Specification of the Trust Service Delivery Contract. These reflect arrangements and services for children that the Council must put in place to enable the Trust to achieve its priorities and performance targets, and include:

- ensuring all children have a school place.
- ensuring where children are not in school, support is provided to help them return to school.
- ensuring all children have 25 hours education a week.
- where children are excluded, removed from roll or otherwise prevented from attending education full-time, the Council will speedily make alternative arrangements.
- that vulnerable children between the ages of two and four have access to free day nursery provision.
- adequate housing for families in need.
- an improved early support and local offer for children with special educational needs and disabilities: this area needs to improve following most recent Ofsted inspections of SEND.
- provision of the Virtual School for our children in care, ensuring children in care, adopted and 'care experienced' children make the best possible progress and receive appropriate support to enhance their potential in school.
- youth services that can be mobilised to support the city's most vulnerable young people in the community.
- further education, training and access to employment support.

With the new leadership at the helm for children and families (including the Director of Children's Services since November 2021), there is a clear recognition of the interrelationship of both the Council and Trust to achieve the very best outcomes for Birmingham's children and young people.

5. Cost of performing the services in 2022/23

The Trust's financial position for 2022/23 has been very challenging not least as there was no real increase in the core contract sum for 2022/23, thus creating a "baked in" pressure of some £9.8m (5%) being carried forward from 2021/22. The forecast rise in the care population has again proven to be very accurate, however the number of asylum-seeking children has increased significantly and was not planned. This together with complexity of need and a continued rise in the number of children in high-cost placements has resulted in a gross cost pressure of £26.7m for 2022/23. Management action and efficiencies delivered across the Trust, together with additional grant from the Household Support Fund and use of the Supporting Families reserve, has provided off-setting savings of £2.7m, reducing the overall deficit to £24.0m (10%).

The cost of performing the services in 2022/23 can be summarised as follows:

	Budget 2022/23	Outturn Variance 2023/23	Outturn Variance 2021/22
	£m	£m	£m
Pay	107.8	2.6	-2.7
Placement costs ¹	100.4	26.7	8.5
Other costs	30.3	-3.1	1.4
Total Expenditure	238.5	26.2	7.2
Funded by:			
Contract sum from the Council ²	218.2	24.0	3.4
Other income and contributions ³	20.3	2.2	3.8
Total Income	238.5	26.2	7.2

The capital programme has helped to deliver a number of improvements, key elements of the capital investment for 2022/23 included:

- creation of new residential facilities for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties which consists of a main hub at Bridgelands (former Braymoor property operated by Priory) which will then be supplemented by up to four satellite homes.
- further investment in our existing residential care homes including replacement of outdated kitchens and bathrooms, and replacement of the heating system at Edgewood Road.
- the opening and repurposing of Trinity Road for support to vulnerable young people.

- the relocation of Therapeutic & Emotional Support Services (TESS) from King Edward Buildings to Bournbrook on an interim basis.
- the start of refurbishment work at Lifford House including the opening of a new child protection conferencing facility in the South, finally fulfilling a commitment to improve the environment and experience of children and families in that part of the city.

Construction inflation and the failure to attract DfE capital funding in the latest round of bids to residential beds has affected the capital programme in that the Trust has had to absorb this within its existing funding envelope. The Trust is in discussion with the Council about making a business case for more funding as well as making enquiries as to future DfE funding rounds.

6. Summary of any changes to the Agreement agreed during 2022/23

A change to Schedule 5 (Payment Mechanism) has been agreed in principle which will provide for an increase in the contract sum for a variance in the number of children in care and asylum-seeking children beyond a forecast tolerance.

The Council and Trust completed a review of a number of support service agreements, including those affected by the replacement of SAP by Oracle with effect from the "go live" at 7 April 2022.

7. Demand for services in 2022/23 and the expected demand for the services in 2023/24; social, demographic or other relevant factors which affected the services in 2022/23 and/or may affect the services in 2023/24

Demand for services has continued to increase with the care population rising to 2221 by the end of March 2023 representing a rate of 77 per 10,000. This still compares favourably statistical neighbours (88 per 10,000).

The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has reached a record level with 167 children as at 31 March 2023 compared to 107 the year before, which is causing a sufficiency and financial pressure, particularly given the costs for those young people over the age of 18 years are not fully covered by the Home Office Grant.

The demographic trend in recent years in Birmingham has seen the overall child population increase by around 1% per annum. The current rate of increase in the care population (including UASC) is now 5.3% which is caused by both demographic and social-economic factors. There is a concern that the current cost of living crisis and the financial pressure on household incomes is at the worst since 2008. The combined effect is expected to lead to higher levels of social deprivation during 2023/24, with a negative impact on the demand for children's social care.

Within this context the numbers of contacts per week over the last 12 months has increased by 5%. We consider that the increase has been suppressed by Early Help services that are now absorbing a proportion of need in the order of c1800 referrals per month.

Referrals have however increased by c40% and year-on-year and assessments undertaken by 29%. This reflects the growing prevalence of need in the city and the continued challenge the Trust has in maintaining quality provision and meeting need in an increasingly challenging demand environment.

8. Effects of any changes in children's social care legislation or guidance on the delivery of the services and/or any actual or anticipated change in law and the implications of such changes

In September 2021 the Government amended the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, to make it a condition of placing in "other arrangements settings" (ie. independent and semi-independent settings) under section 22C(6)(d) of the Children Act 1989 that the child is aged 16 or over. The effect of this is that local authorities must place children in care who are under the age of 16 in either foster care or a children's home that is registered with Ofsted.

These regulatory changes have driven demand for regulated children's homes nationally and sit alongside a number of other challenges that include:

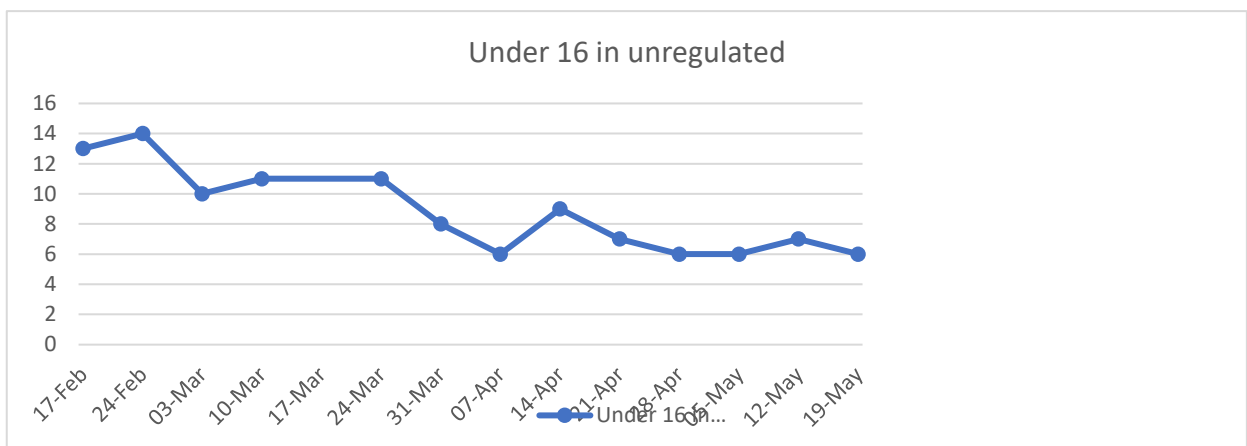
- a post-pandemic increase in demand, as witnessed nationally.
- high number of beds suspended/restricted by Ofsted (c170+ in last 4 months).
- sufficiency challenges in relation to tier 4 provision.
- availability of secure beds.
- significant increase of 56% increase in the number of UASCs from the position in 2022.
- a 15% increase in the number of children from other local authorities placed in Birmingham.

The following is a highlight of some of the steps taken:

- Bridgeland's emergency children home opened April 2023.
- capital investment secured for the delivery of 4 further homes scheduled for 2024.
- completed over 28 market engagement meetings with Birmingham Providers with 30% of placements made with Providers who attended.
- worked with a number of Providers to commission emergency 'solo' placements for under 16s.
- recruited an interim HoS and team to build sufficiency and oversee all aspects of unregulated care.
- worked with over 30 homes where planning applications have been submitted, to build relationships and grow capacity.
- worked with lead member with the planning department to support providers with planning applications.
- commissioned additional providers specifically for UASC in response to a significant increase in demand
- service specifications developed and tendered to increase capacity of 'Regulated' provision

- established monthly data set for all placements/commissioning activity to identify 'ebb' and 'flow' in demand.
- invested in a new HoS to focus on 'step down' and use of the 'BERRI' tool to assist with family finding.
- worked in partnership with Health to develop the revised 'IROC' - a CAMHS model which supports children with complex needs living in residential care.

Despite all endeavours Birmingham has still had a small contingent of under 16-year-olds placed in unregulated settings. This number has however reduced over the course of the year and we remain confident over the next 12 months it will continue to reduce further.



9. Strategic priorities and outcomes for 2023/24

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to Ofsted's recommendations following inspection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services further strengthened in line with Ofsted's findings Compliance with 'best practice'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to HMIP's recommendations following inspection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further improvements in our Youth Justice service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completing the work on the 'Child's Journey' programme, leading to a changed shape of organisation geared toward further improving our effectiveness and our efficiency, and enabling us to respond to the implementation of national changes following the Care Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services organised to deliver great value for money, effectiveness and efficiency Design built on feedback from children, young people, parents, carers, Trust staff and partners Strengthened leadership, management and professional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working within the key partnerships to drive system improvement and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement of the ambitions of the new Children's Partnership and Plan Improved opportunities and outcomes for children as part of the 'Year of Change for Children' led by the Children's Partnership Support real accountability for services and outcomes: Trust and partners Support stronger joined-up efforts to tackle key issues and risks for children as set out by the Children's Partnership and the Safeguarding Children Partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building our relationship as strategic partners with the Council, and demonstrating value for money to our commissioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened collaboration on key shared priorities: SEND; Elective Home Education and Children Missing from Education Transparency and partnership in the management of our commissioner/provider relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing a formal Improvement Support partnership with Solihull MBC, ensuring no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for Trust staff and managers to share learning with a neighbouring authority Opportunity for greater collaboration, capitalising on our shared relationships: NHS,

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
<p>detriment to Birmingham whilst gaining from the opportunities such a partnership brings</p>	<p>Police</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External financial support to deliver package of support • Shared learning opportunities • Enhanced reputation for Birmingham and for the Trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and managing some critical transitions in the Trust, in relation to changes in senior leadership and governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions managed in a carefully planned way so as to minimise disruption within the Trust and between the Trust and its partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, as service provider and as employer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments and services that address EDI and its impact on children with whom we work • Maintaining progress on our challenge to become an anti-racist employer and service provider • Improving our diversity at Board level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to find new and better ways to recruit and retain social workers, residential and family support workers, and carers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved brand and marketing 'presence' • Reduced reliance on agency workforce • More children placed with Trust foster and adoptive carers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Trust, with the Council, will complete a review of the short breaks offer available to children with additional needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are two elements to this review: the 'universal offer', which the Council is leading, and the targeted offer the Trust provides to children and families with whom the Trust is working (under section 17 of the Children Act 1989)

10. Results of any audits or surveys carried out during 2022/23

Veritau completed a number of internal audits during 2022/23 as follows:

Audit	Status	Assurance rating
Oracle (1B) Programme implementation	Final	No Opinion Given
Foster carer payments (follow-up)	Final	No Opinion Given
Covid-19 emergency payments (follow-up)	Final	No Opinion Given
Business continuity management	Final	Reasonable Assurance

A series of recommendations were made in relation to the above and appropriate management actions agreed and reported to the Finance & Resources Committee.

Internal audits in progress during 2022/23 but not completed or finalised include the following:

- Purchase cards.
- Special Guardianship Orders.

The three-year strategic plan for internal audit work has been refreshed and agreed with the Head of Internal Audit at Veritau and work planned for 2023/24 includes:

- Cybersecurity (access controls – ECINS for Early Help).
- Starters and leavers – follow up.
- Key financial systems health check.
- Section 17 payments.
- Regional Adoption Agency – post-implementation review.

There were no external surveys completed during 2022/23.

11. Outcomes of any rectification plans

There were no rectification plans required in 2022/23.

12. High-level review of applicable Central Government funding generally, including details of any anticipated Central Government funding (or changes to that funding) directed to the services in 2022/23 and/or 2023/24 or future contract years where applicable

The Trust receives payment from the Council in respect of services provided under the contract for which the Council receives Central Government grant funding. A summary of the key grants for 2022/23 and the expected funding levels for 2023/24 is set out below.

- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) 2022/23 actual core grant received was £7.6m and expected 2023/24 is £8.2m, an increase of £0.6m.
- Youth Justice Board (YJB) 2022/23 actual core grant received was £2.3m; we are still awaiting formal notification of the 2023/24 allocation.

During the financial year ending 31 March 2023 the Trust also received core funding of £5.0m from the Supporting Families (previously titled Troubled Families) Programme via the Council. The Supporting Families Programme is expected to continue for the length of the current Government's term.

13. Summary of the outcome of any surveys of service users, and relevant stakeholders and third parties in relation to the services

Overview

The trends and themes coming from the feedback from children, young people, parents/carers, professional partners and other service users are very consistent with the themes in the last annual report, and again highlight staff excellence in working relationally, building positive relationships with service users, and being able to support service user needs. Areas for improvement were drawn from a small number of comments and varied between services. We have learned through feedback that there are opportunities to strengthen how we use our systems to correspond with people who use our services. We are now looking at how we use digital technology to ensure that meeting information and reports are sent to children and families. This is in response to feedback that we have received.

Response rates for some feedback have started to dip, and we are exploring new and different methods better to engage our service users.

Key to response rate descriptors:

Almost all: 91-100%

Majority: 71-90%

Most: 51-70%

Some: 16-50%

Small number: 0-15%

Child Protection Meetings – Feedback from Parents/Carers and Professionals

The Child Protection Service survey captured feedback from parents/carers and professional partners that attend the child protection conference meetings, focusing on their experiences of attending these conferences as an opportunity to have their concerns heard, to understand the running of the meetings, and to assure ourselves that the outcomes of these meetings are beneficial to understand next steps. Where possible there are tablet devices available in the meeting room for parents to give online confidential feedback when the meeting ends. Parents and professionals are emailed with a link to the online survey. Between April 2022-23, 26 parents/carers and 440 professionals have completed surveys.

Parent and carer feedback tells us that most receive a copy of the social work report prior to the meeting, and most understand some or all of the report, though only some receive help to understand it. Some parents/carers report having a conversation with the Chair in the week prior to the meeting and the majority of those felt the Chair helped them to understand the reason for and what would happen at the meeting, as well as a chance to ask questions. During the meeting, most parents/carers were able to speak first, the majority understood what was being discussed and most felt they were treated with respect, though this was variable. The majority of parents/carers understood the outcome of the meeting, but fewer understood the plan moving forward and what actions they or others need to take, suggesting there may be difficulty translating the outcome of the meeting into a plan and again into specific actions, or that these steps could be clearer. Open comments suggest there has been a variable experience of feeling heard and that all opinions are able to be expressed, some finding it very balanced while others have shared feeling less able to express the entirety of their experience or opinion. Engagement from parents/carers continues to be a challenge, given the nature of these meetings.

Professional feedback tells us that almost all Chairs are able to manage the timings of the meeting well, give everybody the opportunity to speak, and that concerns were taken seriously. Almost all felt that meetings maintained a focus on the needs, safety and concerns for the child and majority felt that the child(ren)'s voice was heard at the meeting. Post-meeting, almost all understood the outcomes of the meeting, the plan going forward, and what actions they needed to take to help support the family. There is work to ensure parents/carers are understanding the plan and actions as well eg. in accessible language or terms of reference. Open comments suggest the Chairs are generally empathetic, supportive and relational, but that having the correct meeting admin (eg. meeting links) and information shared in good time prior to the meeting could be improved/more consistent.

Young People Review Meetings

The Independent Reviewing Service survey is for children and young people to provide feedback about their experience of review meetings and working with their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). Young people are invited to complete the survey via a text message to their own or their carer's mobile phone, with the

chance to win a £20 prize drawer love2shop shopping vouchers. This has now been completed by 187 children and young people, with 77 completed between April 2022 – April 2023.

The majority of children and young people agreed their IRO always listened to them and involved them in decisions. Most said someone always contacted them for their views when they cannot attend their review and that most are always briefed about what happened at their review if they cannot attend. The majority also understood the decisions made at meetings. Most said they were happy with how often they saw their IRO, but some would like more contact. When children and young people did not attend the most common reasons were that they were happy and did not feel they needed the meeting, did not know about the meeting or found them boring. For those that did attend some or all of the meeting, the most common experience of the meetings was feeling involved, happy, supported and listened to – a positive overall experience. Open comments do suggest that where young people have had a less positive meeting experience there are areas for improvement in feeling listened to and actions taken based on what is shared. Generally, however, young people like their IROs but would like more information sharing.

Annual Foster Carer Survey November 2022

Each year Birmingham Fostering Agency ask their foster carers for feedback and received 33 responses for the fifth instalment of this survey in September 2022. This year Birmingham Fostering Agency also introduced the first survey to obtain feedback from children and young people in foster care. However, as there were only two responses these are not summarised here as they would not be representative.

Overall, the majority of carers have good working relationships with both their child's social worker and their supervising social worker, though they seem to have a less positive and sometimes more challenging relationship with their child's social worker. For the child's social worker, carers noted particularly strong practice in listening to what the children have to say, but one key development area is around contact schedules. For the supervising social worker, carers found they were easy to contact, but there were slightly fewer carers who felt listened to and involved in decisions than in previous feedback. Most carers are satisfied with the frequency of visits from the children's social worker (of which the majority are happening at 6-weeks or less), and almost all carers were satisfied with the frequency of visits/contact from their supervising social worker.

The majority of carers were positive about the guidance and support they received on a range of topics including education, family time, the staying put policy and dealing with allegations, with almost all carers happy with the advice around health. The majority of carers were also satisfied with the advice and support they received from other professionals, though there was some variation across the services: all carers were satisfied with support from the Youth Offending Service, but Advocacy and Leaving Care had the lowest levels of satisfaction. Access to the Therapeutic

Emotional Support Service (TESS) and CAHMS services, however, was felt by some/most carers to be difficult.

Almost all carers are invited to Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), Personal Education Plan (PEP) and Children in Care meetings, the majority are invited to care planning and sustainability meetings, and most are invited to planned disruption, complex care and pathway review meetings. It is important all carers are invited to the core meetings, and pathway review meetings were the least well invited. Of those that do attend, the majority – almost all carers feel they are able to fully participate and engage at these meetings.

Almost all carers were satisfied with the annual review process, an improvement from 2021. The majority of carers had an up-to-date training plan and felt that this met their development needs. The majority of carers were very positive about the standard of training provided by Birmingham's Fostering Agency, feeling that the training provided was of good quality and supporting them to be effective carers.

Almost all carers were members of Foster Talk, and the majority of carers were members of Birmingham Foster Carers Association. Most carers would rate the support from these memberships as 4+/5.

Three key themes emerged from comments: (i) carers overall have very positive experiences, but do not always feel as though they are treated as professionals and do not always feel valued and appreciated; (ii) changes in allocated workers have the knock-on effect of workers not knowing the children well; and, (iii) carers' input and views are not always considered or sought. These comments come from a minority of the carers who responded, but there were common threads throughout the responses given.

Adoption Satisfaction Survey (ranging from most or almost all strongly agreeing)

The Adoption Service set up an online survey for adopters and prospective adopters who have accessed the service to gain feedback on their experiences at different stages of involvement in the adoption service, as well as gathering feedback in relation to why they choose Birmingham Adoption Agency. To date, 154 responses have been gathered, with 42 collected between April 2022-23.

The overall quality of the service was rated as 'Excellent' by the majority of service users, and the majority were also extremely likely to recommend the service. Importantly, almost all service users felt they received the support they needed.

Almost all current and prospective adopters reported the service was easy to contact, and that the people they were in contact with were easy to talk to and knew how to help. Almost all service users felt listened to, that their worries were taken seriously, that their needs were addressed in a timely way and that they were given enough information to understand the service/support available. Finally,

almost all service users found the meetings were at a comfortable location that was easy to access and at a convenient time.

Open comments consistently praised the friendly and professional staff who are able to reassure, provide support and knowledge. A small but consistent thread around improvements was again linked with meeting admin, such as enough notice of panels, links being sent out, and that the initial contact point of the service was sometimes felt to be less relational.

Annual Family Support Feedback

Between April 2022-23 the Families Together service received feedback from 385 adults and 187 children and young people; this is currently being analysed. During this period the Families Together service merged with ASTI and so some of this feedback will reflect this new working arrangement.

For most families, this was their first referral into Families Together. Almost all adults rated the help they received as 8+/10, and most children and young people told us they felt very happy.

The majority of families received a copy of their plan. The majority of adults strongly agreed that they both needed help and got the help they needed, and almost all children and young people felt they got the help they needed, with only a small percent telling us there was help they needed and did not receive. For most children and young people they fully understood why they had a Family Support Worker (FSW), with some understanding to some extent.

Almost all adults and children told us they have a very strong and positive working relationship with their FSW, with the majority of adults and children and young people telling us that they strongly agreed this was a positive relationship. Adults told us that their FSWs explained why their family needed help and asked what help they needed, spent enough time getting to understand them and their children, they could talk to their FSW about their worries, they could contact their FSW when they needed, they trusted their FSW to do what was best for their children, FSWs were honest with them and they listened to their views and involved them in decisions. Similarly, children and young people told us their FSW spent enough time getting to know them, that they could talk to them about their worries, they listened to them and explained things in a way they understood.

Open comments from children and young people around the best things their FSW had done for them were consistent around themes of providing general support and guidance, school support, and communication and relationship building. Adults echoed these themes: parenting tools and strategies, relationship building and family cohesion, school support, guidance and referrals, pillar of support. Both children, young people and adults had one consistent piece of feedback for improvement, which was for longer periods of support and involvement.

Early Help

In December 2022 the Early Help service had their first annual report of feedback from adults and children and young people around the support they receive and the relationship with their Early Help worker. There were 432 responses from adult family members and 41 responses from children and young people. Feedback from both adults and children and young people was very positive, particularly around the positive relationship built with their Early Help worker. The majority of adults and most children and young people tell us they are very happy.

Feedback from adult family members and children and young people was very consistent. The majority of children and young people and almost all adults fully understood why they had an Early Help worker. Almost all children and young people and adults thought their Early Help worker helped them and their family; only a small percent felt there was help that they needed that they did not receive. Almost all children and young people and adults told us they strongly agreed that they have a really positive relationship with their Early Help worker, who did the things they said they would, spent enough time getting to know them, listened to their views and involved them in decisions, was someone they could talk to about their worries, and explained things in ways they could understand.

Open comments from children and young people and adults were also fairly consistent. They told us that their Early Help workers were able to provide advice, guidance, support and referral, mental and emotional health support, support with healthy communication and relationship building, support with school, and parenting strategies (for adults) and understanding and managing behaviours (for children and young people). Both children and young people and adults would like their Early Help workers to remain involved for longer.

14. Matters relating to the risk register

The Trust Board and Executive have agreed nine strategic risks as follows:

- **Relationship between Trust and Council** - a consistent, stable relationship with the Council is critical to the Trust.
- **Workforce** - effective delivery of service relies on maintaining a sufficient, high-performing and motivated workforce.
- **Demand pressure** - a range of factors, including the legacy of covid as lockdowns ended, and children returned to schools and settings, increases beyond current capacity creating delivery and financial pressure and consequences.
- **Significant safeguarding Incident with a child with whom the Trust is working** - a child with whom the Trust is working suffers significant harm that might have been avoided had the Trust acted differently.
- **Regulatory issues** - progress in practice improvement is not sustained or is interrupted by other factors (key staff absent; unprecedented demand etc.) leading to regulators identifying service failure in the Trust.
- **Data intelligence, use of that intelligence** - poor access to, ineffective use of and lack of capacity to cleanse data affects the Trust's understanding of demand/supply, effectiveness of service planning, efficient use of resources and quality of work to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- **Trust Development** - as a relatively new organisation with an ambitious development agenda, the risk is that key developments are not delivered, that unnecessary slippage/delay occurs or that external factors impede development.
- **Placement sufficiency** - there are insufficient regulated placements for children who require them, resulting in placements within unregulated or insecure settings.
- **Oracle (1B)** - Trust Support Service teams have no clear view of how the Oracle system will operate, end to end processes, required resource to undertake new processes and the cultural change required by the Trust to implement the new system.

These events in isolation are considered significant but if they were to impact in parallel, the combination of these would pose a serious threat to the Trust.

These strategic risks form part of the updated Strategic Risk Register which will continue to be regularly reported to the Finance & Resources Committee and the Trust Board.

A full review of the Strategic Risk Register will be undertaken to take account of the developments with regard to a new Trust contract with the Council, the ILACS outcome, and the improvement support work with a neighbouring authority.

The Trust Executive will monitor and manage these strategic risks as well as those key operational risks across the various Trust's activities.

15. Outcome of Ofsted monitoring visits and inspections

Children's Social Care

Children's social care	Date	Inspection Findings
Birmingham Children's Trust Adoption Agency	Commenced 24-25 October; concluded 28-30 November 2022.	<p>The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.</p> <p>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people is good, taking into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How well children and young people are helped and protected (good) - The effectiveness of leaders and managers (outstanding). <p>The Adoption Agency reports can be found here: https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/7/1273493</p>
Youth Offending Services in Birmingham	December 2022	<p>Overall rating: Requires Improvement</p> <p>The inspection report can be found here: An inspection of youth offending services in Birmingham (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk).</p>
ILACS Standard inspection	13 February - 3 March 2023	<p>Overall rating: Overall effectiveness was judged to be Good.</p> <p>This comprises of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: Good - The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: Good - The experiences and progress of children in care: Good - The experiences and progress of care leavers: Good <p>The inspection report can be found here: Ofsted Birmingham City Council</p>

Residential Homes for Disabled Children and Young People

Children's Home	Date and (inspection type)	Inspection Findings
Camborne House	30-31 May 2022 (full)	Inadequate https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273663
	20 July 2022 (monitoring visit)	The purpose of this visit was to review the progress made since the full inspection. Ofsted found "Out of the 10 requirements made at the last inspection, four have been met. Progress has been made in respect of the other requirements, and there is an action plan in place to address the outstanding areas for improvement." https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273663
	13-14 September 2022 (full)	Requires improvement to be good. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273663
Charles House	6-7 December 2022 (full)	The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273497
Edgewood Road	13-14 September 2022 (full)	Requires improvement to be good. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273658
	28 March 2023 (assurance visit)	The purpose of this visit was to review the progress made since the full inspection. The home remains 'requires improvement to be good'. Ofsted acknowledged that previous concerns had been addressed and no further requirements were placed on the home. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273658
Warwick House	17-18 August 2022 (full)	The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273485

16. Statement confirming how the principles of the Business Charter have been implemented or are yet to be implemented

The Trust has:

- promoted equality, diversity and social inclusion principles throughout our practice and corporate processes.
- established an Apprenticeship Scheme to support care leavers with employment opportunities, and promotion of care leavers through the Council's existing Apprenticeship Scheme.
- applied social value principles through our commissioning arrangements with external providers.

17. Proposed changes to the Agreement

The Trust:

- has agreed a new 10 year contract with the Council for implementation from 1 April 2023 – as part of that a number of schedules and SSAs have been revised and agreed.
- has agreed a specific mechanism to respond more flexibly to changes in demand eg. unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- is intending to move to a new building at Aston Cross from Lancaster Circus during 2023/24 following the request from the Council for the Trust to exit Lancaster Circus during 2023. The move has approval from the Trust Board.
- has agreed a revised set of KPIs with the Council for implementation from April 2023.

Change control: a number of change controls were agreed with the Council during 2022/23 which resulted in amendments to the annual contract sum as follows:

- changes in grants
 - Youth Justice Board
 - Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Children
 - Remand
 - Personal Advisers
 - Staying Put
 - Supporting Families (former Troubled Families)
- other change controls
 - increase to reflect full cost of pay awards
 - increase in retention payments to social workers and other critical staff

The new contract, in its final stages now of agreement, will reset and reframe some key issues and any subsequent change control will be managed through the governance arrangements with the Council.

Other matters where no changes are proposed:

- **Pensions:** there have been no changes in the pension arrangements for the Trust during 2022/23. A triennial review of employer contribution rates will take effect from 1 April 2023 and has been factored into the Trust's financial budgets for 23/24.
- **Financial mechanism, finance/contract sum:** the Trust was required to agree the annual contract sum for 2023/24 with the Council by 31 March 2023. This requirement was met and subsequently approved by Cabinet as

part of the wider Council 2023/24 Budget process.

- **Changes arising from audits:** there were no changes to the service delivery contract as a result of any audit recommendations.