



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



**BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST**

This Foreword is an extract from the Birmingham Children's Trust Business Plan 2024/25

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.

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1. Introduction

This annual report 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. In line with this level of confidence, it has been a good time to make key leadership changes, with Andy Couldrick handing over to James Thomas as Chief Executive, whilst providing helpful continuity in his new role as Chair of the Trust's Board.

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 have continued 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 have continued 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.

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.

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 Annual Report 2023/24

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

3. Governance and relationships

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

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

The governance arrangements for the Trust are set out in the Articles of Association and its scheme of delegation. The Service Delivery Contract details how the Trust will work with the Council to ensure the priorities and objectives specified within the contract are delivered, how decisions are made and how the Trust is held to account.

The 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.

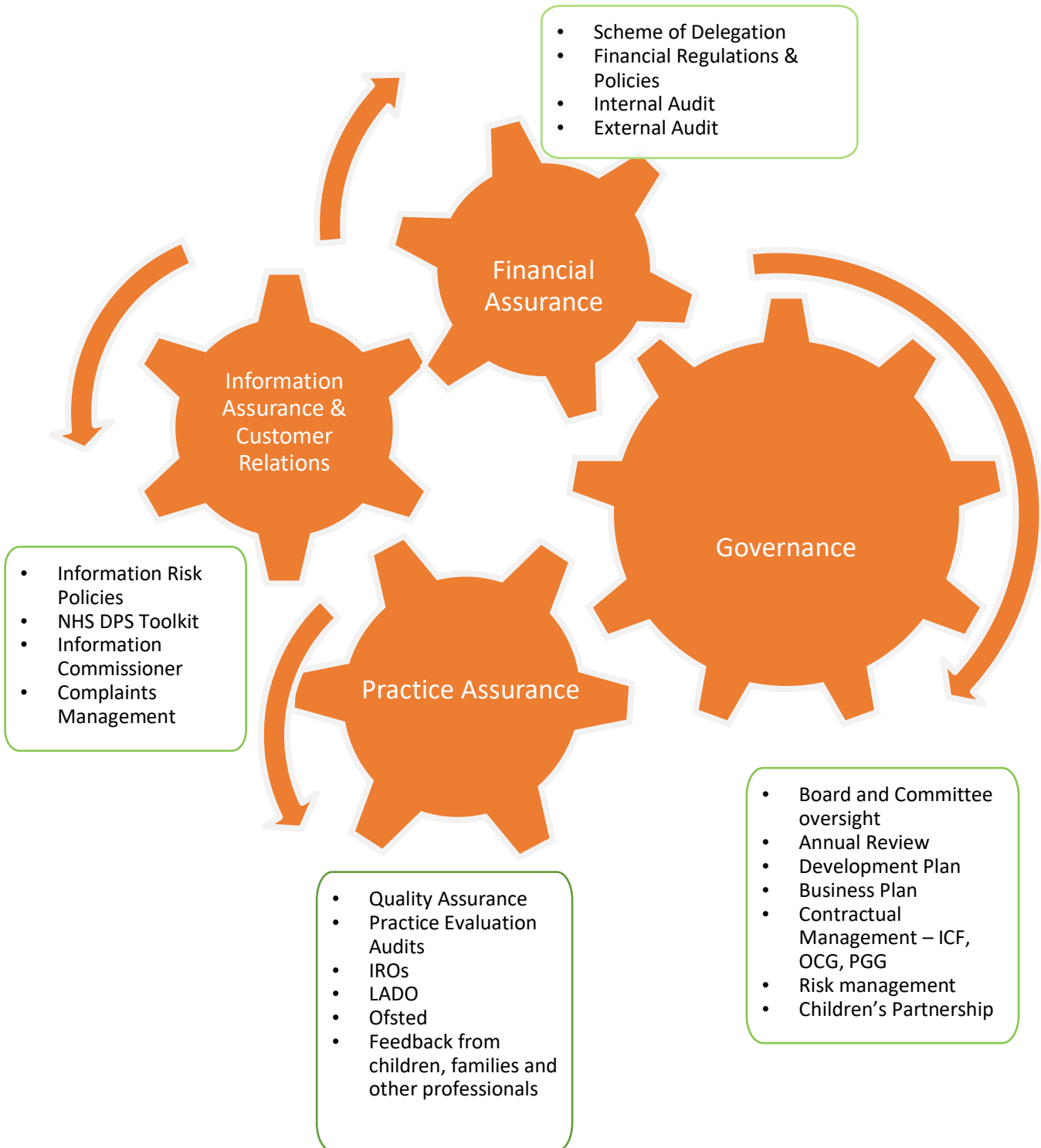
The governance arrangements between the Council, Trust and DfE, have worked effectively during the Trust's first six years. The framework of Operational Commissioning Group, Trust Partnership Governance Group and routine engagement at Overview and Scrutiny, alongside regular meetings between the Trust 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.



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 2023/24

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

6. Summary of any changes to the Agreement agreed during 2023/24

The new 10-year contract was implemented from 1 April 2023 together with a change to Schedule 5 (Payment Mechanism) to provide for an increase in the contract sum for a variance in the number of children in care and asylum-seeking children beyond a forecast tolerance.

A review of the support service agreement with the Council for the supply of digital and technology services, which was planned for 2023/24, is now expected to be completed during the first half of 2024/25.

In October 2023, the Trust moved to new leased premises at One Avenue Road, Aston, Birmingham which will be the new registered office as a community interest company. During 2023/24 the Trust also took full occupation of Lifford House and vacated both Lancaster Circus and New Aston House, and in so doing ended the licence arrangements with the Council for those two buildings.

7. Demand for services in 2023/24 and the expected demand for the services in 2024/25; social, demographic or other relevant factors which affected the services in 2023/24 and/or may affect the services in 2024/25

Demand for services has continued to increase with our care population rising to 2289 by the end of March 2024 representing a rate of 80 per 10,000 at year end. We still compare favourably to statistical neighbours (87 per 10,000). The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has also continued to increase with 181 children as of 31 March 2024, representing 8% of our total care population. Consequently, creating a sufficiency and financial pressure, particularly given the costs for those young people over the age of 18 years are not fully covered by the Home Office Grant.

The demographic trend in recent years in Birmingham has seen the overall child population increase by around 1% per annum. We are concerned that the continuing cost of living crisis and the financial pressure on household incomes will lead to higher levels of social deprivation during 2024/25, with a negative impact on the demand for children's social care.

Within this context, comparing 22/23 to 23/24, assessment volumes have stayed relatively constant over the last year. This is likely as a result of growth being absorbed in other teams, most notably within Early Help where caseloads have increased by 18%. In addition, children with child in need plans have risen by 9% and those with child protection plans by 15%. These rises reflect the growing prevalence of need in the city and the continued challenge the Trust has in maintaining quality provision and meeting need in an increasingly challenging demand environment.

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

On the 28th April 2023 the Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations came into force requiring that all providers offering supported accommodation to 16–18-year-olds be registered with Ofsted by October 2023

- These regulatory changes have had the effect of driving up costs and reducing supply across the country,
- Sufficiency challenges in relation to category 2 provision (provision for those young people assessed as requiring minimal support)

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

- set out a clear strategic plan to ensure continued sufficiency
- completed over 30 market engagement meetings with Birmingham Providers
- shared exemplars of Ofsted's required documents
- worked directly with individual providers to prepare for their Ofsted registration interview
- set out a clear statement of intent to providers outlining the need for more category 2 provision
- initiated the city-wide accommodation panels
- provided training to social work staff
- updated policies and procedures

The actions have ensured that sufficiency is buoyant, with no Birmingham young people placed with providers who have not registered with Ofsted.

The DfE has set out its reform programme in Stable Homes, Built on Love, characterised by some changes in law or statutory guidance, alongside a programme of testing and piloting. The specific issues most relevant for the Trust are in relation to:

- Working Together has been amended and this requires changes to the leadership of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Working Together also makes clearer the circumstances in which Child In Need work can be allocated to professionals other than qualified social workers
- The DfE has made clear that being impacted by a Council S114 notice can be a barrier to applications for pilots or pathfinders – an in-principle position that we are continuing to challenge and lobby on
- We are following closely the learning from the Families First for Children Pathfinders, which are testing new approaches to Family Help and Child Protection
- We are one of the early adopters for the Early Career Framework for social workers

9. Strategic priorities and outcomes 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

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

Veritau provided their Annual Head of Internal Audit Report for 2023/24 and recorded an overall "Reasonable Assurance" for the Trust. The range of internal audits completed during 2023/24 were as follows:

Audit	Status	Assurance rating
Special Guardianship Orders	Final	Substantial Assurance
Purchase cards	Final	Limited Assurance
Starters and leavers processes	Final	No Opinion Given
Cybersecurity (ECINS for Early Help access control)	Final	Reasonable Assurance
Petty cash	Final	No Opinion Given
Key Financial Systems health check	Final	No Opinion Given
Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt Birmingham)	Final	Reasonable Assurance
Payroll	Final	Limited Assurance

Internal audits in progress during 2023/24 but not completed or finalised include the following:

- Section 17 payments;
- Support Services Specification for Digital and Technology Services; and
- Residential Children's Homes – timesheets and payroll.

With regard to the two areas with "Limited Assurance", the purchase cards audit was requested by the Trust on the basis that it had identified itself some weaknesses in controls here. Payroll has been an on-going issue and has been identified as an area of concern for external audit in previous years, and they have sought further assurance in this area from internal audit. The outsourced arrangements whereby the Council provides the payroll service back to the Trust is now under review in order to determine how to improve management control in the short term and whether or not to continue with the current outsourced arrangements.

A series of recommendations were made in relation to each of the above audits and appropriate management actions agreed and reported to the Finance & Resources Committee. This will be monitored through 2024/25 and any follow up audits will be planned.

The three-year strategic plan for internal audit work has been refreshed and agreed with the Head of Internal Audit at Veritau and work planned to date for 2024/25 includes:

- Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests;
- Records management (as part of Information Assurance);
- Direct payments;
- ICT – key systems (segregation of duties);
- Trust Savings delivery approach;
- Spend Control Review; and
- Payroll – follow up audit;

There were no external surveys completed during 2023/24.

11. Outcomes of any rectification plans

There were no rectification plans required in 2023/24.

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 2023/24 and the expected funding levels for 2024/25 is set out below.

- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) 2023/24 actual core grant expected is £10.8m. There are significant delays in the Home Office confirmation of funding for agreed cases. The 2024/25 grant will increase or decrease in line with the number of agreed cases being supported.
- Youth Justice Board (YJB) 2023/24 actual core grant received was £2.4m. The Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board advise local authorities it would be sensible and prudent to work on the basis that the 2024/25 allocation is the same as that of 2023/24. The actual 2024/25 core grant allocation will be confirmed following the General Election in July 2024.
- The Remand Grant was £1.5m for 2023/24 and has been announced as £1.2m for 2024/25.
- During the financial year ending 31 March 2024 the Trust received core funding of £5.0m from the Supporting Families (previously titled Troubled Families) Programme. The same level of funding is expected for 2024/25.
- Staying Put – for 2023/24 the actual grant for Birmingham was £0.7m, no change to the grant value is expected for 2024/25.
- The Turnaround Programme grant funding for 2023/24 was £0.7m, the same level of grant is expected for 2024/25.
- The grant to support Supported Accommodation Reforms was £0.6m for 2023/24 and has been announced at £2.1m for Birmingham for 2024/25.

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

Overview

The majority of service users felt they received the support they needed and that this support was of high quality. 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. Over the past year, there has been a slight decline in some aspects of the relationship with the practitioner, however overall, this remains a positive element of our work. Similarly, children, young people and families have a positive experience of meetings where they feel listened to, involved in decisions and treated with respect. The majority of partners agree that child protection meetings focus on the children's needs, safety, and that their voices are heard, and the majority of young people tell us their wishes and feelings are sought by their IRO's. A consistent area for improvement for both children and families within Early Help and Families Together is for longer intervention and support, with some parents expressing anxiety about coping once our intervention closes, and to fulfil some aspects of support that may take longer than the intervention time allows (e.g. waiting lists for other services, housing etc.). Within the child protection space, the main consistent area for improvement is around meeting preparation, such as help for families to understand the social worker report, and for relevant information to be shared with partners in a timely way.

Children and young people provided the following feedback through Mind of My Own:

- 72% of young people said they felt positive about their relationship with people at home
- 95% of young people feel positive about where they live
- 45% of children and young people felt safe 44% were neutral and 11% felt unsafe or scared
- 79% of children had an adult they could trust
- 100% of children felt safe with foster carers

Top 3 things young people are telling us about where they live:

- Happy
- Supported
- Settled

Child Protection Meetings – Feedback from Parents/Carers and Professionals

We regularly seek feedback from families and professionals post child protection conferences that is useful to help us review and improve the service we offer via surveys.

The surveys capture feedback from parents/carers and professional partners that attend the child protection conference meetings, focusing on their experiences of attending these conferences as an opportunity to have their concerns heard, and to contribute to our quality assurance of child protection conferences. Parents and professionals are emailed with a link to the online survey. Between April 2023-24, 21 parents/carers and 442 professionals have completed surveys. We have more limited success with parents' engagement in completing surveys in part due to the nature of child protection conferences.

We have to be cautious when analysing feedback when the sample size is so small. The feedback from parents has been similar from last year in general where most families report they are given the opportunity to ask questions and share their views, are treated with respect and understand what is being discussed. There have been slightly more parents complaining about not having seen conference reports before the day of the conference. To receive more feedback from families, we trialled putting time aside for managers and principal officers to meet with parents to have a face-to-face discussion and found it to be more helpful. We are proposing to hold these feedback sessions on a quarterly basis to complement the surveys.

We are in the early stages of establishing our family advisory board (FAB) for BCT, as we aspire to build on the partnership with families and being a better children led organisation. Enabling families' voices and lived experience to inform positive change and provide more opportunities for co-production.

Again, professional feedback is similar to last year it tells us that almost all Chairs are able to manage the timings of the meeting well, give everybody the opportunity to speak, and that concerns were taken seriously. Almost all felt that meetings maintained a focus on the needs, safety and concerns for the child and majority felt that the child(ren)'s voice was heard at the meeting. Post-meeting, almost all understood the outcomes of the meeting, the plan going forward, and what actions they needed to take to help support the family.

We have established a multi- agency forum for the child protection pathway that provides another avenue for feedback from professionals. In addition, this forum has contributed to practice observations and auditing around child protection conferences.

Young People Review Meetings

The Independent Reviewing Service survey is for children and young people to provide feedback about their experience of review meetings and working with their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). Young people are invited to complete the

survey via a text message to their own or their carer's mobile phone, with the chance to win a £20 prize drawer love2shop shopping voucher This has been completed by 186 children.

There was a majority of children who had attended reviews and over 40% of respondents had attended all their reviews. Most respondents advised that someone always spoke to them about their views for their Review, A high number of respondents reported that their IRO listens to them and actively involves them in the decisions all the time.

Most frequent feelings reported by children who attended their review were "Happy", "Supported" "listened to", and "involved".

For those who did not attend, the most frequent stated reasons "I was doing something else" "boring" and "I am happy with everything and don't need to attend".

All children advised they understood some decisions and half said they understood all decisions.

Most children were happy with their relationship with and how often they saw their IRO.

Open comments advised they would like reviews to be shorter, and children prefer it when people talk about positive things, as well as having meetings which do not clash with activities.

Annual Foster Carer Survey November 2022

In January 2024, Birmingham fostering agency conducted the annual survey to gather the views and experiences of Birmingham foster carers. The survey was conducted to provide an opportunity for all foster carers to share their experiences and views on the theme of support.

The fostering service conducted a survey to consult with the children living with the carers, however there were only two responses and therefore the information is not collated here as it would not be a comprehensive representation. The experiences of children and young people are noted within unannounced visits, supervisory visits and within the outcome trackers for children in care reviews.

This year Birmingham Fostering Agency used a different method of survey to improve the completion rate, including fewer questions with more multiple-choice responses. This approach was proven to be positive for carers and successful in gathering the views of a wider range of foster carers.

The findings were that the overall majority of carers reported to having a good working relationship with their supervising social worker, though they reported to have a less

positive and sometimes more challenging relationship with their child's social worker and CAMHS and the virtual school professionals. For the child's social worker, carers noted particularly strong practice in listening to what our children have to say, but one key development area is around family time schedules. This has been a recurring theme from the previous survey findings, where foster carers would like a more collaborative approach that considers that they have multiple plans for children in their care.

As a fostering service we understand the importance of the foster carers being integral to the team around the child and having professionals around them who enable foster carers to meet the individual needs of the children and young people. The survey found that:

- The main professionals identified as being active in the team around the child were IRO's (85%), health professionals (83%) and schoolteacher (71%).
- Of the professionals identified as being active in the team around the child:
 - School teachers, health professionals and 'other' were felt to be the most helpful (62%, 60%, 55% respectfully rated as very helpful).

It is important for us to triangulate what we believe in terms of how well we are interacting and listening to children and young people and that of our foster carers. The majority of foster carers do feel that children in their care are listened to by all professionals, however this was impacted upon with the changes of children's social workers. Foster carers reported that they easily have access to their supervising social worker and that the support they are offered is enabled by the longevity of their relationships.

The fostering service know that they have been successful in promoting Birmingham as a preferred fostering agency. This is shown in a positive number of newly approved foster carers, including carers transferring from independent agencies. One of the reasons why new carers are joining us through positive word of mouth from approved carers. It is also confirmed via the Birmingham Foster Carer Association who work closely with our carers and the teams.

In this year, we have been able to connect with foster carers in a greater variety of ways, with the use of the website and an electronic foster carer handbook. This is believed to have ensured that all carers have increased accessibility to information pertaining to their role. The fostering service is dedicated to ensuring foster carers are supported and have positive experiences that leads to children and young people achieving aspirational outcomes. It is clear that Birmingham foster carers share joint vision and values with the Trust.

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

The Adoption Service set up an online survey for adopters and prospective adopters who have accessed the service to understand their experiences at different stages of involvement with the adoption service. To date, 180 responses have been gathered, with 26 responses collected between April 2023-2024. All feedback has been very positive with similarities between the last four quarters, which indicates consistently good practice delivered across all user groups.

The overall quality of the service was rated as 'Excellent' by most service users, with a growing majority also 'Extremely Likely' to recommend the service to others. Almost all service users had a positive experience with the service, from comfortable and convenient meeting locations to being able to contact the service easily and receiving enough information and the right support. 71% of service users (on average) strongly agreed that it was easy to talk with staff and that they listened to them and their needs, and 60% of service users strongly agreed they received the right support appropriate to their situation and needs, and that this was done in a timely manner.

There are several consistent themes from open comments that further qualify positive service user experience. Service users feel well supported, welcomed, and put at ease thanks to the professional, caring, and approachable staff. Staff have good communication, providing regular updates and supporting service users to understand and manage the process, being flexible and going above and beyond to ensure progress for children and families.

Service users also highlight areas for improvement and renewed focus within the service. A very small proportion of service users felt their worries were not always taken as seriously as they could be, felt they needed more information from the service and that there was some support missing they would have liked. In open comments, timescales are a reoccurring sticking point for some service users, including waiting for paperwork or tests to be returned, arranging and rearranging meetings and reviews etc.

A very small number of comments suggest it could be helpful to have an holistic package of support for all those involved with the adoption process (including foster carers), such as 'an idiot's guide to the process' and an idea of support available post-adoption from other non-Trust agencies.

Annual Family Support Feedback

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

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

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

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

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

Early Help

The Early Help Service collect 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. This is the second report and summarises all the feedback gained from 617 adults and 162 children, and a further 10 responses from both the adult and child.

Overall, feedback suggests that children/young people and parents/carers are happy at the end of their time with their Early Help Worker, and the support they receive seems to match the need they identify as having. Both children/young people and parents/carers have excellent relationships with their EHW, demonstrating relationship-based practice is widespread across the service.

'For me it is a lifetime of help, I thought I was losing it, I thought I could not get help and there was no-one for me. Always listened, you never once said to me you can't talk. You would never cut me off. When you said you were going to do something, you did. You fought for me to get the things I needed for example the washing machine. I felt suicidal before you came but as soon as you stepped in the house you start asking me questions and after 2 days things started happening. The way you encourage me, it's like it was hard to get up the mountain but you made it happen. It's not just the practical, it's the emotional support you gave me. You gave me a lot, I can't express.' (Parent/carer)

In open comments, both children/young people and parents/carers would like for their support from Early Help to last for longer. For some parents/carers, they reported some anxiety at being able to maintain long-term change and tackle future challenges without the support of Early Help, while for CYP they wanted more interactions with their EHW.

Compared to the December 2022 report, feedback from parents/carers is consistent, however there is a trend of fewer CYP fully agreeing to several aspects of the relationship with their EHW:

- Spent enough time getting to know me (-12%)
- Involved in decisions (-11%)
- Explained things to me in a way I could understand (-8%)
- Could talk about worries (-6%)

Early Help uses a range of tools and programmes to help us understand and work relational with our families, ACES is one programme run regularly with our families: The group programme, explores the effects of trauma on our brains and behaviour and supports attendees to understand the science of toxic stress, using elements of psychoeducation and CBT, focusing on the power of relationships and connection into recovery. The adult & child programme is 10 weeks, using different techniques for adult and child approaches.

Of those participants who started and completed the course, there was a 101% improvement in Self-esteem scores and 88% improvement in scores from the first session to the final session.

Some adult comments:

- Learned to be patient
- I have the skills to build my own resilience and continue building my self-confidence using the equality wheel to remind me I deserve to be treated well
- Not everything is my fault. There is help and I'm a good Dad
- I started to understand my emotions which has helped me keep strong from my addiction
- Learning to say 'No' and setting boundaries.

- Huge increase in self-esteem; I feel less stressed
- It has given me different strategies, which were broken down to be able to deal with my kids differently.

Early help Feedback report 22-23



Early%20Help%20feedback%20report%20-

Aces Outcome report



Citywide ACES
Outcome Report - Co

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

Children's Social Care

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

Residential Homes for Disabled Children and Young People

Children's Home	Date and (inspection type)	Inspection Findings
Camborne House	20 September 2023 (Full)	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://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273663
	06 March 2024 (Assurance visit)	At this inspection, the inspectors evaluated: v the care of children the safety of children the effectiveness of leaders and managers. Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, using the social care common inspection framework. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273663
Charles House	28-29 February 2024 (Full)	Outstanding The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care. 50244204 (ofsted.gov.uk)
Edgewood Road	28 March 2023 (assurance visit)	The purpose of this visit was to review the progress made since the full inspection. The home remains 'requires improvement to be good'. Ofsted acknowledged that previous concerns had been addressed and no further requirements were placed on the home. https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273658
	28-29 November 2023 (Full)	The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50239968

Warwick House	9 & 10 October 2023	<p>The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.</p> <p>https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/1273485</p>
Bridgeland's	9 & 10 May 2023	<p>First Full Inspection post registration</p> <p>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account inadequate How well children and young people are helped and protected inadequate the effectiveness of leaders and managers inadequate</p> <p>There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor, and they are not making progress</p> <p>https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/2711552</p>
Bridgeland's	17 & 18 October 2023	<p>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account good How well children and young people are helped and protected good the effectiveness of leaders and managers good the children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.</p> <p>https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/2/2711552</p>

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

The Trust has:

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

17. Proposed changes to the Agreement

The Trust intends to complete a review of the support service agreement with the Council for the supply of digital and technology services during the first half of 2024/25.

A review of the pension liability arrangements is planned to ensure the Trust's accounts reflect a true and fair view, including options for treatment of the historic pension liability prior to 1 April 2018, the date of service commencement for the Trust.

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

- changes in grants
- Youth Justice Board
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Children
- Remands to custody
- Rough Sleeping Grant
- Supported Accommodation Reforms
- Turnaround Programme
- Family finding, Befriending and Mentoring Programme
- Strengthening Multi-Agency Leadership for reform
- Supporting Families (former Troubled Families)

other change controls

- increase to reflect full cost of pay award
- increase to reflect rise in employers' contribution rate (see below)

Other matters where no changes are proposed:

- Pensions: The triennial review of employer contribution rates which took effect from 1 April 2023 was factored into the Trust's financial budgets for 2023/24. This saw a rise in the employer contribution rate and the pension scheme going into a deficit. This will be reviewed during 2024/25.
- Financial mechanism, finance/contract sum: the Trust was required to agree the annual contract sum for 2024/25 with the Council by 31 March 2024. This requirement was met and subsequently approved by Cabinet as part of the wider Council 2024/25 Budget process.
- Changes arising from audits: there were no changes to the service delivery contract as a result of any audit recommendations, however an audit by the Council made a recommendation to strengthen some of the governance around contract monitoring.