



BUSINESS PLAN 2024-29

May 2024



**BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST**

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Foreword from the participation groups U & U - Unique and United

Our new name and identity

We are proud to show you our new name and logo that we created. Our Digital Marketing Apprentice helped put our ideas into a design that we think looks great and represents us. '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, LGBTQ+ and Young Parent's Project.



We are strengthening our participation work, doing huge amounts of co-production, consultations, training, interviewing of staff (including all of our Assessed and Supported Year in Employment [ASYE] cohort) and still finding time for our own campaigns.

Our priorities for 2024

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

We will be consulting with young people on what support they need with what can be a very difficult transition into adulthood and independence. We will work with lots of people including Children in Care teams, the 18+ Service, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Fostering and Housing on how we can be prepared earlier, be more involved and have more information when we need it.

As care experienced young people, we can often face a lot of challenges when living independently, this can range from managing our finances and the cost of living, needing help to furnish, decorate and maintain a home and accessing education and employment opportunities. We will also focus on themes to do with our emotional wellbeing, being lonely and not having a strong support network. We will be looking at how some of these things can be made easier and what our social workers, personal advisors (PAs), the council and other partners and people in the community can do to help. We are keen to ensure we have spaces we can 'drop in' and have opportunities to get support and meet other young people.

- **Ensuring young people understand their plans and what is happening to them**

There is a theme about young people not always knowing who is involved with them, what their plan is and why certain decisions have been made. Some Trust staff will now write to us in our plans or records. We want to see this being developed into practice so that what is written about us and decisions that are made are easily understood, and we have information that we can understand.

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

Being a child in care or care experienced can be difficult enough, this can be more difficult if you are disabled, LGBTQ+, Black, Asian or from another ethnic minority. We heard for the first time at the Corporate Parenting Board last year from our LGBTQ+ group and the

challenges they faced from family, peers, social workers, and teachers. We heard about young people not being called by their identified name and people refusing to accept them for who they are.

We are also creating a new group for young people who are Black, Asian and from other minority groups. From feedback we have had from young people there are specific challenges young people face and outcomes that are not as good based on your ethnicity.

We are keen to tackle these issues and start finding our more so we can make changes for our young people.

- **Peer Support Opportunities and Training**

As well as having our apprentices support our groups, we are also developing opportunities for young people to do this as well.

Our apprentices have developed training called 'Be Present', which young people can be trained in and help deliver.

Young people will also be supported to be part of training that includes a focus on disabled and neurodiverse young people, those experiencing poor emotional & mental health, LGBTQ+ and black, Asian, and other minority groups.

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

This year we are really keen to reach as many children in care and care experienced young people as possible. Our Social Media and Marketing Apprentice has created our new social media pages. We want people to follow these and promote them so that children and young people can communicate with us and give feedback in different ways. If you want to join a group or find out more email

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



@unitedunique_



@UnitedUnique_



@unitedunique_

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



Section 1

Introduction

1. Introduction

This is the seventh annual business plan which reflects the mature status of Birmingham Children's Trust, now well established and with a successful track record of achievement most obviously in the Good Ofsted judgement from March 2023. The City Council has expressed its deep confidence in the Trust by committing to a ten-year contract term in 2023, just as the Department for Education (DfE) reflected its own confidence in subsequently revoking the statutory direction in respect of children's social care.

However, Birmingham's context has become more challenging with the Council issuing a section 114 notice to reflect its inability to set a legal and balanced budget, and the government subsequently appointing a team of commissioners to oversee the Council's plans to address the budget deficit and improve the running of the Council – adjoining the existing intervention in respect of the Council's responsibilities for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Trust has rapidly built strong working relationships with the commissioners, who have in turn expressed their confidence in the Trust.

The Trust has moved quickly to support the Council in its planning and recognise our responsibility to shoulder a proportionate share of the savings that have proved necessary – at the same time as ensuring we can maintain all the services that are essential for vulnerable children, young people, and families across the city. This is particularly challenging, in the context of the profound impact of the pandemic and the subsequent additional impact of the cost-of-living crisis, with the consequence that levels of need have been rising rapidly. The two system leaders for children in Birmingham, in the person of the Trust Chief Executive and the Council's Director of Children's Services (DCS), have taken proactive steps to ensure that these challenges are seen by all partners as a shared responsibility.

All of our staff across the Trust continue to deliver for children, young people, and families through all the roles across the organisation, and it is to their credit that they have not been distracted from their passion and commitment by Birmingham's challenges. We remain grateful and respectful every day for their skilled relational work that has such a positive impact for so many, as everything we achieve is down to them. We will continue to be focused upon ensuring we deliver the system conditions for great practice in Birmingham, as well as sharing our learning and supporting sector-led improvement in particular through our developing partnership with Solihull.

We are excited to have initiated our Trust 2025 Programme as a proactive opportunity to consider all the ways in which we can become an even more effective organisation, always seeking to move forwards and improve. The Programme will build upon the findings of the Child's Journey work and take account of the context which includes a number of significant factors: the arrival of the new Chief Executive; the development of the government's children's social care reform programme; our next steps in embedding our practice framework 'Connections Count'; and the likelihood of further budget challenges following from the Council's s114 notice.

The Trust Board has approved a refreshed strategic objective for the next five years:
To improve the outcomes and experiences of children, young people, and families through:

- effective earlier intervention.
- reduced risk from neglect, abuse, and exploitation.
- support to be cared for within family networks.
- realising potential for all our children in care and care leavers.

And the Board has endorsed the development of a clear baseline of measures, both quantitative and qualitative against which progress can be measured.

This business plan sets out our next set of challenges and priorities as we continue to drive ourselves to be the best we can be. Our focus on the quality of practice will be relentless, as we seek to strengthen our approaches to ensuring every child is cared for within their family network when it is safe to do so, to intervening 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.

This business plan, we hope, sets out a firm and confident base for the Trust that enables us to embark on the many challenges ahead with both resolve and confidence.

Thank you

Andy Couldrick
Chair

James Thomas
Chief Executive



Section 2

2024: Our Vision and Values

2. Birmingham Children's Trust 2024: Our Vision and Values

Our vision is to build a Trust that provides excellent social work and family support for and with the city's most vulnerable children, young people, and families.

We will do this:

- with compassion and with care.
- through positive relationships, building on strengths.
- in collaboration with children, young people, families, and partners.
- by listening, involving, and including.
- in ways that are efficient and deliver value for money.

Success will mean significant progress towards these outcomes:

- healthy, happy, resilient children living in families.
- families able to make positive changes.
- children able to attend, learn and achieve at school.
- young people ready for and contributing to adult life.
- children and young people safe from harm.

BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S
ONE TEAM
ACCOUNTABLE AND RESPONSIBLE
QUALITY
RELATIONSHIPS
HIGH SUPPORT HIGH CHALLENGE

These values are reflected in the model that underpins our practice right across the Trust:

- **Relationship-based:** practice invested in relationships with child and family; understanding of relationships and attachments and their importance in assessments and plans. Built on the idea of 'High Support, High Challenge'.
- **Contextual:** understanding the context in which people with whom we are working are: family; economic; social; school; employment. Understanding context is pivotal to learning how we can help.
- **Trauma-informed:** practice based on an understanding of the impact of past adverse events and experiences, that is sensitive to trauma and focused on the means of moving beyond trauma, for children and young people and for families, building resilience and confidence.

Our Practice Model, 'Connections Count' reflects these values and equips staff with knowledge and tools to practice in this way. We know we have grown a culture across the Trust that supports this.



Section 3

Key Developments for 2024/25

3. Key Developments 2024/25

Twelve months on from our "Good" Ofsted rating we are now focussed on sustaining the improvements by establishing the optimum conditions for great social care practice. We have concluded the Child's Journey work and the learning from this has informed the next phase of our development, the "Trust 2025 Programme: Delivering the System Conditions for Connections Count". Informed by the National Review and the flexibilities afforded by the updated Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance, we will be testing ways in which we can intervene earlier and more effectively in children and families' lives, shifting demand to earlier points in the system. We will be looking to new ways of organising the workforce to reduce dependency upon qualified social workers and the workload demands upon them. Managing support for children in need differently through an alternatively qualified workforce will be a key consideration. This will be transformational work but is necessary in the context of increasing demand alongside an insufficient supply of social workers to meet it.

We are continuing to prioritise the recommendations from the 2023 Ofsted inspection. Preparation for adulthood is a system-wide challenge and we are working closely with Birmingham City Council's adult services and Children and Families department to review the arrangements. We want to make sure that planning for children and their exit from care is managed much earlier and is more sensitive to the unique challenges they face.

Our offer to Children with Disabilities has been a challenge for us over the last couple of years. We have reviewed our policies and are now embarking on a more fundamental review of how we organise our resources. We want children and families to receive a consistent and equitable approach to the assessment and allocation of vital resources. Our new policy and resource framework will help set the organisational standards, but more work is needed to embed a graduated response to families that is clear and accessible. We will continue to work closely with colleagues leading the SEND agenda and alongside those children and families that need our services.

Quality assurance and performance management is critical for any organisation in having a line of sight over the quality of practice. We have made significant progress in establishing and implementing a framework, which was commended by Ofsted, but we know that there is more to do. Birmingham Children's Trust is a large organisation and therefore the assurance frameworks we have in place will need to encompass the breadth of services we deliver. We are committed over the next 12 months to strengthening our arrangements so that we have all of the right information to steer our priorities.

We are working hard to improve our services across youth offending and while we are pleased with the progress made so far, we recognise that the improvements must continue at pace to achieve a better regulatory outcome and ultimately a better service offer for young people. A critical part of this agenda will be our response to youth violence in the city and we will look to review existing youth provision arrangements alongside the targeted offer to ensure we have got our system response right.

The fostering service currently rated as Good by Ofsted is likely to be inspected during 24/25, a plan is in place to ensure. In line with the Trust sufficiency plan the service continues to focus on recruitment of carers with 23/24 seeing a net increase in carers. The service

continues to forge links with local communities in order to recruit carers from a wide range of backgrounds to meet the needs of our young people, this year we aim to recruit 50 additional homes, including 6 additional homes for young people moving on from residential care.

The performance of the adoption team continues to exceed expectation with over 100 children being adopted this year. Looking to increase the use of early permanence which provides better outcomes for children and supports our sufficiency plan. In 24/25 the adoption service will take an increased role in the planning for children with a permanence other than adoption. The service continues to support the Trust sufficiency plan while promoting outcomes for children by increasing the numbers of early permanence arrangements.

Corporate parenting is a priority for 24/25 with the need to build on the foundations of the current board wider engagement of BCC is a priority for the coming year.

Sufficiency continues to be a priority focus, the recently implemented accommodation panels have seen a significant reductions in placement spend, as well as progressing the plans for young people. The service has a robust strategy to engage and shape the market, making Birmingham the local authority of choice while maintaining the cost of care. There are a number of key priorities including reducing the number of under 12s in residential care. In line with our sufficiency plan there is an ongoing review of our inhouse residential service to improve occupancy rates and increase internal provision.

Within the commissioning service we are working closely with partners to establish a joint commissioning space, which will deliver economies of scales improved outcomes for children and young people. A shared commissioning strategy will reduce frustrations and provide greater clarity for families and professionals.

We are leading on the West Midlands Placement Portal project which has sponsorship from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and we are progressing the feasibility and design work for the West Midlands Safe Centre which has DfE sponsorship and aims to provide new secure provision within Birmingham.

We will continue to invest in new technology and tools to enable our workforce to strengthen and expand their direct work with children and families. This will include better systems integration to reduce time taken on data management and focus on data intelligence to better inform management decision making.

We will strengthen our people management and financial management across the Trust to ensure the offer to operational management is consistent and robust.



Section 4

Trust Priorities 2024/25 and beyond

4. Trust Priorities 2024/25 and Beyond

BETTER OUTCOMES



Meeting children's needs through effective earlier intervention



Improving the outcomes for children in care and care leavers



Reducing drift and delay



Enabling more children to be cared for in their family networks



Improved support for children with disabilities



More foster carers recruited

ENABLERS



Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing Plans



Recruitment and Retention



Participation and Co-production



Strengthened partnership working



Delivering the system conditions for 'Connections Count'



Deepening our learning culture

Priorities for 2024/25

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
Meeting children's needs through effective earlier intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering "Right Help, Right Time" so that families experience interventions as supportive • Expanding the Early Help/Family Help offer to minimise Social Work interventions • Measuring effective impact with reduced higher tariff interventions
Improving the outcomes for children in care and care leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Reducing drift and delay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt response following referral • Care plans drawn up 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (non-unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) coming into care in late adolescence
Improved support for children with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved experience of families in respect of short breaks • Improved experience of timely identification of SEND
More foster carers recruited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone child who needs a foster placement should have access to one • Reduced use of residential care
Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments and services that address equality, diversity, and inclusion (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

Strategic Priority	Impact/Benefits
Recruitment and Retention	<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
Participation and Co-production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased impact of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership • Stronger partnership Early Help offer through the Children and Young People's Partnership • Effective joint working between front-line practitioners
Delivering the system conditions for Connections Count	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manageable caseloads and workloads • Support first line managers • Strong continuing professional development (CPD) offer • Competitive salary • Support systems and tools that support
Deepening our learning culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative auditing programme across the Trust • Increasing evidence of learning being implemented



Section 5

Performance

5. 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.

The Trust has performed well, in 2023/24, in relation to all but two of the contractual performance indicators. We have seen one month where the timeliness of all assessments completed was below target and out of tolerance. We know that the timeliness of assessments at the front door i.e. when we are making initial decisions about the help, support or protection children need is good, with consistently 90%+ assessments completed in time.

The number of agency social workers has remained persistently higher than we would want. However, we have seen the numbers falling month on month over the year. We also perform better than regional and statistical neighbours. Over the year we have continued to convert agency to permanent workers and we have seen many agency social workers leave and then return to us.

Summary of Trust performance 2023/24

The key performance indicators for 2023/24 are set out below.

Birmingham Children's Trust Business Plan 2024-29

No.	Indicator	No. of months on target or within tolerances or 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	12/12	100%
KPI 2	Percentage of assessments completed in 45 working days or less	11/12	88%
KPI 3	Percentage of children in need on a plan for more than three months	12/12	100%
KPI 4	Rate of section 47 enquiries per 10,000 of the u18 children and young people population	No target Set	No tolerance Set
KPI 5	Percentage of initial child protection conferences held within 15 days	12/12	100%
KPI 6a	Percentage of child protection plans lasting two years or more	12/12	100%
KPI 6b	Percentage of child protection plans for a 2nd or subsequent time in the last 2 years	12/12	100%
KPI 7a	Rate of children looked after per 10,000 under 18 population	12/12	100%
KPI 7b	Percentage of children in care living in foster care	12/12	100%
KPI 7c	Percentage of children in care living in residential care	12/12	100%
KPI 7d	Percentage children in care living with their family networks	12/12	100%
KPI 8	Number of children waiting for adoption	No target Set	No tolerance Set
KPI 9a	Children in care with 3+ home (placement) moves within 12months	12/12	100%
KPI 9b	Children in care in home (placement) for 2.5 years or more	12/12	100%
KPI 10	Percentage of children and young people placed within 20 miles of home address	12/12	100%
KPI 11a	Percentage of care leavers in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 17th to 18th Birthday	12/12	100%
KPI 11b	Percentage of care leavers in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 19th to 21st Birthday	12/12	100%
KPI 12a	Care leavers in suitable accommodation aged 19-21 (reported monthly for Q1-4)	12/12	100%
KPI 12b	Care leavers in suitable accommodation aged 17-18 (reported monthly for Q1-4)	12/12	100%
KPI 13	Average caseload per social worker	12/12	100%
KPI 14	Percentage of agency social workers	0/12	0%
KPI 15	Reoffending rate	Annual	Annual



Section 6

Governance Arrangements

6. Governance Arrangements

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. In response to the volume of work generated for Trust non-executive directors (NEDs), and a wish to improve the diversity of the Board, the number of NEDs has been increased by one, in agreement with the City Council and DfE.

The Board consists of a chair and 8 non-executive directors, one of whom is appointed by the City Council. Details of current Board members are available on the Trust Website at: [https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/who we are](https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/who_we_are).

The Trust Board has established the following committees:

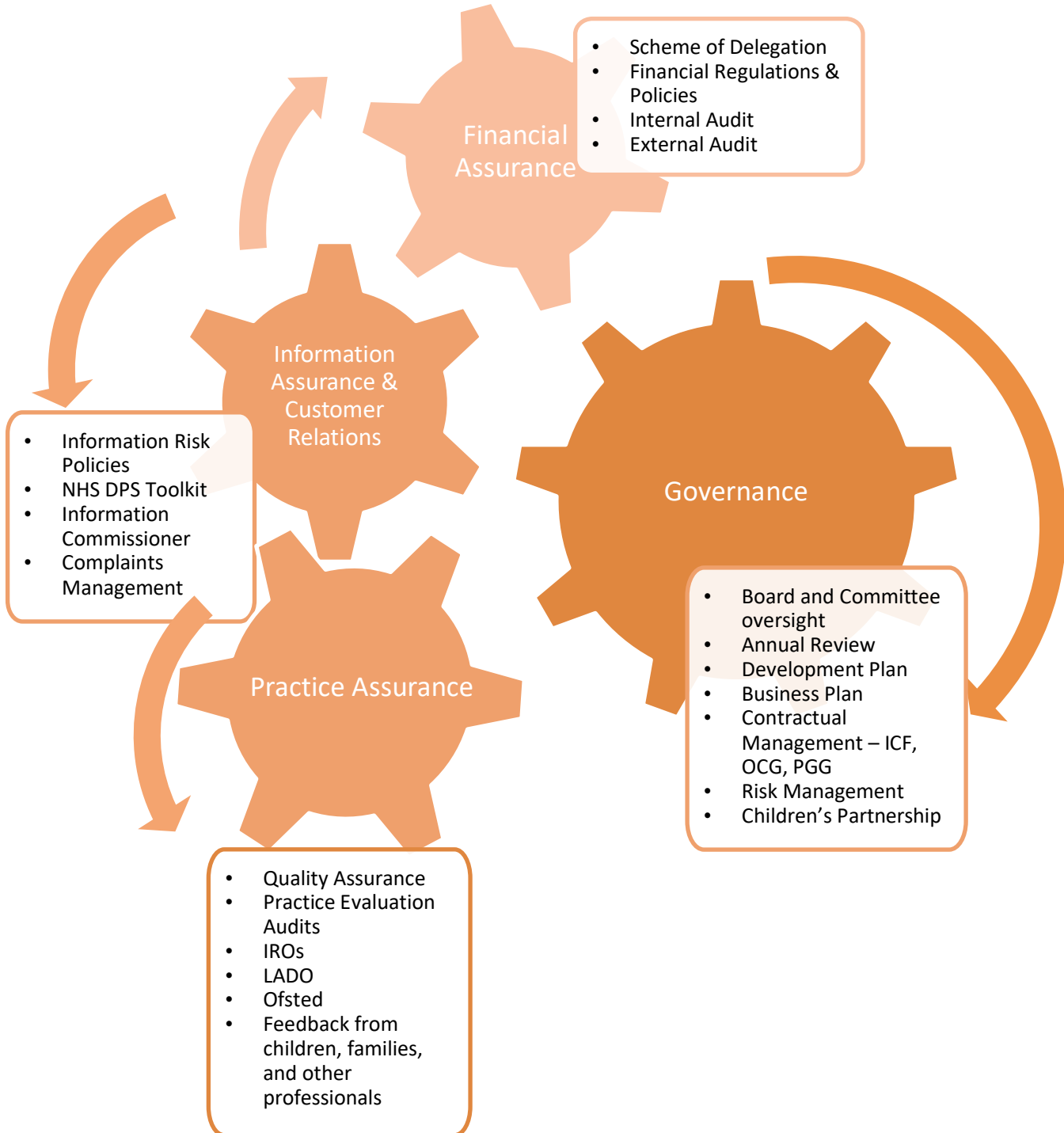
- Finance and Resources.
- Performance and Quality Assurance.
- Workforce.
- Nominations and Remuneration.

The governance arrangements between the Council, Trust and DfE, have worked effectively during the Trust's first six 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.





Section 7

Trust Services

7. Trust Services

The Trust is commissioned by the Council to provide the following services:

- Early Help Services
- Families Together
- Children's Advice and Support Service (CASS) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Social Work Teams
- Contextual Safeguarding Hub EmpowerU
- Services for Disabled Children: social work; short breaks
- Adoption (Regional Adoption Agency) and Fostering
- Residential Care
- Placements and commissioning
- Rights, participation, and advocacy
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, No Recourse to Public Funds, Homelessness service, Edge of Care, Family Group Conference service
- Care Leavers' Service
- Youth Offending Service
- Family Drug and Alcohol Court
- Independent Review Service and Child Protection Chairs
- Support Services (including Finance, Legal Services, Commissioning, ICT, HR and Business Services & Support, Customer Relations)
- Business support to the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership

A pen portrait of our children and our service is appended.



Section 8
Our People

8. Our People

The Trust is committed to the development of our staff both in terms of how we invest in their learning and continuous professional development and in how we recognise and reward our workforce so that we are attractive as a potential employer and our retention levels are high. This is all encapsulated in our Trust workforce development plan.

A key element of the Trust workforce development plan is to promote the Trust as "an employer of choice". Some of the key initiatives include:

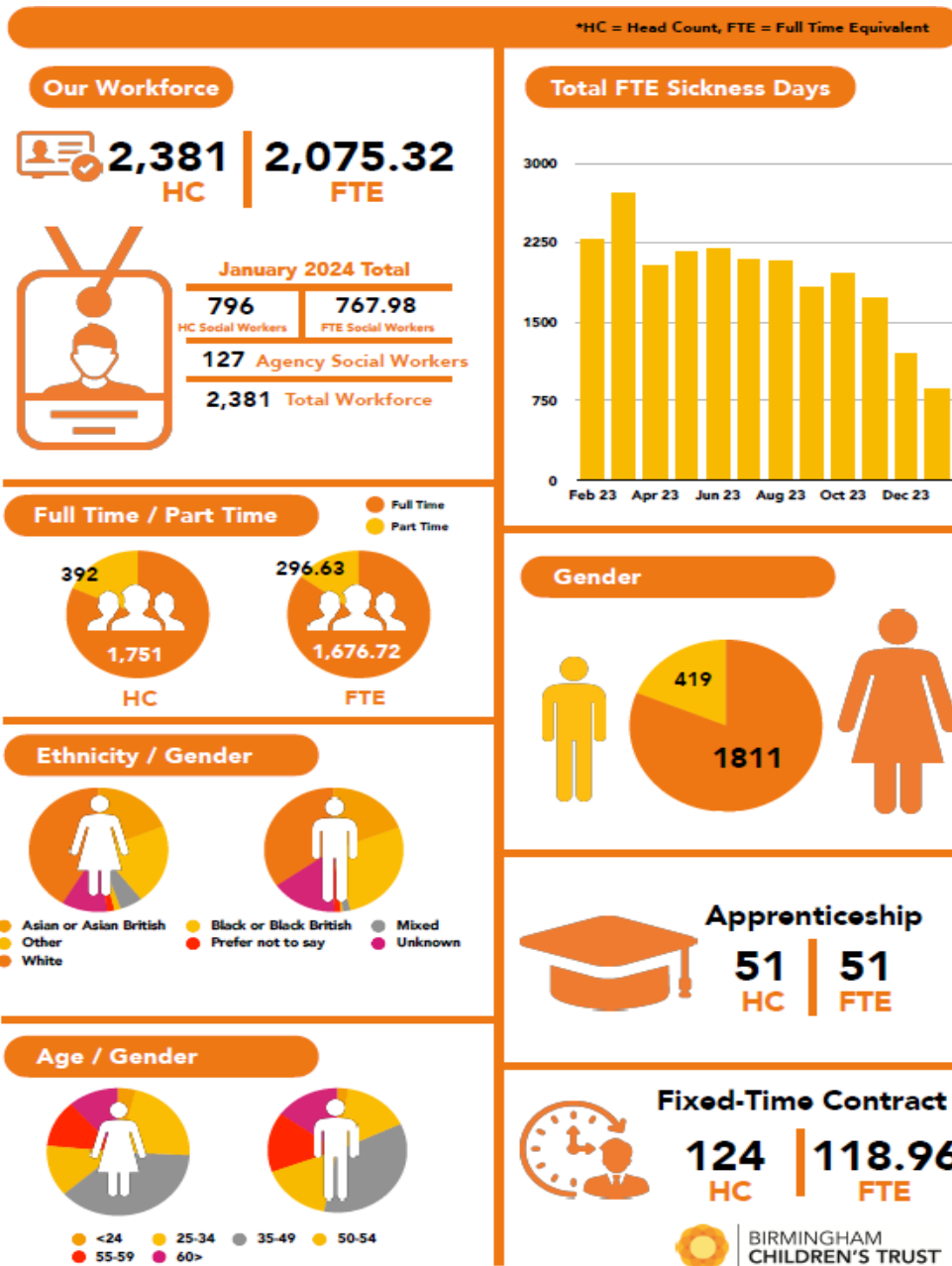
- a development of our brand and "value proposition" to attract and retain staff through an improved digital marketing and social media presence and by increasing the Trust's visibility in the job marketplace.
- developing an improved emotional support offer for our people, based on our trauma- informed principles.
- implementation of regular, consistent digital recruitment campaigns across various platforms to target, in particular, regional experienced social workers to increase application rates and interest in our permanent vacancies.
- strategies and processes to streamline our supply of temporary and agency staff that minimise our unfilled vacancies and increase the size of our talent pool.
- continuing our successful social worker ASYE programme and apprenticeship scheme to "grow our own". We have developed our Trust Academy to support their development in the early stages of their social work career.
- investment and support in the career development of unqualified roles eg. Family Support Worker/Social Work Assistant, within our social work teams.
- a training offer aligned to "Knowledge and Skills" for all the workforce.
- Trust-wide access to the benefits of the apprenticeship levy for existing and new staff for a range of professions.
- an established health and wellbeing initiative with a range of diverse support measures.
- a review of our practice operating model and roles in an effort to build clearer and stronger career pathways for experienced social workers.
- improvements to our workforce succession planning, development, and progression opportunities across all roles.
- improving employee engagement at all levels, through the creation of workforce

specific task groups to include employees in the Trust's decision-making and improvements to enhance their loyalty, inclusion, and sense of belonging to the Trust and becoming a regional lead employer of choice.

- a high importance placed on equality and diversity matters for all employees. This is supported by an Equalities Forum and the Equalities and Diversity Manager role that supports the development of this work.
- an ongoing review of our pay and non-pay benefits to ensure they remain competitive and attractive.
- a review of our HR service and functional products to ensure alignment with the business need.
- constant review of Trust HR policies to ensure the organisation's people processes can be managed in the most effective and positive way.

The infographic below sets out the Trust's key human resources analytics, outlining:

- a comparison of full and part-time in terms of total head count and total FTE.
- a comparison of the sickness days lost.
- qualified social workers shown against the total Trust workforce.
- ethnicity and gender breakdown.
- age and gender breakdown.
- HC means headcount. FTE means full-time equivalent.



Following the closure of some of our buildings and office moves, our overall footprint has reduced, as we embrace a hybrid, flexible working model which finds the 'sweet spot' between flexible and home-based working that has been largely successful during the pandemic, and the need for staff to maintain human contact and relationships to support their work: with peers and colleagues, managers, partners, and service users.



Section 9

Trust Financial Position and Budget

9. Trust Financial Position and Budget

The Trust's financial position for 2023/24 has been challenging. The forecast rise in the care population has again proven to be very accurate, however the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has increased beyond what had been forecast. 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 £18m for 2023/24. Management action and efficiencies delivered across the Trust, together with additional grant from the Household Support Fund has provided off-setting savings of £8m, reducing the overall deficit to £10m (4%).

The in-year pressure compares favourably with national comparators and Birmingham has consistently had the second lowest number of children looked after per 10,000 children compared to statistical neighbours (confirmed by an independent review undertaken by Newton Europe, commissioned by the Council, and published in 2023).

The on-going pressures of the Trust, together with the financial position of the Council have informed the budget negotiations for the 2024/25. The agreed contract sum which will form the basis of the Trust's revenue budget for 2024/25 is £294.8m. The breakdown and key assumptions behind this are as follows:

- £272.0m core contract sum carried forward from 2023/24

Add:

- £15.4m provision to cover pay and non-pay inflation
- £13.5 to cover demography changes (including UASC)
- £7.9m for increments, additional pension costs, ICT pressures, and to cover the loss of the Household Support Fund
- £0.7m for increased grants

Less:

- £5.7m removal of Early Help funding from the Council
- £9.0m 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 will continue to deliver Early Help services, despite the removal of funding from the Council. The approach taken by the Trust to deliver savings and allow for required reinvestment in Early Help for 2024/25 is as follows:

- Reduce the pensions liability
- Use of alternative funding sources and maximise use of grant
- Placement cost control & contract management
- Efficiency savings (e.g., automation / digitalisation)
- Other service reductions (to be kept to a minimum)

The Trust's capital proposals approved by the Council at a Cabinet meeting in March 2022 include capital funding of £1.1m for 2024/25. Due to the financial position of the Council

the Trust will need to submit a business case detailing how this funding will be utilised before it can be drawn down.

Key elements of the 2024/25 capital business case will be to enable the Trust to:

- invest further in our residential care homes including replacement of outdated kitchens, bathrooms, and boilers, etc;
- carry out essential repairs, for example roof repairs and replacements; and
- ensure our working environment is fit for purpose.

The Trust is the lead for the West Midlands Safe Centre project to provide additional secure capacity in the region. The project is currently at feasibility stage and expected to complete detailed design stage during 2024/25. The capital cost of this will be funded by DfE grant.

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 2024/25.

Spending and funding analysis	2024/25 (£m)
Employees	129.5
Premises	3.6
Transport	1.6
Supplies and services	13.5
Payments to third party providers	152.4
Total planned spending	300.6
Funded by:	
Core contract sum from Birmingham City Council	281.8
Government grants paid via Birmingham City Council	13.0
Total contract sum	294.8
Other grants and contributions received direct by the Trust	5.8
Total funding	300.6





Section 10

The Children's Trust and the Council

10. The Children's Trust and the Council

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.



Section 11

Managing Risk

11. Managing Risk

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.

Appendix - Pen portrait of our children and our service



Pen portrait of our children and our service (31 March 2024)



BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST

Our vision is to build a Trust that provides excellent social work and family support for, and with, the city's most vulnerable children, young people and families. We give our best so young people can achieve their best.

Gross budget **£304m**



Number of employees **2,166**



Child breakdown by age

Under 1 - 496 children
 1-4 - 1,360 children
 5-9 - 1,767 children
 10-15 - 2,575 children
 16-25 - 2,091 children/young people

994
care
leavers

9,603
open
children

181 unaccompanied asylum seekers
 596 Trust foster carers - 822 placements
 15% of children left care through adoption
 104 children adopted
 4 homes for disabled children
 1 home for children with EBD needs
 26.6% youth reoffending rate (34.2% Eng & Wales)

Number of children with a child protection plan



1,442

Number of children in care



2,289

672 Number of disabled children



1,660
Children
in need
with plan

Over 7,521 families supported during the year



Get in touch: birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

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