

BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST

Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) Report



**Annual Report 2024/25
(Abridged Version)**

Executive Summary

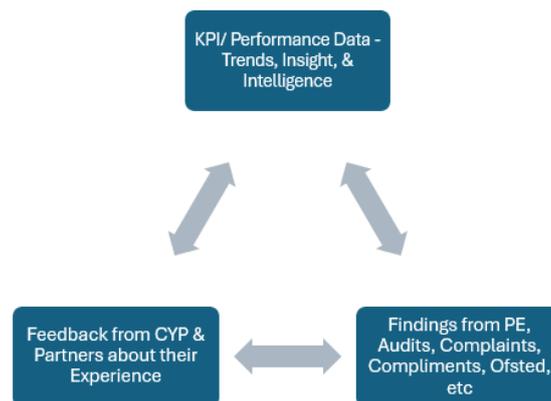
The Birmingham Children’s Trust Annual PQA Report 2024/25 highlights strong performance across key areas. Practice evaluations showed 94% of interventions were appropriate and 88% had a positive impact. Referral timeliness improved, re-referrals declined, and child protection plans rose by 13%. Children in care experienced stable placements, improved health checks, and timely reviews. Care leavers achieved good outcomes in education, employment, and accommodation. Workforce caseloads averaged 18, with 93% of casefiles supervised, though agency use remains high. Complaints were stable with high uphold rates, and compliments reflected strong staff impact. Children’s feedback increased, but advocacy referrals from social work teams remain low. Priorities include strengthening child participation, embedding EDI, improving multi-agency coordination, and reducing agency reliance.

Overview

The 2024/25 Annual PQA Report provides a comprehensive evaluation of Birmingham Children’s Trust’s performance across key service areas, including safeguarding, children in care, care leavers, workforce, youth justice, and participation. The report integrates performance data, practice evaluations, and feedback from children, families, and professionals to assess service quality, impact, and areas for improvement.

The PQA framework is built on three pillars:

- Performance Data: Trends, insights, and intelligence.
- Practice Evaluation: Reflective analysis of frontline work.
- Feedback: Experiences shared by children, young people, families, and partners.



Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) Framework

Birmingham Children’s Trust has embedded a strong culture of quality assurance and performance improvement through its Trust-wide PQA framework. This has enhanced accountability, enabled data-driven decision-making, and improved service responsiveness. Monthly PQA meetings and bi-monthly PQAMs provide structured

forums for reflection and oversight, while tools like scorecards and Power BI dashboards support real-time performance tracking and ownership at all levels.

The Trust is shifting from compliance-based reporting to a more analytical, evaluative approach aligned with the Ofsted Self-Evaluation Framework. To fully embed this, QA must become part of everyday practice—integrated into roles, routines, and supported by training and reflective learning. Fostering a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement will ensure quality assurance remains a driving force for better outcomes.

Practice Evaluation

During 2024–25, Birmingham Children’s Trust completed 471 practice evaluations, achieving an 82% return rate overall and 84% in Quarter 4. Of the interventions reviewed, 94% were deemed appropriate and 88% were found to have made a positive difference. Strengths identified included strong relationships between social workers and families, trauma-informed assessments, collaborative planning, and reflective supervision. However, challenges remain, including inconsistent use of tools such as genograms, limited integration of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles, and variable attention to developmental needs.

Help and Protection

In Quarter 4, Birmingham Children’s Trust received 14,016 contacts—a 5% increase compared to the same period last year—while referral volumes remained steady. Of these, 86% were completed within the required timescale, and the re-referral rate improved to 20%, outperforming both national and statistical neighbour averages. Additionally, 89% of assessments were completed within 45 days, reflecting strong case management and timely decision-making.

The Families Together service supported 362 children and 172 families in July 2024, with 70% of work delivered in partnership with Children’s Social Care. The service maintained zero waiting lists, achieved high levels of engagement, and received consistently positive feedback from families.

Front Door services continued to perform well, maintaining timely referral responses between 84% and 87%. The service demonstrated effective case allocation, improved inclusion of fathers in assessments, and robust planning for families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), contributing to more responsive and inclusive early intervention.

Child Protection

The number of children subject to child protection plans increased by 13% in 2024, rising from 1,503 to 1,697. Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) maintained strong

timeliness, averaging 85%, with a consistently high conversion rate to plans ranging from 88% to 96%. Compliance with child protection visits improved to 93% in Quarter 4, reflecting stronger frontline engagement. However, core group meeting timeliness remained low at 54%, highlighting the need for improved multi-agency coordination and oversight.

Pre-proceedings were used in 84% of public law outcomes, up from 67% in 2023, with 16% of children on child protection plans now in pre-proceedings. The average time from legal planning meeting to initial pre-proceedings was 13.7 days, nearing the 10-day target. Care proceedings duration dropped from 40 to 37 weeks, and diversion from court improved to 45%, aligning with national expectations. No care applications remain open beyond 100 weeks, and long-duration cases continue to decline. Active care cases fell from 232 in 2021 to 153 by the end of 2024, with child-led applications now outpacing family-led ones.

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) continued to deliver strong outcomes, with 55% of children reunited with their families and 65% of parents completing the programme. These results were achieved despite complex needs, with notable reductions in parental substance use. Key priorities moving forward include improving early permanence, refining pre-birth planning, expanding family group conferences, and reducing delays in care proceedings and discharges.

Child Protection Review Service: Section 47 enquiry rates remained stable into early 2025, reflecting consistent thresholds. Child protection plans increased from October 2024, stabilising over winter, with a December dip due to fewer reviews. Only 1% of plans exceeded two years, 19% ended within three months (often due to care entry), and 9% were repeats within 24 months. ICPC timeliness declined from 88% to 80% due to scheduling delays, and conversion to plans dropped to 88%, suggesting stricter thresholds. Oversight continues via midpoint checks and case note reviews.



Children in Care

The number of children looked after (CLA) rose to 2,312, with the rate per 10,000 children remaining stable at 80. Timeliness of Children in Care (CIC) reviews improved to 92% in Quarter 4, and placement stability remained strong, with only 7% of children experiencing three or more moves. Among those in care for over 2.5 years, 71% remained in the same placement, reflecting sustained stability. Health assessment completion rates ranged from 80% to 81%, while dental assessments improved to 73%.

CIC services also improved care planning timeliness to 78%, with a strengthened focus on health, placement stability, and transition planning in preparation for Ofsted inspection. The Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS) reported an 81% improvement in emotional wellbeing and 89% placement stability following intervention. The service responded to a 30% increase in referrals, including a 400% rise in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

Fostering services achieved 78% placement stability and 89% occupancy, with a net gain in foster carers. The service was rated “strong good” by Ofsted in October 2024 and is supported by a diverse and stable workforce. Adoption services also showed improvement, with reduced delays, a doubling of early permanence placements, increased adopter approvals, and 47% of adopters matched within three months of approval.

Care Orders at Home and Discharge – 2024/25: Following Ofsted concerns, Birmingham Children’s Trust launched a Care Discharge Project to improve oversight and legal processes. As of May 2024, 427 children were under care orders at home, with

discharge agreed for 108. The proportion of care orders at home dropped from 6% to 4%. Despite progress, delays persist due to legal advice, consent issues, and social worker capacity. Leadership actions—including appointing a lead officer, setting timescales, and improving legal responsiveness—have led to increased referrals and early 2024 discharges. Timely discharge supports children’s rights and aligns with EDI principles.

Care Leavers

Among care leavers aged 19–21, 62% were in education, employment, or training (EET), and 92% were in suitable accommodation. For those aged 17–18, 64% were in EET and 89% were in suitable accommodation. The Trust maintained contact with 98% of care leavers. These outcomes were supported by mentoring programmes, housing pathways, and apprenticeship schemes.

Workforce

The average caseload per social worker was 18, slightly above the target of 17. Supervision compliance reached 54.3% in Quarter 4. Agency staff accounted for 20% of the workforce, exceeding the 12% target. However, 93% of children’s casefiles had up-to-date supervision records, indicating strong managerial oversight.

Youth Justice

The youth reoffending rate rose to 27.8%, exceeding the 25% target but remaining below the statistical family average. Continued focus on prevention and rehabilitation is recommended to sustain progress.

Complaints and Compliments

Complaint volumes remained consistent throughout the year, with a marked improvement in response timeliness by Quarter 4. However, persistently high uphold rates at Stage 2 indicate a need to strengthen early-stage resolution to prevent escalation. Although Ombudsman involvement was limited, the cases that did arise revealed delays and procedural shortcomings, highlighting opportunities for internal process refinement.

The increase in complaints from young people and advocates in Quarter 4 reflects improved accessibility and awareness of the complaints process. This rise in child-led complaints is a positive indicator of empowerment, but also underscores the need for more child-focused planning and communication.

Evolving Themes by Quarter:

Q1: Service delivery and communication challenges.

Q3: Concerns around staff conduct and assessment quality.

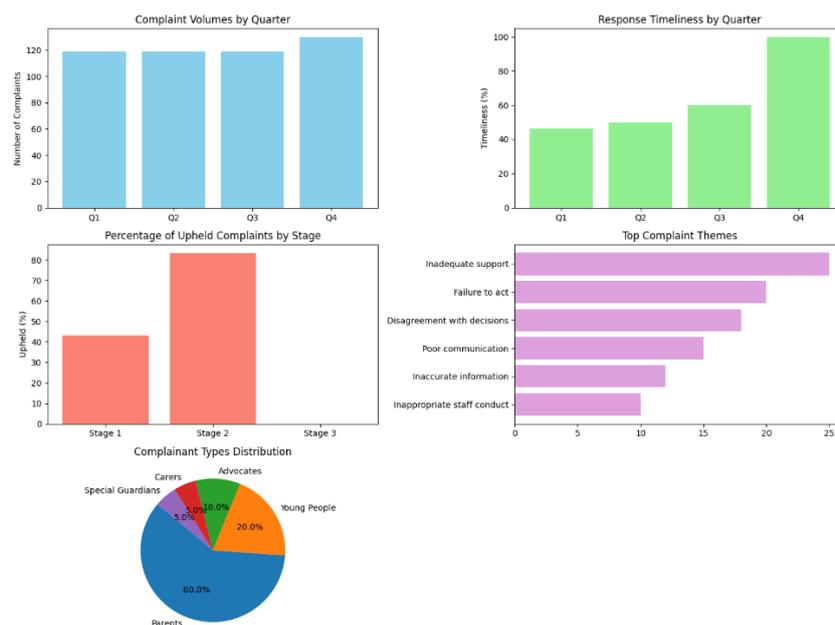
Q4: Increased dissatisfaction with assessments and support planning.

BCT Compliments Summary

In 2024/25, Birmingham Children’s Trust received a rich and diverse collection of compliments that highlight the exceptional work being carried out across the organisation. These expressions of gratitude came from children, families, and professionals, and consistently praised the compassion, professionalism, and dedication of staff.

The feedback illustrates the Trust’s success in building meaningful relationships, delivering impactful support, and fostering positive change in the lives of children and families. This period stands as a strong testament to the Trust’s commitment to excellence in practice and the value of recognising and celebrating the people who make that possible.

Birmingham Children’s Trust Complaints Report 2024–2025: Visual Summary



Voice of the Child

Feedback collection increased significantly, with a 77% rise in parental responses. Among children, 80% understood the Trust’s involvement in their lives and 81% felt involved in decision-making. Advocacy referrals rose by 25%, although only 30% came from social work teams. Children expressed a desire for greater involvement in placement decisions, improved transition support, and more consistent emotional wellbeing services.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

While Birmingham Children's Trust recognises the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion, there is currently no systematic approach to measuring or reporting its impact. Inconsistent EDI data collection across services limits the Trust's ability to fully understand and address disparities in outcomes. Persistent inequalities are evident in services such as FDAC and Adoption, where children from global majority backgrounds remain underrepresented despite their significant presence in care—suggesting potential systemic barriers in matching, recruitment, or cultural alignment.

Similarly, the limited involvement of fathers in assessments and planning reflects gender bias, which can lead to incomplete family assessments and missed opportunities for support. To address these challenges, the Trust must embed culturally competent practice, inclusive communication, and diverse recruitment across all services. Staff should be equipped to understand and respond to families' cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds using trauma-informed, accessible approaches. Recruitment of carers, adopters, and staff should reflect the diversity of the children and families served.

By embedding these principles into everyday practice and improving the consistency and quality of EDI data collection and analysis, the Trust can deliver more equitable, inclusive, and effective services.

Key Improvement Priorities and Recommendations

Birmingham Children's Trust is committed to embedding a culture of continuous improvement through a set of strategic priorities focused on quality assurance, inclusion, workforce development, and partnership working.

1. Embedding Quality Assurance in Practice

The Trust will strengthen its quality assurance culture by integrating QA expectations into job descriptions, supervision, and training. It will expand the use of moderation and peer evaluation, implement standardised care and pathway plans, ensure consistent use of case summaries, and improve the quality of intervention records. Dashboards will be used to monitor and address overdue tasks, supporting accountability and service consistency.

2. Advancing Equity, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EEDI)

To address persistent disparities, the Trust will develop a Trust-wide EDI reporting framework, deliver staff training in cultural competence and inclusive communication, and increase the recruitment of diverse adopters, foster carers, and staff to better reflect the communities it serves.

3. Supporting and Strengthening the Workforce

The Trust will address caseload imbalances, enhance staff wellbeing, and expand access to therapeutic support and reflective supervision. Reducing reliance on agency staff remains a key focus, with investment in recruitment and retention to build a stable, skilled workforce.

4. Improving Interagency Collaboration

Stronger coordination across health, education, legal, and community partners will be prioritised. Audit findings will be used to inform joint planning and drive integrated, child-centred services.

5. Strengthening Child Participation and Support

Children's voices will be embedded more consistently in planning and decision-making. The Trust will expand access to advocacy and emotional wellbeing support, ensuring children feel heard, supported, and involved in shaping their care.

Conclusion

The 2024/25 Annual PQA Report reflects Birmingham Children's Trust's continued progress in delivering high-quality, responsive, and inclusive services. Strong performance in practice evaluation, care planning, and placement stability demonstrates the Trust's commitment to improving outcomes for children and families. While areas such as EDI integration, documentation consistency, and workforce stability require further attention, the Trust has laid a solid foundation for continuous improvement. By embedding quality assurance into everyday practice, strengthening child participation, and advancing equity and collaboration, the Trust is well-positioned to build on its achievements and drive forward its vision for excellence in care.

Report Author

Ogee Robinson

Head of Performance and Quality Assurance

July 2025

Full Annual PQA 2024/25 Report



BCT%20Annual%20PQA%20Report%20-%