



ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



**BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST**

Our Groups and Forums

'United and Unique' reflects our expanding participation groups that include our Junior Children in Care Council (Junior CIC), Children in Care Council (CICC), Care Leavers Forum, Don't DISability, All is One (LGBTQ+), Young Parents Project and our new BIAS (Beauty In All Shades) for our Global Majority children and young people.



We are continuing to build upon our Participation work with a big focus on Co-Production. This year we are planning to reach more children and young people from different areas of the Trust and open more opportunities for children and young people to be involved in the work we do including consultations and interviews.

Our priorities for 2025/26

- **Improved Transitions and Supporting our Independence.**

This still a big area of focus for our groups. Our Children in Care Council think independence work could start a lot sooner and be a lot more fun to complete. They are making this a key project to look at how they create their own Preparation for Adulthood programme. Our Care Leavers' Forum are keen to focus on Pathway planning, key areas shared by our care leavers are managing social isolation and supporting independence. We have seen with our Next Steps programme the difference it can make when making new friends, having a mentor/befriender and building a strong network of support around us.

We are still keen to look at how our Corporate Parents can help us better when living independently, managing our finances and with furnishing, decorating and maintaining a home. We also want support with key opportunities in education, training and employment. We still want a central space to 'drop in' to find out more about the opportunities and support we can get, and to meet other young people.

- **Coming into Care and Returning Home and Trust 2025**

Our Young Parents group are also supporting Trust 2025 to look at how we can prevent children from coming into care and can live with their own family. We support early intervention and things that can prevent children from having to be in care.

When children come into care, we want to make sure they have all the information and support they need. We are helping the Principle Social Worker to develop what this looks like. Our Care Leavers Forum are doing work on ensuring services and

professionals clearly explain their roles and what they do and they can support them. Many of our care leavers say they were confused about what different people and professionals did and their role in their life.

Our Children in Care Council are also supporting Trust 2025 to look at how children and young people could return home safely. This is something that we don't always feel is discussed or looked at often enough.

- **Hearing from young people who are often unheard and experience multiple forms of disadvantage**

Our Don't DISability, All is One and BIAS (Beauty In All Shades) are working hard to ensure their voices are heard and issues specific to them are better understood and supported. Our All in One Group is supporting our learning and Development team with training and helping to shape content for how workers are trained. Our BIAS group are working with an external partner to support research into their specific experience as children in care.

Our Junior Children in Care Council is reforming and we need new members. We are keen to ensure younger children in care are heard and their experienced better understood.

- **Connecting with more children and young people**

We need help from professionals, and carers to get more children connected to our groups and what we do. For any child wanting to you want to join a group, email or look at our social media pages or website.

advocacy@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk or connect through Instagram or TikTok.

[Rights and Participation Service | Child's Voice opportunities | Birmingham Children's Trust](#)



@unitedunique_



@unitedunique_

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

CONTENTS	Page
What our children and young people said	2
1. Introduction	5
2. Summary of the Trust's performance	7
3. Governance and relationships	10
4. Summary of the Council's performance of its obligations	13
5. Cost of performing the services in 2024/25	14
6. Summary of any changes to the Agreement agreed during 2024/25	17
7. Demand for services in 2024/25 and the expected demand for the services in 2025/26; social, demographic or other relevant factors which affected the services in 2024/25 and/or may affect the services in 2025/26	18
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	19
9. Strategic priorities and outcomes for 2025/26	20
10. Results of any audits or surveys carried out during 2024/25	22
11. Outcomes of any rectification plans	25
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 2024/25 and/or 2025/26 or future contract years where applicable	26
13. Summary of the outcome of any surveys of service users, and relevant stakeholders and third parties in relation to the services	27
14. Matters relating to the risk register	34
15. Outcome of Ofsted monitoring visits and inspections	35
16. Statement confirming how the principles of the Business Charter have been implemented or are yet to be implemented	38
17. Proposed changes to the Agreement	39

1. Introduction

The Trust moves into our eighth year with the confidence of the Council, government-appointed commissioners and Ofsted that we are sustaining our track record of continual improvement. More importantly we continue to listen to the voices of children and families as central to all that we do, both to do more of what works and to learn and drive improvement from what does not.

The Trust has reset our headline strategic objectives for the next five years with a focus upon outcomes for children and families. A basket of indicators is being used to measure progress against these high-level objectives and as we refine this approach the evidence currently suggests progress as follows:

- Earlier intervention – cautious positive
- Reducing risk – inconclusive
- More in family networks – inconclusive
- Children in Care and Care Leaver outcomes – cautious positive

The context in which the Trust operates continues to be dynamic and the Trust's leadership team ensures that we are an outward-looking organisation that expects to adapt, respond and lead on the local, regional and national stage. Our relationship with the Council is central to the Trust and we are pleased to have strengthened our links and approach to joint working at the same time as fulfilling the comprehensive accountability framework that is in place. Key to the local context remains the s114 status of the Council and the appointment of government commissioners who provide oversight, and the Trust has worked very hard with Council colleagues to achieve the right balance between contributing to the Council's legal duty to set a balanced budget, and ensuring that the Trust has sufficient capacity to deliver our duties effectively. As you might expect given Birmingham's scale, we play a very active role within the West Midlands region and lead on a number of our shared priorities including in relation to sector-led improvement.

For Children's Social Care we are in a period of significant change through the national reforms contained in the Families First Partnership Programme, and the Trust is being proactive in developing our own approach through the Trust 2025 programme to deliver effective earlier support for families through a new model of Family Help, as well as leading the development of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams. We are providing shared leadership with partners in ensuring that these changes are delivered as a whole partnership through the Birmingham Families First programme centred around the design of a shared district operating model.

It is a marker of the Trust's maturity that we have developed a significant role in providing sector-led improvement support to other local authorities, most notably to Solihull as they progress on their improvement journey. We provide leadership for the region in relation to the slow but positive progress in developing the Safe Centre as a new secure children's home. And we are striving to be more systematic in drawing in more peer review and scrutiny to

provide external eyes on what we do, such as the joint work we have done with Worcestershire in respect of our care leavers.

Our staff and our foster carers are our most precious resources and must take the credit for all that we achieve. We remain grateful and respectful every day for their skilled relational work, and we will continue to be focused upon ensuring we deliver the best possible system conditions for them to be effective in terms of workloads, supportive management, the working tools and environment, and competitive pay. Recruitment and retention remains a real challenge for a number of roles.

We have set new challenges and priorities as we drive continual improvement. Our focus on the quality of practice, on children's outcomes and the experiences of children and families will be relentless. We will seek to strengthen our approaches to ensuring every child is cared for within their family network when it is safe to do so, to supporting families with our partners at the earliest opportunity, to working in co-production with children, young people, and families, and to strengthening the Trust's approach to recognising and addressing inequalities and discrimination. We will continue to pay attention to the organisational culture that will be key to supporting those approaches, in particular through collaborative and team working, and through seeking to maintain a balanced high support/high challenge culture.

Andy Couldrick

Chair



James Thomas

Chief Executive



2. Summary of the Trust's performance

The Trust contractual performance indicators include activity measures (KPIs 4 and 8), some that are shared with the Council (KPIs 7a, 7b, 12a and 12b) and the remainder sit with the Trust.

Across both 2023/24 and 2024/25, the Trust has consistently delivered strong performance against these indicators.

In 2023/24, Birmingham Children's Trust delivered commendable results across the majority of its contractual indicators. Targets were met, and performance remained within agreed tolerances for nearly all measures. There was only one instance during the year when the timeliness of all assessments fell below target and outside tolerance levels. Despite this brief dip, timeliness at the front door remained robust, with over 90% of assessments completed on time throughout the year.

Performance has continued to strengthen in 2024/25. The timeliness of assessments has not only remained within target but has consistently exceeded expectations. Additionally, the proportion of agency social workers, which was initially above the desired level, has been steadily declining month on month. This downward trend is particularly encouraging, as the Trust is now outperforming both regional and statistical neighbours. Our targeted efforts to convert agency staff into permanent employees have proven highly effective, with many choosing to continue their careers with us. This not only enhances workforce stability but also strengthens continuity of service for children and families.

Overall, our performance reflects a strong and sustained commitment to excellence and good outcomes for children. These outcomes reflect the Trust's unwavering commitment to high-quality, timely, and impactful service delivery in terms of both operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability. We remain focused on continuous improvement and delivering services that make a meaningful difference to children and families across Birmingham.

Summary of Trust performance 2024/25

The key performance indicators for 2024/25 are set out below.

No.	Indicator	No. where target met or within tolerances last 12 months	% where target met or within tolerances last 12 months
KPI 1	Percentage of re-referrals to children's social care within 12 months	12	100%
KPI 2	Percentage of assessments completed in 45 working days or less	12	100%
KPI 3	Percentage of children in need on a plan for more than three months	No target or tolerance set	No target or tolerance set
KPI 4	Rate of section 47 enquiries per 10,000 of the u18 children and young people population	No target or tolerance set	No target or tolerance set
KPI 5	Percentage of initial child protection conferences held within 15 days	12	100%
KPI 6a	Percentage of child protection plans lasting two years or more	12	100%
KPI 6b	Percentage of child protection plans for a 2nd or subsequent time in the last 2 years	12	100%
KPI 7a	Rate of children looked after per 10,000 under 18 population	12	100%
KPI 7b	Percentage of children in care living in foster care	12	100%
KPI 7c	Percentage of children in care living in residential care	12	100%
KPI 7d	Percentage children in care living with their family networks	12	100%
KPI 8	Number of children waiting for adoption		
KPI 9a	Children in care with 3+ home (placement) moves within 12months	12	100%
KPI 9b	Children in care in home (placement) for 2.5 years or more	12	100%
KPI 10	Percentage of children and young people placed within 20 miles of home address	12	100%
KPI 11a	Percentage of care leavers in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 17th to 18th Birthday	10/12	83%
KPI 11b	Percentage of care leavers in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 19th to 21st Birthday	12	100%
KPI 12a	Care leavers in suitable accommodation aged 19-21 (reported monthly for Q1-4)	12	100%

No.	Indicator	No. where target met or within tolerances last 12 months	% where target met or within tolerances last 12 months
KPI 12b	Care leavers in suitable accommodation aged 17-18 (reported monthly for Q1-4)	12	100%
KPI 13	Average caseload per social worker	12	100%
KPI 14	Percentage of agency social workers	0	0%
KPI 15	Reoffending rate	Annual	Annual

3. Governance and relationships

The Trust is owned by the Council. Its day-to-day operational delivery is controlled by the Trust Executive Team which is accountable to the Trust Board 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.

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 Board consists of a chair and eight non-executive directors, one of whom is appointed by the City Council. Details of current Board members are available on the Trust’s 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.

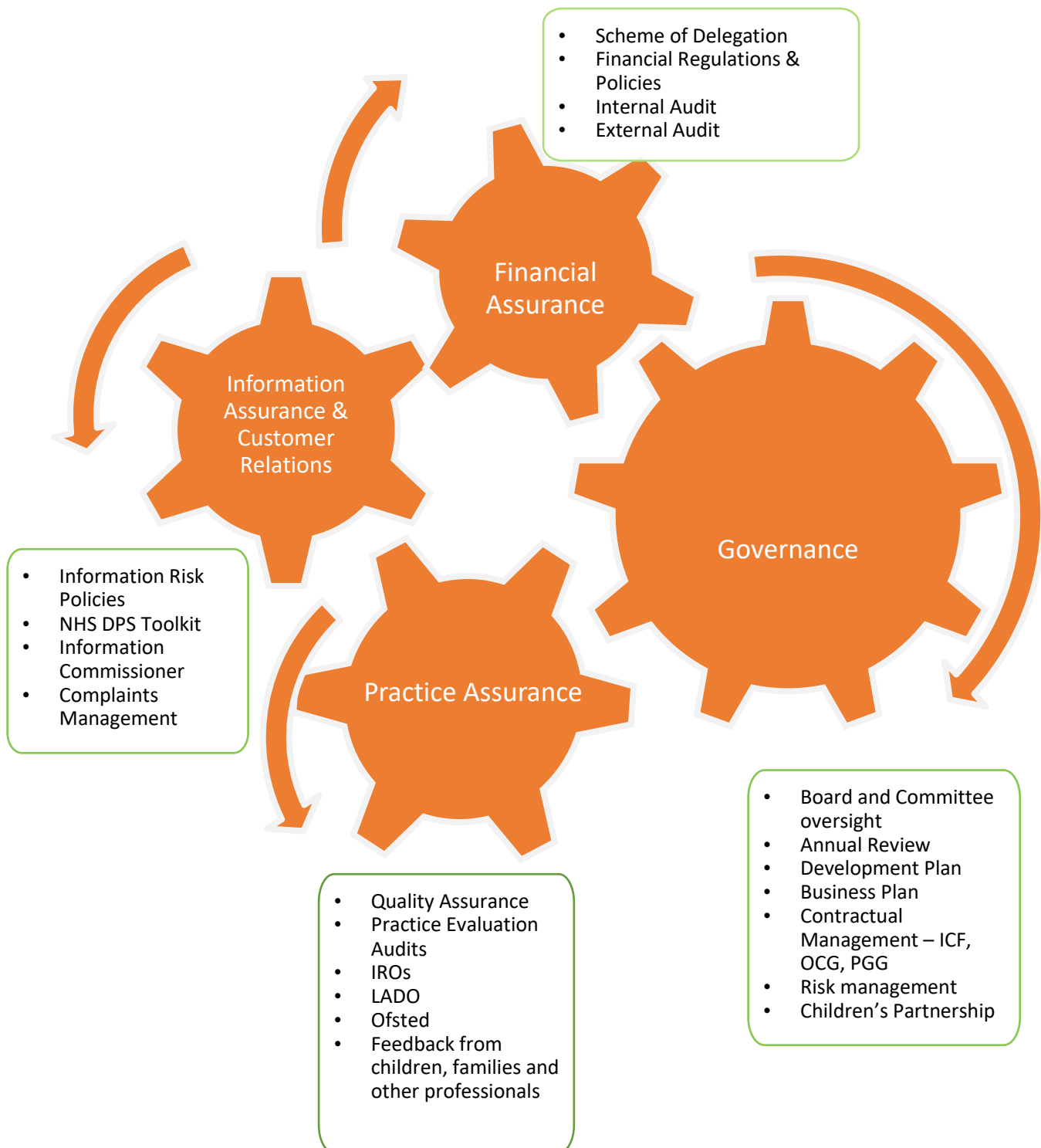
The governance arrangements between the Council, Trust and DfE continue to work effectively. The framework of Operational Commissioning Group, Trust Partnership Governance Group and routine engagement at Overview and Scrutiny, alongside regular meetings between the Trust Chief Executive and the Council Managing Director, 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 Help and Protection, the Director of Corporate Parenting, the Director of Commissioning and Specialist Services, the Director of Quality Assurance and the Director of Finance and

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.

5. Cost of performing the services in 2024/25

The Trust's financial position for 2024/25 has been challenging. The forecast rise in the care population has again proven to be very accurate, this, together with complexity of need and a continued rise in the number of children in high-cost placements, has resulted in a placement cost pressure of £9.3m for 2024/25. Management action and efficiencies delivered across the Trust, together with additional grant from the Household Support Fund and other one-off savings of £12.8m, has reduced the overall position to a net surplus of £3.5m (1%).

The on-going demand pressures experienced by the Trust, together with the financial position of the Council have informed the budget negotiations for 2025/26. The agreed contract sum which will form the basis of the Trust's revenue budget for 2025/26 is £329.8m. The breakdown and key assumptions behind this are as follows:

£307.1m core contract sum carried forward from 2024/25

Add:

- £17.6m provision to cover pay and non-pay inflation
- £27.5 to cover demography changes across 2024/25 and forecast for 2025/26 (including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)
- £1.6m for other pressures.

Less:

- £24.0m savings target

The Trust recognises the financial challenges faced by the Council and continues to bear down on costs to deliver good Value for Money. The Trust continues to invest in Early Help services as part of a wider strategy of early prevention and managing demand.

The approach taken by the Trust to deliver savings is as follows:

- Trust 2025 transformation will deliver savings through work to support families earlier, reducing the Trust's spend on placement costs for children in care and enabling more children to remain with their families. Robust governance, including benefits tracking, is in place through the programme.
- Efficiencies, Headcount and Commissioning Savings - The Trust will be delivering this saving through various efficiencies, including deletion of vacant posts and better value commissioning.

- Maximisation of grant income.

It is anticipated that the Trust's capital programme for 2025/26 will utilise approved resources of £1.9m. This is the remaining balance of the capital funding approved by the Council at a Cabinet meeting in March 2022.

Key elements of the 2025/26 capital programme will include:

- Fire door remedial works across the Trust estate, to ensure health & safety requirements are met;
- Further investment in our residential care homes, including a programme of refurbishment works at Trinity Road Children's Home;
- Carrying out essential repairs to the Trust estate.

We are seeking to refresh the programme beyond 2025/26 to take forward Trust priorities including seeking further investment in Children's Homes, Relocation of the Youth Justice estate and supporting the rollout of Trust 2025, as well as an ongoing programme of maintenance. Without additional funding the programme beyond this year is at risk.

The Trust is the lead for the West Midlands Safe Centre project which will provide additional secure welfare capacity in the region, with the facility providing 20 secure welfare beds. The project is currently at Stage 4 which will provide funding to submit the planning application, procure a contractor to enter into a Pre-Construction Services Agreement and to develop RIBA Stage 4 design. The capital cost of this project is estimated to be circa £70m and will be fully funded by grant received from the Department for Education (DfE).

How we spend our money and how we are funded

A breakdown of how the Trust spends its money and how we are funded is given below for 2025/26.

Spending and funding analysis		2025/26 (£m)
Employees		147.8
Premises		3.7
Transport		2.0
Supplies and services		24.1
Payments to third party providers		161.3
Total planned spending		338.9
Funded by:		
	Core contract sum from Birmingham City Council	305.3
	Government grants paid via Birmingham City Council	24.5
	Total contract sum	329.8
	Other grants and contributions received direct by the Trust	9.1
Total funding		338.9

6. Summary of any changes to the Agreement agreed during 2024/25

The contractual KPIs were agreed in June 2024 and did not change from 2023/24.

A review of the support service agreement with the Council has been undertaken and will inform a change that will be made in 2025/26.

7. Demand for services in 2024/25 and the expected demand for services in 2025/26; social, demographic or other relevant factors which affected the services in 2024/25 and/or may affect the services in 2025/26

The local context is one in which there are very high levels of need alongside high rates of child poverty. Thanks to a combination of Council investment and a Trust savings and efficiency programme, we have this year been able to make substantial additional investments in our Early Help and Leaving Care services. The Council has also raised its commitments to corporate parenting responsibilities with a particular focus upon work opportunities for our care leavers.

In Q4 2024/25, 14,016 contacts were received which was a 5% increase from the same quarter the previous year. Despite the increase in contacts, referral numbers remained stable, indicating consistent application of thresholds. Domestic abuse continues to be the leading reason for contact, underscoring the need for targeted intervention.

Our care population slightly rose to 2312 by the end of March 2025, with the rate per 10,000 remaining stable at 80 per 10,000. This modest growth aligns with population changes, indicating stable demand and consistent application of care thresholds. We still compare favourably to statistical neighbours (84 per 10,000) and the West Midlands average (90). We have seen a small reduction of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) since March 2024.

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan increased steadily over the year. The rate per 10,000 children also rose from 52 to 59, indicating that the growth is not simply a result of population changes and may point to improved identification of children at risk of significant harm, increased professional vigilance or adjustments in referral thresholds. It may also reflect pressure on early help services, resulting in more cases escalating to child protection.

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

On 20 March 2025 the DfE published its guidance on the Families First Partnership Programme to support the implementation of the Family Help and multi-agency child protection reforms and make greater use of Family Group Decision Making.

This followed the policy paper Keeping children safe, helping families thrive, published in November 2024 which set out key principles for the reforms:

- Children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering the care system in the first place.
- Children should be supported to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care.
- Addressing excessive and exploitative profit making in the placements market
- Investment in key enablers which underpin the social care system including the workforce, better data and information sharing.

Our Trust 2025 programme has built the case for change in Birmingham and evidenced the opportunity for whole system shift to earlier support, and we have now tested our Family Help model in one district of the city ahead of us rolling out later this year. Our partners share our commitment to the reforms through the Birmingham Families First programme of work to deliver our multi-agency commitment to Family Help and a whole system approach delivered through a district operating model.

9. Strategic priorities and outcomes for 2025/26

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
Meeting children's needs through effective earlier support	• Delivering "Right Help, Right Time" so that families experience services as supportive • Rolling out the Family Help district delivery model to minimise handovers of the lead professional role • Seeking to meet the needs of more families at a lower tier of intervention
Improving the outcomes for children in care and care leavers	• Improving measurable outcomes in respect of placement stability, educational progress and attainment, and health outcomes • Education, Training and Employment (ETE) and suitable accommodation for care leavers • Qualitative measures of children and young people's experience
Improved care planning and reducing drift and delay	• Prompt response following referral • Care plans drawn up in co-production with children and families in a timely way • No drift for children in care – IROs to have more impact
Enabling more children to be cared for in their family networks	• All children whose Care Order can be revoked to enable care in the family should have this achieved • Increased numbers of children achieving permanency through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) • Reduced numbers of children coming into care in late adolescence • Increase in the proportion of connected carers
Improved support for children in the youth justice system and experiencing harm outside the home	• Improved experience and outcomes for children • Reduced levels of harm to children and the public
More foster carers recruited	• Everyone child who needs a foster placement should have access to one • Reduced use of residential care
Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing Plans	• Assessments and services that address equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and its impact on children with whom we work

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
	• Maintaining progress on our challenge to become an anti-racist employer and service provider • Improving our diversity in leadership roles
Recruitment and Retention	• Improved brand and marketing 'presence' • Reduced reliance on agency workforce • More children placed with Trust foster and adoptive carers
Participation and Co-production	• Care plans that are drafted with children and parents/ carers • Increasing use of Family Group Conferences • Co-production priority workplan with our participation groups
Strengthened partnership working	• Increased impact of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership • Stronger partnership offer through the Birmingham Families First Programme • Effective joint working between front-line practitioners
Delivering the system conditions for Connections Count	• Manageable caseloads and workloads • Support first line managers • Strong continuing professional development (CPD) offer • Competitive salary • Support systems and tools that support
Deepening our quality assurance and learning culture	• Collaborative auditing programme across the Trust • Increasing evidence of learning being implemented

10. Results of any audits or surveys carried out during 2023/24

In its 2024/25 Head of Internal Audit Annual Report, Veritau arrived at an overall opinion of “Reasonable Assurance” for the Trust.

The range of internal audits completed to final and draft report stage from the 2024/25 work programme will be presented as follows:

Audit	Status	Assurance rating
SAR and FOI	Final	Reasonable Assurance
Direct payments	Final	Limited Assurance
Spend control: phase 1	Final	Limited Assurance
Savings delivery	Final	Substantial Assurance
ICT audit: key systems (segregation of duties)	Draft	Limited Assurance
Records management	Draft	Limited Assurance

Internal audits in progress during 2024/25 which are currently being concluded are:

- Emergency Duty Team (this was a late addition to the work programme and outcomes from this work are expected to be reported to the September Finance & Resources Committee meeting)

Veritau has arrived at a Limited Assurance opinion for four 2024/25 engagements. Some context for each engagement is provided below:

- Direct payments – Veritau was asked to undertake this audit following on from the first review undertaken in 2021, before Veritau was awarded the internal audit services contract. While it was found that significant control gaps and weaknesses still exist within the system for administering direct payments, management has committed to a number of strong actions which should be completed by the end of quarter 1 or shortly afterwards.
- Spend control: phase 1 – this audit involved a review of processes the Trust has been following since it was placed under spend control in August 2023. At the time of the audit, the Trust was already working on arrangements to improve and refine spend control arrangements, and phase 2 (to commence shortly) aims to provide assurance on how effective these have been.
- ICT audit: key systems (segregation of duties) – this audit was another example of the Trust engaging Veritau to review an area of known weaknesses. In 2022/23 and 2023/24, the Trust’s external auditors, Crowe, reported on a control weakness relating to how duties are segregated within its key social work case management systems. If user permissions are not

properly managed and monitored, there is a risk that staff can access functions or undertake tasks which are not compatible with / appropriate for their role. The audit has identified that some significant improvements are still required to the management of user roles and permissions to ensure that staff are only able to perform functions they should.

- Records management - this has been a topic of regular discussion at the Trust's Information Assurance Group, and work has been underway for some time to identify and record information assets to facilitate improvements in how they are managed. Despite the work already done by the Trust, there are still weaknesses in overall governance arrangements, and with the management of physical information assets.

The Trust has continued to invite Veritau to review systems and processes with known weaknesses to help drive improvement and maximise the value of its internal audit service. The annual opinion to be provided by Veritau has taken account of this, and other sources of assurance have been referred to (though not relied upon) to determine the overall health of the Trust's control environment. This includes information gathered from Veritau's involvement in the Information Assurance Group, the ICT Strategy Group, monthly liaison with the Director of Finance & Resources and the Assistant Director of Finance, progress with implementing actions agreed in previous audits, and review of reports presented to the Finance & Resources Committee during 2024/25.

A series of actions have been agreed, or are in the process of being agreed, with Trust staff in relation to each of the audits in the 2024/25 programme. These will be monitored through 2025/26, in accordance with the Trust's follow-up and escalation procedure. Where no or insufficient action has been taken to address identified issues and risks, this will continue to be reported to Trust Leadership Team each month, and to the Finance & Resources Committee as part of regular progress reporting. Follow-up audits of specific systems will be considered, weighing these up against other audits already included in the 2025/26 internal audit work programme.

The three-year strategic plan for internal audit work has been refreshed and agreed with the Head of Internal Audit at Veritau. Work planned to date for 2025/26 includes:

- Spend control: phase 2
- Foster carer payments
- Youth Justice Board
- Procurement compliance
- Recruitment and establishment control
- Unaccompanied asylum seeker children
- Therapeutic Emotional Support Services
- IT audit: cybersecurity

One additional audit will be added to the 2025/26 work programme. Consultation is currently ongoing with the Trust Leadership Team to identify this.

11. Outcomes of any rectification plans

There were no rectification plans required in 2024/25.

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 2023/24 and/or 2024/25 or future contract years where applicable

The Trust receives payment from the Council in respect of services provided under the contract.

The Trust also receives grant funding, either directly, or via the Council (if required by the conditions of grant). A summary of the key grants for 2024/25 and the expected funding levels for 2025/26 is set out below.

- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) 2024/25 actual core grant expected is £13.5m. There are significant delays in the Home Office confirmation of funding for agreed cases. The 2025/26 grant will increase or decrease in line with the number of agreed cases being supported.
- Youth Justice Board (YJB) 2024/25 actual core grant received was £2.4m. The Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board have confirmed an increase in 2025/26 core grant allocation to £2.5m.
- The Remand Grant was £1.2m for 2024/25, the grant allocation for 2025/26 is still to be confirmed.
- During the financial year ending 31 March 2025, the Trust received core funding of £5.0m and £3.4m Payment by Result allocation from the Supporting Families Programme. For 2025/26, Children and Families Grant consolidates all Department for Education Children's Social Care programmes. This grant is also included within this allocation at the same level of funding in 25/26.
- Staying Put – for 2024/25 the actual grant for Birmingham was £0.7m, no change to the grant value is expected for 2025/26 (included within consolidated Children and Families Grant).
- The grant to support Supported Accommodation Reforms was £2.1m for 2024/25, the same level of grant is expected for 2025/26, (included within consolidated Children and Families Grant).
- Household Support Fund allocation for 2024/25 was £3.7m, the grant value for 2025/26 is expected at £5.1m.
- The Turnaround Programme grant funding for 2024/25 was £0.7m, the grant allocation for 2025/26 is confirmed at £0.4m.

13. Summary of the outcome of any surveys of service users in relation to the services

Overview

The Trust seeks feedback in a variety of ways and this report includes a summary of the feedback received in 2024.

A prominent theme throughout feedback continues to focus on the positive and relationship-based working relationships children and families have with their practitioners, with children and families feeling listened to, involved in decisions and that practitioners take the time to get to know them.

Work will be taking place during 2025/26 to increase the number of responses received so that the feedback is more representative.

Annual Family Support Feedback

The Families Together service supports children, young people and families across the Trust, and children, young people and adult family members are asked to provide feedback on working with their Family Support Worker.

A report of comments on feedback provided between October 2024-March 2025 included 476 responses from adult family members and 199 responses from children and young people. The response rate is slightly higher than the last report, suggesting a well embedded approach to capturing family's experiences of working with Families Together.

Feedback across children and adult family members is incredibly positive, with feedback demonstrating that families feel helped and supported, and that things have changed for the better. Additionally, feedback highlights the effective, trusting and supporting relationships they have with their practitioners; they robustly tell us that their Family Support Worker is reliable, listens to them and are able to build a safe space to discuss worries.

Almost all family members had it explained to them why they had been referred to Families Together, were able to contribute towards their plan, and received a copy of their plan which outlined what Families Together were aiming to help support them with. This is really positive and shows good co-production with families in shaping the support they receive and in having support written down to refer back to.

Many findings are comparably positive, suggesting well-embedded practice that supports positive change and empowers families.

Early Help

The Early Help Service collects feedback from children and adult family members at the end of their time working with them. Children, young people, and families are asked about their understanding of the process, their relationship with Early Help Workers (EHW), the support they received and how much we helped. The third report summarises all the feedback collected December 2023 – December 2024.

During this period the Service gained feedback from 766 adults and 294 children (1,060 total), an increase since the last report..

Overall, feedback suggests that children/young people and parents/carers are happy at the end of their time with their Early Help Worker. Both children/young people and parents/carers have excellent relationships with their EHW, demonstrating relationship-based practice is widespread across the service.

'They helped me get a school for education and helped me listen to my mom and dad and go to bed early' (child, young person).

'He helped me and my family to grow our bond in tough times, getting us to understand each other and helped me with school' (child, young person).

'I felt empowered, supported, less worried and became more optimistic, confident and safe. Housing support and bidding, financial help, education and schooling...referral to Aquarius... and mental health support for Torrie. We could not have made these changes without [worker]' (parent/carer).

There is perhaps room for this to be strengthened, as for children and young people there were fewer who reported feeling that their EHW got to know them, and this follows a previous downward trend in the last report.

Overall, the majority of both parents/carers and children and young people were very happy with the support, and families were closed feeling supported, heard and listened to, and less worried.

Safeguarding

Feedback was given by six children and young people (10-16 year olds) and 46 parents/carers.

Overall, positive feedback was received from children and young people in the way Social Workers interact with children and young people, with all respondents indicating that their Social Worker spent time getting to know them, involved them in the support planning, and were safe enough people that children felt able to speak to them about their worries.

Feedback was also positive from parents and carers, highlighting high satisfaction with the reliable and relational way Social Workers work with them and their family; over 91% of respondents felt their social worker listened to them, explained their role, and visited as promised. Additionally, 87% reported a positive difference in their family due to the service. Aligned with the practice model, feedback suggests a strong contribution to plans from parents/carers. Open comments reiterated these themes, highlighting the positive impact Social Worker support has had on their family, and specifically their Social Worker in the way they were professional and going above and beyond.

ASTI Feedback

In 2024/25 ASTI started seeking feedback from children and adult family members at the end of their time working with them. Children, young people, and families are asked about their understanding of the process; their relationship with their Social Worker; the support they received; and how much it helped.

Feedback was received from 126 adults and 27 children. This is an encouraging response for a new feedback tool but the team are considering ways to boost engagement in future.

Overall feedback collected between June 2024 and February 2025 was very positive. However, understandably, some families viewed social work intervention less favourably and have a different perception of the support offered.

The vast majority of children and adults who responded understood why a social worker was working with their family and felt the support was helping.

In open comments, children said their social worker had helped by supporting the family, listening, understanding and advising. From parents, whilst there was a small number of negative comments, on the whole parents mainly said their social worker had been understanding, non-judgemental and professional, providing support with difficult situations and improving family dynamics.

Child Protection Meetings – Feedback from Parents/Carers

Parents and carers attending Child Protection Conference meetings have been asked to provide feedback since late 2021. The aim is to understand experiences before, during and after the meeting to help identify areas of good practice and areas where good practice can be nurtured further and made consistent across the service.

Where possible there are tablet devices available in the meeting room for parents to give online confidential feedback when the meeting ends. Principal Officers are also being asked to email parents with a link to the online survey where tablets are not available. Take up is often low, so questionnaire results are supplemented by a bi-monthly activity, where Principal Officers/ the Assistant Head of Service seek permission to collect in-person feedback from families directly after their conference. Most parents/carers approached are happy to provide feedback.

Feedback in 2024/25 included lots of positive comments, mainly about staff who were helpful and who explained well, listened and focused on strengths - helping the family feel less anxious:

- *Social worker* – good, prepared me well, good at communicating, helpful, went extra mile
- *Principal Officer* – kept us well informed, explained things, good to have same PO across different conferences, helped social worker think about how to support us and consider our views and strengths
- *Chair* – helpful, explained things well

A number commented that the building their conference was held in was nice and welcoming, with friendly reception staff. One said their second conference was in an informal room which they much preferred.

Young People's Review Meetings

The IRO service has a rolling survey for children and young people to provide feedback about the work of the IRO service and their experiences of Review Meetings. Young people are invited to complete a survey via a link sent to their carer(s) and/or themselves. Every two months there is a randomly selected winner for a prize draw to receive £20 of love2shop shopping vouchers.

Feedback was received from 13 young people from June 2024 - December 2024 inclusive:

- 93% said they attend at least some of their review meetings, with 31% attending all of them.
- Young people who attended typically reported positive feelings, predominantly feeling happy, involved, supported, and listened to.
- 50% said their IRO listens to them and involves them in decisions all the time, 50% said their IRO sometimes does this.
- 46% always understand the decisions made during review meetings and 38% sometimes do.
- 45% said someone always contacts them for their views when they cannot attend their reviews; 27% said this sometimes happens.
- 92% said they were always informed about what happened at their review if they did not attend, there has been a strong upward trend in this measure across the last 3 years.
- 85% said they are happy with how often they see and talk to their IRO, while 8% would like to see them more and 8% would like to see them less.

As the number of responses is quite small, and smaller than seen in previous reporting periods, the service is reflecting on the survey and considering how it might offer more value to the service and give more children and young people an opportunity to share their views.

Adoption Satisfaction Survey

The Adoption Satisfaction Survey has been running in its current format since November 2020. Families are invited to take part in the survey at various points in their adoption journey, being sent a link to an online survey. The survey is also sent to families matched for long-term fostering and is sometimes completed by Social Workers from other agencies on behalf of the families whose matches they are supporting.

In recent years, response rates have been quite low, and discussion is ongoing about refreshing the approach to ensure it provides both a window into the experience of adopters and meaningful service learning.

The April 2025 report summarises feedback received between April 2024 and March 2025. 30 questionnaires were completed:

- 13 families who had recently attended adoption panel
- 13 with a recently placed child
- 2 who had recently enquired about becoming adopters
- 2 who had recently accessed the Adoption Support Fund.

Views expressed were overwhelmingly positive. Only one family felt the overall service provided was anything other than good/excellent, with the vast majority saying the service was excellent. The same family were the only ones to say they

were not likely to recommend Adopt Birmingham to others. Comments show that the family were long term foster carers rather than adopters and the source of their dissatisfaction related to a four-month transition period, delayed as paperwork had not been signed off.

What families think is good about the service

- **Enquiries** are responded to well.
 - *Everyone we spoke to was always helpful, friendly and understanding.*
- **Panel** is seen to be efficient. They said panel members were warm, put them at ease and made them feel listened to. Families feel things were explained well, helping them feel prepared.
 - *Our social worker has been amazing throughout the whole process and we were fully prepared for our panel session and felt it went well.*
 - *Panel were all really lovely explained everything that was going to happen , quick efficient and just genuinely nice people*
 - *Had feeling everyone listened closely to what we said and were well understood*
- **Matching** - Families praised the friendly, professional approach of staff, saying staff were readily available, responsive, communicated well and were supportive.
 - *Very professional while being warm, welcoming and understanding*
 - *Family Finder has been amazing from day one. Always at the end of an email with a quick response, answered any questions we had throughout process and always done with a smile. It was lovely that we met her so many times both in person, on teams and also as part of our introductions.*
- **Post adoption support** was described as life changing, professional and empathetic. Families said they received excellent support, and that staff really took the time to get to know the family and their needs.
 - *Our social worker had time for us and really got to know us and our needs.*
 - *Our support worker was very proactive in seeking out ways to help us, and very responsive whenever we made contact with her, always very supportive, positive and reassuring, and good at giving us hope again at times when we were struggling most.*

What families think could have been done differently or improved:

The only recurring issue mentioned related to the **panel Teams link** – three families reported issues with this. It was suggested we “share the Teams link earlier than a few minutes in advance of the meeting as this is stressful (particularly when panel is delayed for whatever reason”. One family said they weren’t aware it would

only be sent at the time of the meeting and another said only one partner received the link and that their social worker was not sent the right link either.

Panel timeliness issues were mentioned by two families. One said they had to wait *"quite a long time after the time we were given before being admitted (maybe 30 minutes)"*; another that their *"original panel appointment got postponed due to panel having a 'more urgent' case to hear and we had to wait several months for a panel date"*.

The experiences of the long-term fostering family were outlined above – they feel that **transition** was unduly delayed as paperwork was not signed off, which was distressing for all involved and resulted in payment delay meaning accessibility equipment required by the child could not be sourced in advance. They did say that "communication and support from the actual family finder was great" and that the source of delay was from elsewhere.

Other comments were that:

- *"A **change in social worker** was not ideal a couple of weeks before panel"*.
- We should *"write a more positive cover email when sending the **outcome letter**"*.
- The **annual ASF funding cycle** is not very helpful because it leads to *"gaps when one set of funding had run out and the next had not yet been approved and gaps sometimes meant momentum was lost in the work with our children"*.

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 - demand for services has increased at a rate above our resourced capacity resulting in unmet need and a rise in serious incidents.

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.

Placement sufficiency - there are insufficient regulated placements for children who require them, resulting in placements within unregulated or insecure settings.

Oracle - the Trust continues to be impacted by the way in which the Oracle ERP system was implemented by the Council and support service teams in the Trust are still not clear on the system solutions.

Financial Pressure - the Council's financial challenges have resulted in the need for the Trust to deliver savings in 2024/25 and a requirement to contribute to more savings in 2025/26 and beyond.

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 and Resources Committee and the Trust Board.

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 during 2024/25

Children's Social Care

	Date	Inspection Findings
ILACS	24 September 2024 (Focused visit)	Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in care, with a particular focus on the: • Quality of matching, placement and decision-making for children in care. • Experiences and progress of disabled children in care. • Experiences and progress of children living in supported accommodation or an unregistered children's home https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50260095
	20 February 2023 (Full inspection)	Good. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80429
Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency	28 October 2024 (Full inspection)	Good. The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50264346

Residential Homes for Disabled Children and Young People

Children's Home	Date and inspection type	Inspection Findings
Camborne House	22 October 2024 (Full inspection)	Requires improvement to be good. The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50263803
	17 September 2024 (Monitoring visit)	The purpose of this monitoring visit was to review adherence to the notice of restriction and the progress made in meeting the requirements of the compliance notice relating to regulation 12 only. The compliance notice for regulation 12 was not met and was reissued. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50260195
	6 August 2024 (Full inspection)	This inspection resulted in compliance notices being issued in relation to regulation 12, the protection of children standard, and regulation 13, the leadership and management standard. A notice restricting the accommodation of any further children at the home until improvements are made was also issued. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50258051
Charles House	4 March 2025 (Full inspection)	Good. The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50273463
Edgewood Road	13 January 2025 (Full inspection)	Good. The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50269655

Warwick House	19 March 2025 (Full inspection)	Good. The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50275530
----------------------	--	---

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 contractual KPIs for 2025/26 were agreed at a meeting of the Operational Commissioning Group in May 2025 with some targets and tolerances adjusted for the new year, agreed by both the Trust and the Council.