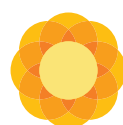




# SELF EVALUATION

March 2024



BIRMINGHAM  
CHILDREN'S TRUST

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# INTRODUCTION

**James Thomas, Chief Executive**  
**Birmingham Children's Trust**

Our vision is to provide excellent social work and family support for and with the city's most vulnerable children, young people and families. We strive to do this with compassion and care, working in collaboration with, and listening to, our children, young people, their families and our partners. We build positive relationships and build on strengths.

I am proud to have joined Birmingham Children's Trust as the new Chief Executive. I arrive at a well-established Trust, which has been effective in driving improvement in getting to 'good' thanks to the commitment of all our staff and thanks to the leadership which has driven culture change and a focus on getting the basics right. That success is reflected in the confidence expressed by the City Council and its commitment to a ten-year contract with the Trust in 2023.

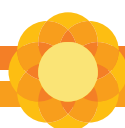
Birmingham is a great city, characterised by its diversity and young population. But it is also a place of extremely high child poverty and is the third most deprived core city in England. The dual impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis has been profound. It has resulted in levels of need rising significantly and placing pressure across all agencies. We also face significant challenges in parts of our workforce and in placement sufficiency. As a committed systems leader, I am working hard to ensure that our responses to these pressures are rooted in a partnership response. I have already been able to contribute to a strengthening of that approach both through the strong foundations of the safeguarding children's partnership and through the strengthening the children & young people's partnership board.

Birmingham's context has become more challenging with the Council's s114 notice, resulting in the appointment of a team of commissioners. We have moved quickly to support the Council in its planning and recognise our responsibility to shoulder a proportionate share of the savings required whilst doing everything we can to protect in full our core frontline services. We have rapidly built strong working relationships with the commissioners, who have in turn expressed their confidence in us.

## Looking ahead, we will be focused upon **three key themes**:

- **Earlier intervention** – Our analysis is that there are opportunities for some children to have their needs met at a lower level of intervention at all points in our system. We have a major transformation programme Trust 2025 to deliver improved system conditions for delivery of our practice framework Connections Count, in line with the national direction of travel set out in 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'.
- **High support/high challenge culture** – We will be strengthening our quality assurance approach as the driver of consistently good practice; seeking to have more rigour in our continuous improvement plan and how we drive it, as well as being more systematic in identifying and addressing inequalities and discrimination
- **Team and collaborative working** – Starting with being more systematic in listening to and acting upon the voices of children and families, focussing upon strengthened partnership working and the potential for a new locality operating model to deliver that, including ensuring that our own teams across the Trust work more closely

Our context is a challenging one, but that has not diminished our ambition and we are determined to demonstrate continued improvement.



# BIRMINGHAM - OUR CITY

Birmingham City Council is Europe's largest local authority, serving

**1.14m**  
people



Birmingham is a young and super-diverse city, with **44%** of the population **under 30 years old**, a median age of **34 years**.

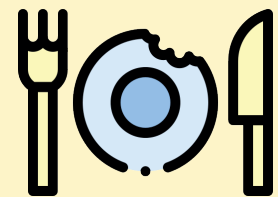
**51%**

of the population being from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups



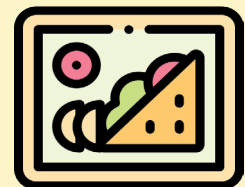
We have **187** different nationalities living in Birmingham, speaking **90** main languages other than English.

Birmingham faces challenges around poverty, being ranked the **7th** most deprived local authority and **3rd** most deprived core city in England.



**43%** of the population and **51%** of children (under 16) live in the **10%** most deprived neighbourhoods.

Approximately **1 in 2** of Birmingham's pupils are entitled to free school meals, and around **1 in 4** households live in socially-rented housing.



Birmingham has **308** primary schools, **91** secondary, with **89%** of state-funded schools rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

Birmingham is also home to five universities, **two** of which are ranked in the **top 500** of the QS World University Rankings.



(Icons from Freepik)



# ILACS RECOMMENDATIONS

## RESPONSES SINCE MARCH 2023

### The effectiveness of the response to domestic abuse

- Since the Ofsted inspection last year, we have strengthened our strategic governance and partnership arrangements, Domestic Abuse Prevention strategy and action plan to better hold each other to account across the partnership.
- The Trust has developed a dedicated intranet page for domestic abuse to provide a one stop shop for resources and the help and support available for survivors and perpetrators. We have a rolling programme of training for staff across the Trust to bolster our expertise and support offer.
- We have developed practice guidance, risk assessment tools and safety plans for harmful practices, including so-called honour-based abuse, forced marriage and FGM. Ongoing work includes the development of toolkits for practitioners working with children who have experienced or been affected by domestic abuse.
- We provide Inspiring Families and Domestic Abuse Recovery Toolkit programmes for families affected by domestic abuse. We acknowledge that there continues to be a gap in working with high-risk perpetrators and we are involved in discussions with partners to address this.
- We are engaging with the new private law pathfinder pilot. Amongst its aims is a problem-solving approach to domestic abuse in private law proceedings in the family court.
- Our participation in multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) is effective. Robust mechanisms are in place to make sure that actions arising from MARAC are progressed in a timely manner and contribute to effective safety planning for high-risk victims and their children.
- Our audits tell us that our information sharing through MARAC is effective. We have more to do to make sure that risk assessments (DASH) consistently inform safety planning. Quarterly audit activity provides assurance that police single-agency screening of domestic abuse referrals is safe and in line with Right Help, Right Time guidance.

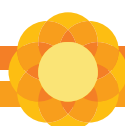


# ILACS RECOMMENDATIONS

## RESPONSES SINCE MARCH 2023

### **Earlier pre-birth assessments to support early permanence planning, and timely action to progress permanence plans for children in stable placements through changes to legal status.**

- We have created additional dedicated resource to complete pre-birth assessments. These teams work intensively with smaller numbers of families (usually 10 – 12) to maximise the chances of the child staying with their parent/s or wider family network and to properly frontload our work in Court so that timeliness of decision making for new-born children improves. We now have three teams, one in each of our geographical areas, under one of head of service to provide consistency of standards and drive practice improvement. We have implemented clear criteria for the scope of our pre-birth teams and continually refine this as we learn and improve.
- Our auditing tells us that more children are benefiting from earlier pre-birth assessments, but we still have more to do so that all assessments and our planning starts at the earliest opportunity. We have reduced the number of residential parenting assessments from 33 in 2022/23 to 22 in the last year. We are using more parent and child fostering arrangements as our earlier pre-birth assessments are better identifying the needs of new parents. We have therefore reduced our reliance on residential settings to complete the assessment phase.
- Immediately following the inspection, we initiated a project to review all children living at home with their parents with a care order, children with plans for discharge of a care order and children living in foster homes (connected and mainstream) with a plan of SGO. We are confident that we now have effective oversight of these children. Our court progression officers, along with the legal team, maintain citywide tracking mechanisms. Further oversight is provided through the Citywide PLO meeting chaired by assistant directors. We are making some progress in securing legal permanence for more children but need additional capacity to increase pace for all three cohorts.



# ILACS RECOMMENDATIONS

## RESPONSES SINCE MARCH 2023

### Earlier engagement of personal advisers for children leaving care.

- In April 2023 the Trust executive agreed additional budget allocation to increase personal advisor (PA) capacity. The rise (98%) in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children needing our support has meant that additional PA capacity has had to be redirected to support this vulnerable group. Through the 2024/25 budget setting process we have allocated additional funding to secure increased capacity so that children benefit from earlier allocation of a PA.

### Consistency of written plans.

- We have reviewed and updated the format of written plans in our case management recording system. Our new more family friendly format was introduced in November 2023. In tandem, we have updated and relaunched our planning practice standards through service area practice forums.
- Our auditing tells us there have been incremental improvements Trust-wide with more children having clear written plans in place. Our planning is effectively improving the child's situation for most children.

Written plans are increasingly evidencing joint working by the team around the child.

In particular, more plans for care experienced children evidence multiagency working. Equally, more plans for children within our safeguarding teams have plans that are effectively improving the child's situation.



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Political and Corporate Leadership and our Partnership

Children's social care services in Birmingham are delivered by Birmingham Children's Trust. The Trust is owned by, but operationally independent from, Birmingham City Council. A detailed contract which includes finance, performance and governance is in place. The Trust Board is fully operational and embedded. The chief executive of the Trust and the three Trust executive directors are responsible for the delivery of the contract. The director of children's services (DCS) is responsible for the commissioning of the Trust. The DCS provides strategic and systems leadership for education and SEND in the Council. The DCS has an established mechanism for assurance through monthly performance monitoring meetings and as part of the routine senior leadership audit program. The Trust chief executive and the DCS each describe themselves as the two systems leaders for children in Birmingham.

Over the last year we have seen changes in senior leadership in the Trust. Our Trust board chair and chief executive have retired, and our director of practice left us for a promotional opportunity. To provide consistency and continuity our chief executive has stepped into the chair role and portfolios have been realigned at executive director level. We have welcomed a new chief executive who brings a wealth of experience and real determination to take the Trust on our next chapter of continuous improvement.

There remains trust and confidence in the Trust's ability to deliver effective services to children and our families and a new ten-year contract has been agreed with a five-year review incorporated.

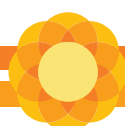
The formal governance and commissioning arrangements established in the contract work effectively. Our ILACS inspection in 2023 found clear and effective governance arrangements between the Council and the Trust and that political leaders give great priority to children. Also, that despite the financial pressures the Council faces, strengthening services in response to increased demand is a continuing commitment.

While the Trust has been required to provide savings and efficiencies in the order of £16m we have also received demographic growth funding to address the increases of demand and inflationary pressures, to the sum of £24m.

The Trust and Council work together in a variety of other contexts, including the safeguarding children partnership, the children's partnership, the community safety partnership, the SEND Board, and the early help partnership.

We know that a key area of weakness in the delivery of effective children's services historically has been the absence of a coherent partnership.

We are proud of the progress we have made; validated through our 2023 inspection finding that there has been a positive shift in the quality and impact of partnership working across the city. Our maturing early help system and the delivery of multidisciplinary locality family hubs is strong evidence of this progress.





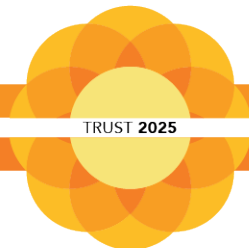
# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Political and Corporate Leadership and our Partnership

In the context of a challenging financial landscape, the Children and Families Directorate and the Trust are working incredibly hard to protect vital services for children and families. There is strong collaboration through the new Children and Families Transformation plan to further strengthen joint working and transform the way we help and support children and families, both at the earliest opportunity and to achieve sustained change.

The programme will focus on delivering a better experience and outcomes for the children, young people and families alongside delivering short, medium and long-term financial sustainability of services and prosperity for the city.



### TRUST 2025 PROGRAMME

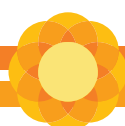
Our **Trust 2025 Programme** is one of five strands of the overall transformation plan, that also include:

- A 0 to 19 Universal Services Transformation (including Health Visiting, School Nursing and Children's Centres).
- A programme transforming the Prevention, Youth and Early Help services in the city.
- Further transformation within the Children and Young People's Travel services.
- Continuing the existing SEND & AP Improvement work.

Each of these programmes will seek to establish new operating models for delivery, providing financial benefits via improvements to culture, practice, systems, structures, processes and workforce.

The programmes will be joined up through the design of a refreshed whole system locality delivery model in which all partners are joined up to the benefit of children and families.

The **Trust 2025 Programme** – “delivering the system conditions for Connections Count” provides us with the opportunity to pause, take stock and step forward intentionally to understand the factors that help or hinder us delivering the most effective support to children and families and to model, test and pilot changes that we think will make a positive difference – before making decisions for the next chapter of the Trust's journey.



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Corporate Parenting

Our fundamental belief is that corporate parenting is our collective responsibility to make sure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to lead fulfilling lives, in the same way that any good parent would do for their child.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy (2023-26) sets out our ambition for children and young people and how we will hold ourselves to account. No one single agency can be responsible for the delivery of our strategy, which is why the signatories include Birmingham City Council, ICB executive board, Birmingham Community Health Care Trust, and Forward Thinking Birmingham, Birmingham Children's Services, and the city council's Director of Children's Services.

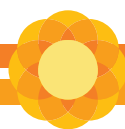
We are proud of the fact that the Council adopted care leaver as a protected characteristic in June 2023. In developing our strategy, we have placed the voices of our children and young people at the centre of all we do – if we do not listen, we cannot learn.

Our Board is chaired by the cabinet member for children, Councillor McCarthy, and meets six times a year. We remain committed to our 'Takeover Board' that happens twice each year as it provides a strong platform for our children and young people to hold the Board and its membership to account.

Our care leavers asked for more support as parents. They felt support came too late and that they needed earlier help and support: 'why don't you come at the beginning instead of the end?' NHS colleagues were also part of this Takeover Board meeting and were keen to hear from our young people to shape what originally was a prenatal pathway. Following feedback from our young parents this moved into a perinatal pathway, making sure support does not stop and extends post pregnancy. The Perinatal Pathway has been coproduced and this year our young parents have helped to produce training material (including video), which now form parts of midwives training.

In response we also developed our 'new growth' project (an enhancement of our 'Breaking the Cycle' project). This is now embedded in practice and forms part of the offer for all children in care and care leavers who are due to have a baby.

Our young people expressed that they need more support and mentors/people in the community to support them. In response we have secured DFE funding in excess of £600k to provide a mentoring and befriending project for children in care and care leavers aged 16 to 25. This programme connects young people to mentoring in a range of different ways including fitness, music production and podcasting, well-being sessions and football, other sports and nutrition. We are working with a range of providers from local community providers like ROCUP, Making the Change, Journal to Dream and the Aston Villa Foundation. The programme is also developing workshops in life skills for our children young people including DIY finance and cooking which can be done alongside a mentor. 99 young people have been referred/or referred themselves. 76 are currently accessing the programme from the initial target set of 60.



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Corporate Parenting

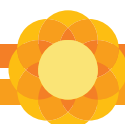
Our young people presented to PWC staff at their offices in Birmingham to recruit more mentors for our Develop Me programme. Over 12 staff applied and were successful at interview. We now have a drop in in each month planned to recruit more mentors. At our recent corporate parenting launch our chief executive spoke to the PWC Partner for Taxes who has committed to do even more this year.



We also have a range of 'United and Unique' forums through which children and young people have opportunity to tell us what they think. These include:

<b>Junior Children in Care Council</b>	Up to the age of 13
<b>Children in Care Council</b>	Young people up to the age of 18
<b>Care Leavers' Forum</b>	Care experienced Adults up to the age of 25
<b>Young Parents' Project</b>	Young parents various ages
<b>Birmingham Roaring Lions</b>	Forum for disabled young people from our internal children's homes
<b>Don't Dis-Ability</b>	Forum for disabled young people
<b>LGBTQ+</b>	Forum for children who identify as LGBTQ+
<b>Young People Panels</b>	Young people up to the age of 18
<b>Non-White Brits Group</b>	Young people up to the age of 18

### What our children and young people have told us is important to them:



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Corporate Parenting

We are proud of the fact that no senior appointments are made in the Trust without the involvement of our young people. All newly qualified social workers are interviewed by children and young people. We continue to develop our participation work and our young people present on a local, regional and national stage to showcase the work we do. Our four transformational and improvement apprentices deliver training across the Trust and champion young people's voices.

Priorities for the coming year for our Board are:

- Improved transitions and supporting independence
- Ensuring young people understand their plans and what is happening to them
- Hearing from young people who are often unheard and experience multiple forms of disadvantage
- Peer support opportunities and training
- Connecting with more children and young people



@unitedunique\_



@UnitedUnique\_



@unitedunique\_



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Corporate Parenting



We are proud to have our own linked charity Bfriends. Over the course of the year Bfriends has worked with businesses, community, and our partners to:

- Support 16,213 one-off immersive experience for children and adults.
- Successfully delivered 14 sport, education, and wellbeing programmes.
- Give 422 volunteering hours to projects, events, and community work.
- Deliver over 17,000 gifts to children, adults, and families across the city.
- Secure 125 30-hour education and wellbeing placements.
- Funded 29 residential weekend placements.
- Become the partnership lead of the Commonwealth Games Legacy for the City.
- Developed a partnership community hub that is growing and delivering outcomes with a network of staff, schools, faith leaders, community groups, partners, and businesses with a dedicated focus on supporting care leavers, vulnerable young adults, and young parents.

# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

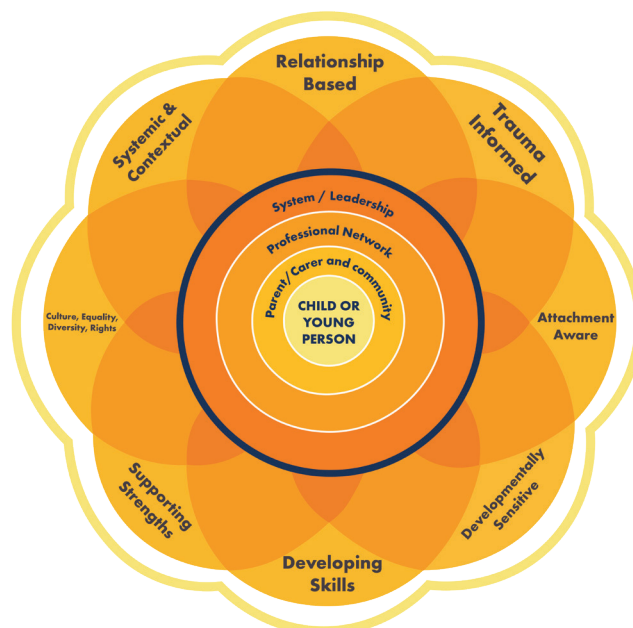
### Learning Culture

We are cultivating a culture that eradicates blame and shame and reinforces accountability, responsibility, appreciation, celebration, quality and continuous learning. We are incrementally strengthening our approach to scrutiny, quality and continuous improvement and being deliberately curious about children's experiences. We want the workforce to experience both high levels of support and high challenge so that children can achieve the best possible outcomes. To that end we are investing £500K in audit and improvement roles to increase capacity and expertise in the quality assurance space.

The Trust has always placed children and supportive relationships at the heart of our practice. However, following consultation with staff and young people, we have further developed the model to provide a clearer and more consistent language and organising framework for practice that more explicitly 'names' the golden threads (core principles) of our approach – Connections Count.

We provide a wide range of services to children, young people and families who have often experienced significant adversity, life stress, significant attachment disruption, trauma or inequalities. These experiences can make it difficult for people to have a felt sense of safety or trust when working with professionals or those in positions of power. We recognise that the more that we understand about the impact of these experiences and the risks they can create, the more we can proactively work together to create the counter conditions needed for positive change, resilience and recovery.

The model (Below) centres the voice and lived-experience of the child or young person, whilst recognising that children and young people do not live, grow or function in isolation. Sometimes, to best support them, we may also need to support their parents and/or caregivers and work together with communities and partner agencies.

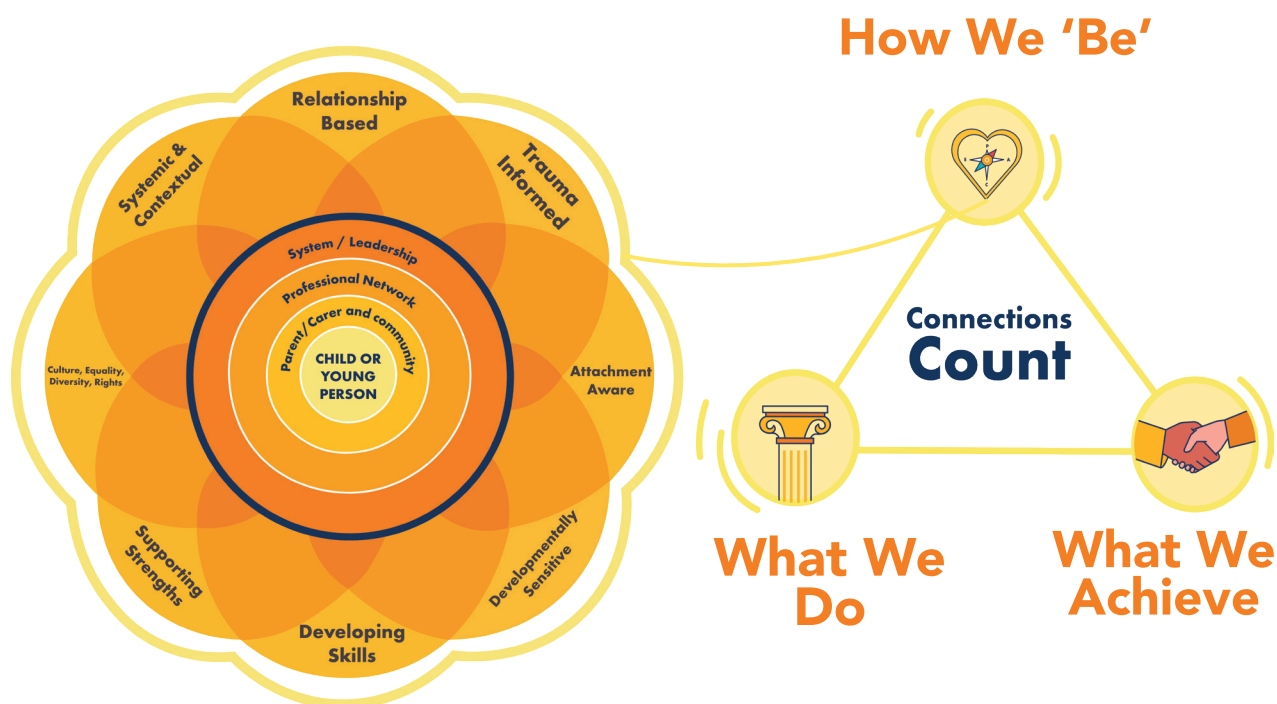


# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Learning Culture

The model is underpinned by the following golden threads: relationship-based, trauma informed and attachment aware practice; providing services that are developmentally sensitive (understanding impact of adversity on child development, recognising needs at different ages and developmental stages, and supporting special educational needs and disabilities); support the development of new skills and existing strengths; being respectful of and sensitive to issues of culture, diversity, equality and rights; and aim to understand family struggles in the context of the wider situations, communities, and systems in which they live.



### These golden threads underpin:

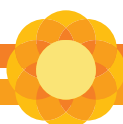
#### How We 'Be' What We Do

The heart of our relational approach;  
Our pillars of practice (1. Listening to the voice of the child, 2. Assessment & Analysis, 3. Planning & Intervention 4. Reviews, Listen & Learn); and

#### What We Achieve

Creating positive change and improving children's lives.

Our organisation is large and diverse so we also respect that within each service area, there may also be additional approaches, frameworks or toolkits that are specific and appropriate to the work that we do.



# LEADERSHIP

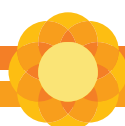
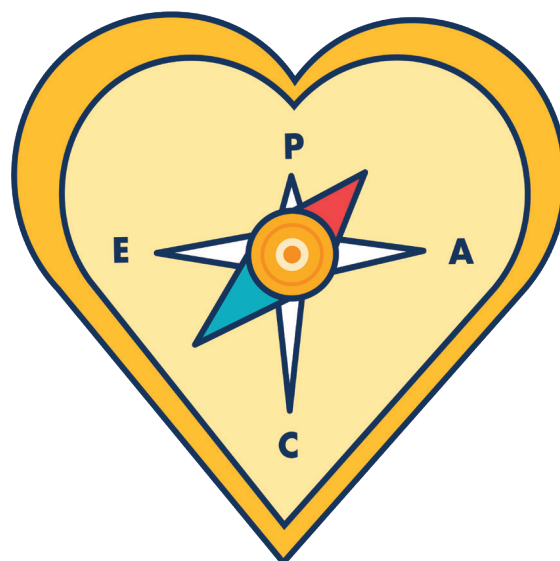
## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Learning Culture

In the last 12 months we have trained over 1700 staff from across the Trust. Connections Count is recognised across the Trust as our practice model, but it is not fully embedded – we would not expect it to be yet! We recognise that so far; we have set out our strategic intent to the workforce. The hard work to embed the model is underway. We have a comprehensive programme of work (10 workstreams) to realise our ambitions. We are starting to map our learning offer to the key elements of the model. Likewise, we have refreshed our practice evaluations to help us to identify where we need to give greatest focus so that our model supports continuous practice improvement. A key driver for our Trust 2025 programme is 'delivering the system conditions for Connections Count'.

In the past year we have invested in three new heads of service to improve practice: our performance and quality assurance lead, our learning academy lead, and our principal social worker (PSW). We now have the right leadership conditions in place for effective continuous improvement.

Our approach to quality assurance is ever evolving and developing, as we learn. We audit through meaningful quarterly practice evaluations. All leaders across the Trust complete evaluations. Our methodology is "sit alongside, tell me – show me". Our aim is for this to be a learning opportunity in itself, through reflective consideration by the evaluator and the worker about the children's experiences and progress. In the last year, in addition to our overall practice evaluation report, we have developed service area specific reports to provide more bespoke analysis for service leaders. Practice forums are held regularly across service areas to share learning and Trust wide forums and webinars compliment these. Our weekly chief executive and quarterly PSW blog celebrate and share good practice and learning.





# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Learning Culture

We include some feedback from children, families and partners in our evaluations, in recognition that their experience of our services is vitally important to help us understand what we need to improve. We moderate c10% of our evaluations to assure ourselves that we are applying consistent judgements. We know that we have more to do further strengthen our holistic approach. We are therefore investing in a central team of audit and improvement roles that will help services across the Trust to develop effective audit practice, create additional capacity for independent audit and verification activity, and to support impactful practice improvement activities alongside practitioners and leaders.

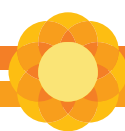
To enhance our auditing we have introduced quarterly senior leadership audit days. Our chief executive, directors and assistant directors complete thematic audits alongside practitioners. These audits provide insight into the quality of practice and difference we are making for our children, but also into our staff's experience of working for the Trust.

Performance and quality assurance (PQA) is everyone's business. Our new head of service for PQA is supporting service areas across the Trust to embed regular effective PQA meetings that scrutinise local performance and practice. Our bi-monthly citywide PQA meeting provides an opportunity for thematic oversight of the different cohorts of children we support, protect and care for. Our city-wide PLO meeting provides increasingly effective oversight of children in pre-proceedings and before the Court.

A range of Trust leaders participate in a variety of audit and review activities driven by the local safeguarding children's partnership arrangements. Learning from serious safeguarding incidents, including rapid reviews and local safeguarding practice reviews, is collated quarterly and shared with senior leaders and routinely disseminated through PSW led practice forums. Individual service leads also highlight key service specific learning through service practice forums and extended management meetings. Practice briefings are routinely shared through Trust comms and in the quarterly PSW blog.

We have a well-established social work academy (one half of our Trust wide Learning Academy) that supports c300 learners – students, apprentices and returners to social work, and our ASYEs at any one time. We are strong innovators in this space and achieve high retention rates year on year. We are proud that the head of our learning academy is an expert writer for the early career framework and that the Trust is an early adopter, meaning that we are at the forefront of shaping social work professional development.

We have completed a whole Trust training needs analysis in the last year, which has informed our refreshed learning offer, launching in 'practice fortnight' in April. We are updating our learning management system to provide us with more accurate data, and we are continually refining our approach, to offer blended learning opportunities that are accessible and impactful for our staff.



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Continuous Improvement

With new leadership comes fresh eyes and different ways of driving continuous improvement. From May we are introducing a new continuous improvement board, inclusive of all senior and corporate leaders in the Trust, which will become the 'engine' that drives and tracks our improvement and build on what we already do.

Aligned to this is our revised and repositioned Continuous Improvement Plan. Both of which are focused on increasing our rigour and accountability and marking our progress.

We are modelling and enacting our values in the delivery of our Trust 2025 programme. We have an extensive staff engagement exercise planned throughout April that will help shape our next steps. Staff and leaders from all levels and services form our Programme Board.

A variety of monthly communication activities, including webinars, intranet content, managers briefings seek to routinely update and engage our staff in the programme.



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Workforce



We have reduced  
our average caseload  
from **19** to **18**

We are dedicated to creating the cultural and system conditions for best practice to thrive.

We want our workforce to feel confident, contained and psychologically safe and to have reasonable workloads as we know that these are the foundations that underpin effective practice.

### In our inspection in 2023 inspectors recognised:

//

*Most social workers have manageable caseloads, and all are very positive about working for the trust, feeling respected and valued by leaders. The positive organisational culture established in the trust is enabling the incremental development of a relationship-based, trauma-informed practice model to permeate through the workforce. //*

//

*Strengthening and stabilising the workforce is a priority for leaders in Birmingham. There is a comprehensive workforce development strategy in place. Internal structural changes have been made in the trust to maximize the impact of non-social work qualified staff in supporting families at an earlier stage of need, however, recruitment to such posts as PAs for care-experienced young people remains a challenge. There are strong and well-received internal processes for staff recognition, pay and rewards, helping to sustain staff retention. //*



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Workforce

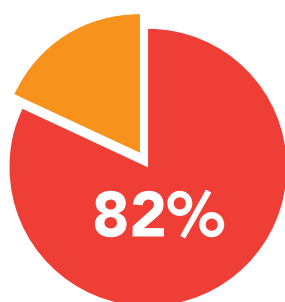
Stable leadership supports positive outcomes for children. A permanent and stable director and assistant direct leadership team is in place. Our new chief executive brings significant experience, 'fresh eyes' and real determination to support our continuous improvement to be the best we can be for our children and families. He also champions connectivity between senior leaders and our workforce and models the importance of visible leadership including through a visit to a frontline team every week.

We have initiated monthly all staff engagement forums chaired by the chief executive and attended by the senior team.

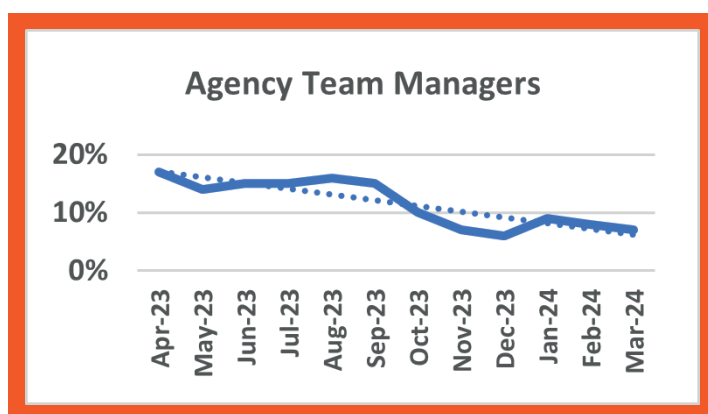
We have also refreshed our communication strategy through weekly all staff comms, a monthly managers brief and quarterly leadership events. We have a dedicated email inbox for staff ideas.

Our Health Check is a valuable mechanism for all staff to feedback their experiences of working in the Trust, from organisational culture and management through to wellbeing and job satisfaction. In the 2023 health check, there was a general sense of better work experiences, with more staff feeling that managers were visible and communicated regularly and that managers provided clear leadership.

Staff tell us they have supportive teams, available and supportive managers, and feel well connected, which staff capitalise on to support learning and wellbeing.



Percentage (%) of permanent workers as of March 2024



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Workforce

We know that our workforce is our greatest asset, and their wellbeing is something we give relentless focus to. In the last 12 months we have reviewed, recommissioned, and persistently promoted our employee assistance programme. We have introduced TRiM (trauma response incident management), an evidence-based supportive response to traumatic events, such as unexpected child deaths, an approach that is highly valued by those benefiting from it.

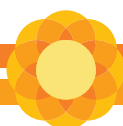
### How We 'Be'

#### The Heart of our Relational Approach

- 1 Developing safety, stability, consistency and trust.
- 2 Listening with choice, voice and hope.
- 3 Working together in collaboration: Doing with, not to.
- 4 Treating people with compassion, care, dignity and respect.
- 5 Looking beyond behaviour: Adopting an attitude of PACE.
- 6 Supporting co-regulation and co-creation of meaning.
- 7 Having courageous conversations: With High Support and High Challenge.
- 8 Taking difficult decisions with transparency, honesty and reflection.
- 9 Valuing relational repair.
- 10 Understanding language matters.

Our refreshed practice model 'Connections Count' is starting to unify us in 'how we be' – our top tips for effective relationship-based/trauma-informed practice and leadership. We have a comprehensive programme of work underway to embed our model but recognise that this takes time. The establishment of our Connections Count communities from May will help us. We are at the start of our ambitious journey to be a truly trauma-informed organisation. We are seeing renewed vigour and vision in our workforce development with the appointment of our new head of human resources (HR). Collaborative links are being strengthened between HR and our Learning Academy to make sure that we give our workforce the best possible start with us and great opportunities for learning and continual professional development.

We recognise that we have more to do to make sure that our workforce development strategy actively recognises and addresses inequalities. A key priority for the coming year is to reset our approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion through a revised strategy that is inclusive of all aspects of diversity and owned by the Trust leadership as a whole. In the last 12 months we have delivered on the first phase of our property strategy to create welcoming spaces to work from that are accessible for our children and families. We encourage hybrid working so that our workforce can achieve a quality work/life balance. Phase two of our property strategy is now gathering momentum with our priorities to create more locality-based workspaces and deliver an improved training/reflective/CPD space.



# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Feedback from children and families

'I felt respected by [FSW], she listened and stayed around when others haven't'.

**(Feedback from parent, Families Together)**

'In a climate where good children's service workers are hard to come by (SW) is a true credit to your team ....and really is a cut above the rest'

**(Feedback from child in care)**

(SW) is brilliant, she explains everything. I have never really trusted SW's all my life, I know about the care system and she has helped and done really well for us'.

**(Feedback from parent - ASTI)**

'Probably my story – instead of asking me my story all the time I want to be listened to' **(Feedback from child/young person)**

'(Young person) is a very different young person now to when she arrived with us and its (SW) that has supported us to enable her to start to become independent and to understand why she is in care'.

**(Feedback from foster carer)**

I wish (FSW) could stay longer, the support is great and I don't want to have a dip in a few weeks and be without support'.

**(Feedback from parent - Families Together)**

# LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

### Feedback from children and families

Her (SW) work has really made me feel better in my teenager years, showing me I am able to do anything I can put my mind to. This recently includes me application to the police.'

**(Feedback from child in care).**

'(SW) demonstrated to us clearly that our grandchildren were not just another case or number, but instead saw them as individuals in need and did her role with compassion'.

**(Feedback from grandparent - Safeguarding)**

I want to express my sincere gratitude for the exceptional support and professionalism you all demonstrated. As a first-time experience navigating the complexities of such a situation, your guidance and understanding were invaluable...Your liaising efforts with myself, my children, and my family helped create a comfortable environment where our voices could be heard. Your compassion and dedication were truly appreciated'.

**(Feedback from parent – Safeguarding)**

# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Early Help

# 8,640

**(April 23 - March 2024)**  
**Families supported by  
Early Help Services**

Ofsted recognised in our 2023 inspection that our early help services are strong. We are confident that children continue to receive timely and thorough assessments of their needs and effective early help and support.

We have supported 8,640 families and 24,909 children in the last 12 months.

Partnership working is key to our offer. We are proud of the strength of our partnership including with our third sector organisations (our BVSC partners), police, education, health and children's centres. Well-attended weekly allocation meetings take place to identify the best lead organisation to help and support the family.

The top five needs early help are supporting are:

- Child and adult mental health issues
- Domestic abuse
- Neglect/poverty
- Housing – temporary accommodation
- Education – exclusions/part-time timetables/SEND

We offer a range of parenting programmes to meet the needs of families which include one to one work with children and their parent/carer and group work for parents such as the Freedom Programme and Healing Together for domestic abuse needs, Non-Violent Response (NVR), ACES, PACT, which support with teenage abuse on parents and we offer varying parenting programmes aimed at upskilling and equipping parents/carers to parent effectively.

Our ACES programme:

We measure the difference we are making by working to successfully claimed family outcomes.

By implementing pre and post family needs scores we can see the journey of the family and measure sustained change over a period of time using the 'Think Family Outcomes Plan' (TFOP).





# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Early Help

We We have developed a bespoke early help project and practice team that lead monthly Trust team, locality team and partnership audits. This centralised team ensures consistency in the quality of our audits and embedding the learning that arises. We routinely consider threshold and the quality of assessments and plans. Our auditing demonstrates that we are making a positive difference for children and families. Overview reports are shared across teams and with our partners. Moving forward we plan to further enhance our assurance activity by direct observations in the teams and with families.

Family voice feedback forms a significant part of our ongoing assurance that we are getting it right for families. In addition, the Assistant Director for early help conducts monthly phone calls and visits to families to understand their felt experience of services and to help shape the service offer Hannah and Hailey-My Early Help Journey.

In feedback from 617 adults and 162 children between December 2022-2023, 94% of family members and 83% of children strongly agreed early help workers helped their family, and the support they received matched their needs. At the end of working with early help services, 81% of family members were very happy, and 95% of children were very or quite happy, and tell us they have a very positive relationship with their early help workers.

'I just can't believe what a difference of where I am now' (Feedback from Parent/carer).  
'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... 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.' (Feedback from Parent/carer).

Early Help is facing significant cuts from the Council due to the savings it needs to make in the context of the 114 notice. To mitigate against this, the Trust is retaining the 10 Trust early help teams. We have also set aside a further £1.2 million to sustain five of the current 10 voluntary sector providers to maintain as effective an offer as possible. Some cuts to commissioned services, such as primary aged mentoring, housing workers have had to be made. We have streamlined our management structure as one means to protect services to families.

Birmingham's Family Hubs (FH) are also in development - an integrated service model that provides holistic and preventive support for families with children aged 0-19 across 10 localities. FH are co-located in children centres, which offer a range of universal and targeted interventions, such as infant feeding, maternity services, parent support, domestic abuse, financial management, and digital inclusion.

FH also connect families with community resources and coordinate early help assessments and plans through lead workers.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

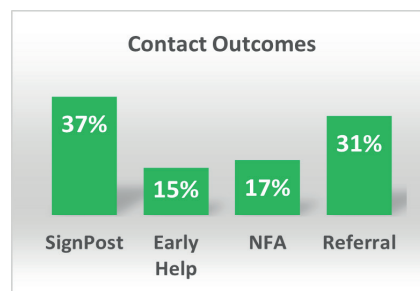
## Our Front Door Services

# 5,000

**(April 23 - March 2024)**  
**Contacts on average per month**

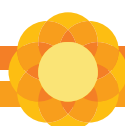
Our front door services include our Child Advice and Support Service (CASS), Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Assessment and Short-Term Intervention (ASTI), our Out of Hours service (EDT) and No Recourse to Public Funds service (NRPF).

CASS is a single point of access for all requests for support and any concerns about a child. CASS offers consultation and advice to professionals, parents, and carers. Qualified social workers triage all request for support forms received and make decisions based on agreed 'Right Help Right Time' thresholds. Where needed, contact is made with parents or child if they are old enough to understand and it appropriate to contact them, to get an understanding of their concerns or their response to the concerns raised by the referrer. If required, consent is obtained to continue with enquiries. Where we identify that children may be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, they are referred to the ASTI Team in the MASH environment without delay for a strategy discussion or to our out of hours service.



Over the last 12 months CASS considered an average of 5000 contacts each month, 60,000 over the year. Our largest referrer is the police, followed by health. 37% of contacts resulted in sign-posting, 15% in early help support and 31% went on to a referral for social work assessment. The 17% recorded as NFA includes poor quality contacts where we request more information, those with no consent and those where we provide advice. Our actual 'purist' NFA is less than 2%. We routinely report on this as part of our monthly service level management information.

In November 2023 we introduced a new request for support portal, which has helped to focus and improve the quality of requests. Consequently, we are seeing more appropriate and better-quality requests for support from our partners, helping us to make sure that children receive the right level of support at the right time. In tandem, we are seeing more requests for early help support going directly to the early help allocation meetings, meaning children's needs are being met earlier.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Our Front Door Services

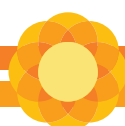
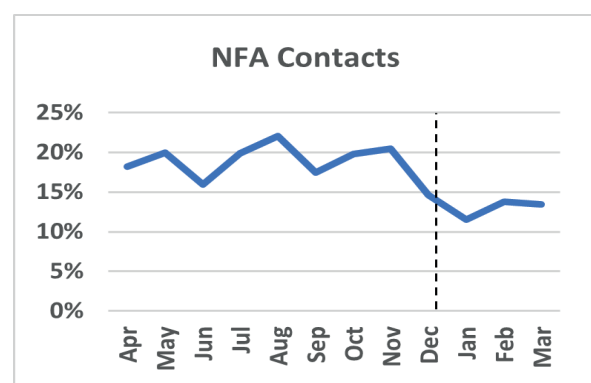
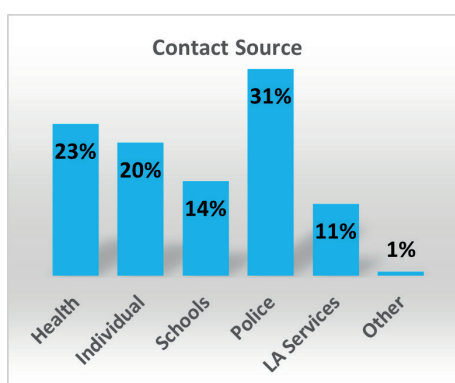
Decision making on referrals is mostly timely, with 81% within 24 hours. We have seen a slight reduction since November 2023 because we are interrogating and triangulating information presented to us to make sure that our decisions lead to children receiving the right level of help and support. This is in the context of a hypothesis that we are assessing too many children. Positively we are seeing a gradual reduction in the number of assessments and more children accessing early help.

We continue to interrogate our re-referral rate which has remained stubborn at c23% over the course of the year. Whilst this is broadly in line with the national average and our statistical neighbours (22%) we want to see this reduce. We know that often children are re-referred to us for a different reason and mostly where we have undertaken a previous assessment rather than more prolonged help and support. A key consideration within our Trust 2025 Programme is how we can meet need more consistently and in ways that supports sustainable improving situations for children and families through an effective locality based multi-disciplinary approach.

Our MASH provides a confidential environment within CASS where key partner agencies have access to their own information systems, and where information is shared to support decision making. We have 28 partner agencies (co-located and virtual) that support effective sharing of information. Since our inspection we have significantly strengthened education presence in MASH.

Our front door services routinely undertake thematic dip sample audits, both Trust and partnership, which gives us confidence that we continue to make timely and effective front door decisions for children.

Whenever a child is believed to be suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm MASH hold timely and effective strategy meetings and discussions to plan child protection enquiries and assessments. Managers provide effective oversight to make sure actions are clear and increase safety for children. The MASH also facilitates strategy meetings for children already open to the Trust, which supports a consistent response to strategy meetings, safety planning and application of thresholds.

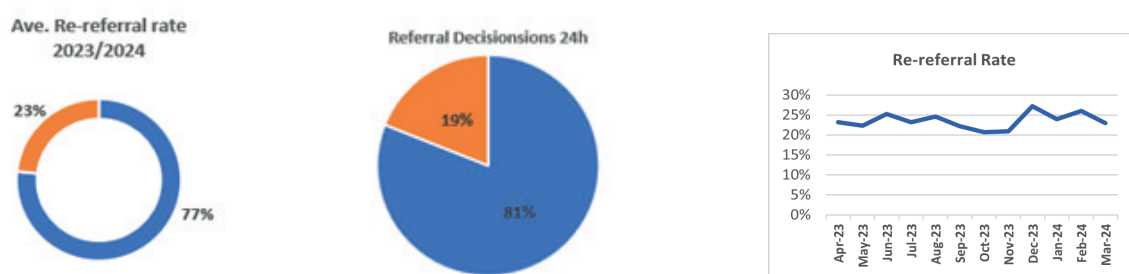


# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Our Front Door Services

Our rate of child protection enquiries has risen slightly over the year to 173 per 10,000 as of March 2024 with an average over the year of 166 per 10,000. Both are below statistical neighbour (225) and national (192) averages.

Children and families experience timely allocation of social workers, who commence assessments promptly. Our timeliness of completion of assessments at the front is consistently good – 90% over the course of the year. Children are routinely seen throughout the assessment.



Our practice evaluations tell us that most of our assessments are effectively identifying need, risk vulnerabilities and strengths of the family network. Strengths and protective factors are identified and inform analysis. We have more to do to further strengthen analysis in our assessments so that we are more explicit about the nature and extent of need/harm experienced. This is a practice priority in our continuous improvement plan for the coming year.

We have seen gradual improvements in assessments being sensitive to issues of culture, diversity, equality and rights of the child. Our practice model and refreshed learning offer reinforce the need to continually hold in mind the felt experience of families from global majority backgrounds. Management oversight and supervision is judged to be effective in progressing plans for most children, supported by clear management rationale and timely directive decision-making when key decisions are made. We recognise there is more to do to strengthen the tracking of agreed actions in children’s records. We have updated our supervision policy to make expectations more explicit and revised our case management recording system to better demonstrate progress and impact.

We remain curious as to why (on average) 75% of our assessments do not result in further social work involvement. We are currently refining our reporting to enable us to better understand the extent of help and support afforded children and families through the period of the assessment and beyond, and the difference being made for them.

Inspectors recognised in 2023 that “the emergency duty service responds to children’s needs in a timely and proportionate way. The service interacts and aligns with daytime and weekend services, with effective handover arrangements to daytime services”. We remain confident that our out of hours support to children and families is highly effective. We are proud of the range and extent of support we provide, meaning that children experience seamless support when they need it.

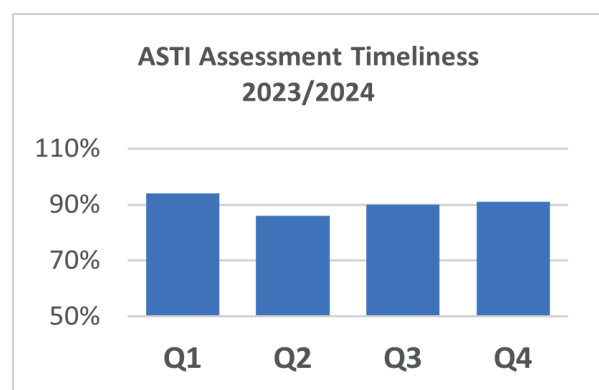
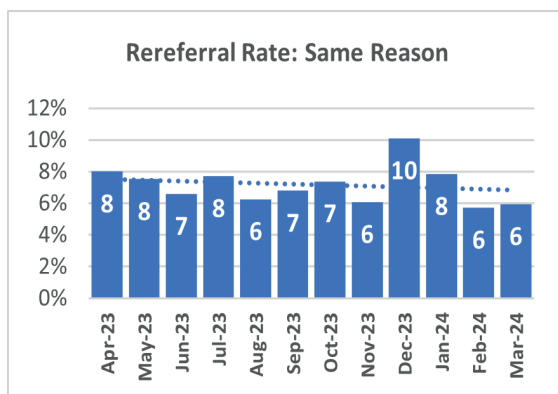


# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Our Front Door Services

We have a dedicated service that provides effective help and support for families with no recourse to public funds. More families are gaining recourse to public funds, due to challenges to Home Office and Department for Works and Pension (DWP). There is a significant reduction in the length of time families are waiting for a decision from the Home Office. The Connect Home Office database is facilitating more information sharing for families across different local authority areas.

All children have a child in need plan that is regularly reviewed. We see our children at least once every six weeks (81% in timescale at the end of March). We routinely reassess families every 12 months to ensure that help and support offered remains relevant and impactful. We have seen a significant reduction of families in bed and breakfast/hotel accommodation. Where families have been housed in these types of accommodation, this is short term and mainly relates to domestic abuse, whilst we await decision from the Home Office for the domestic abuse concession. Partnership working with the Home Office and statutory and non-statutory agencies is good. Over the last 12 months we have seen a significant reduction in the numbers of Letter before Action and Judicial Reviews, demonstrating continuing improvements in our practice.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Allegations against professionals

Our experienced designated officer team consistently respond promptly to allegations, offering proportionate advice and guidance. We have fostered strong partnerships with key agencies. Our designated officers play a crucial role, coordinating responses to concerns and providing training across the partnership.

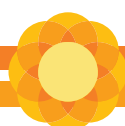
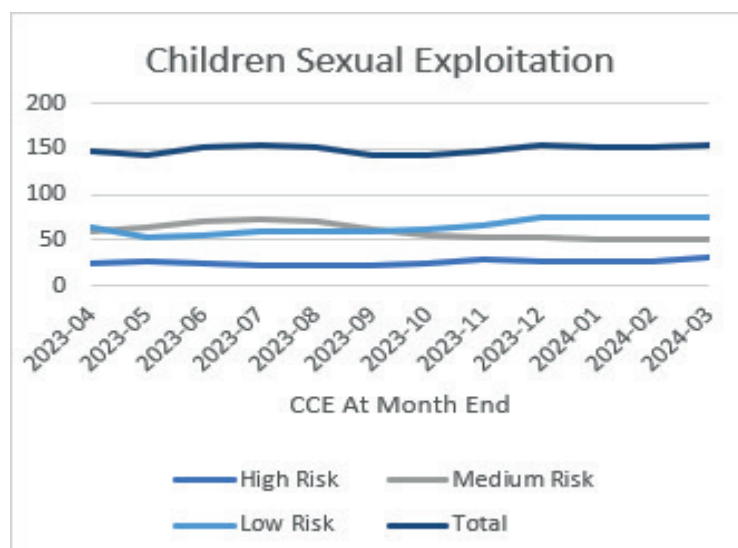
A peer review conducted in September 2023 reaffirmed the strengths in the team's practice and assured us that our improvement actions for the service are the right ones.

## Exploitation, missing and serious youth violence

We have a robust prevention, response and support offer to children who are at risk of, or subject to, exploitation. The contextual safeguarding board provides strategic oversight and has strong links with the local safeguarding children's partnership, the YOS Board and the community safety partnership. We continue to operate a multi-disciplinary centre of learning and oversight as we continually build our understanding of the scale of exploitation both in the city and cross border.

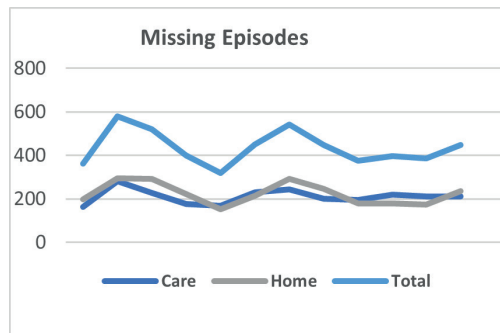
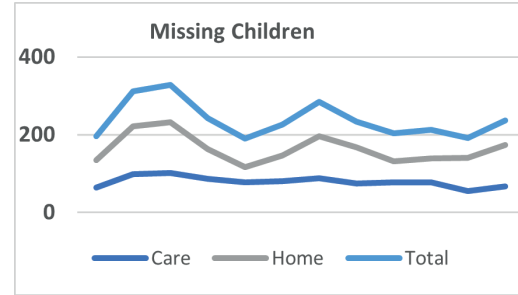
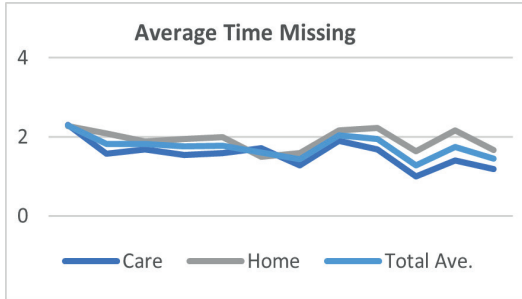
Daily multi-agency planning and disruption meetings routinely consider what immediate steps need to be taken to address risk. Exploitation and missing co-ordinators attend strategy discussions where exploitation is a possible feature. In tandem, EmpowerU attend the daily police gang meetings to share information and influence how best to engage and work with children and families. Our bi-weekly meeting between the police and the Trust to discuss our 'top 10' missing children and children's homes. This meeting is attended by Locate and neighbourhood police and means that we can plan more effectively for our higher risk children and young people. We are proud of the strength of our partnership working to mitigate risk to children.

Equally, we are proud of our community engagement work.

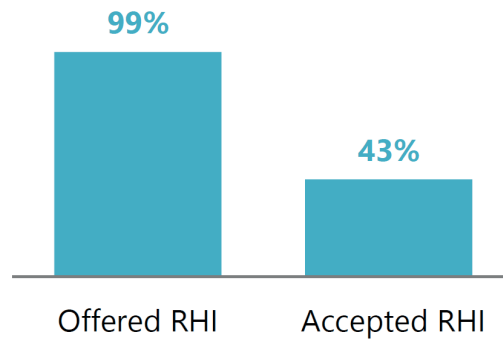


# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

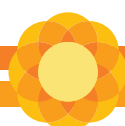
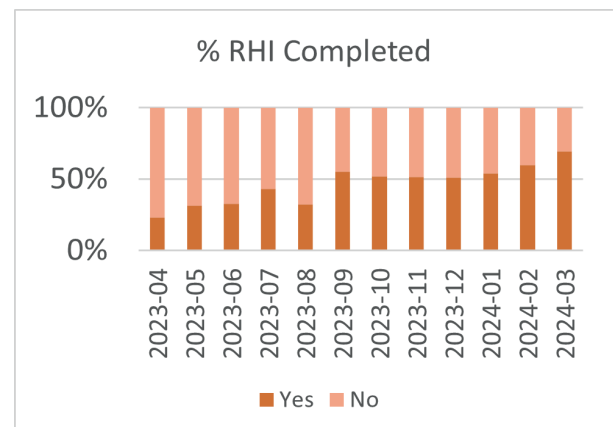
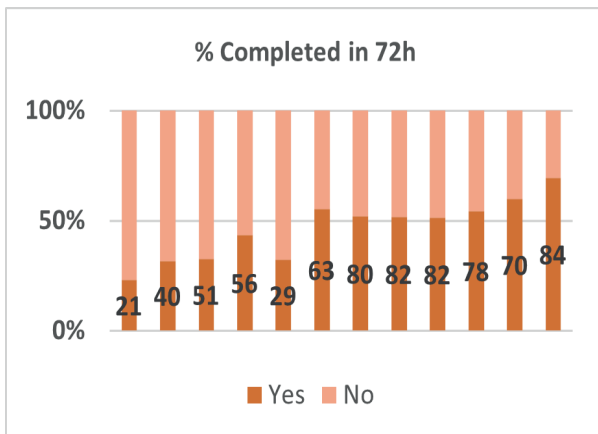
## Exploitation, missing and serious youth violence



### Individual children



### Missing episodes



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Exploitation, missing and serious youth violence

We persistently reach into schools and faith groups to raise awareness of exploitation. We have regular parent/carer groups that enhance community knowledge and response to exploitation. We also learn from their experiences to continually improve our practice. We continue our community profiling work that we share with communities and working alongside the community safety partnership to increase safety in higher risk areas. Over the last year Trading Standards have closed shops selling nitrous oxide to children, some hotspots have had increased street lighting and in others there is increased policing as a result of this work.

Children who are at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation continue to be well-supported by their social workers and our specialist teams that include EmpowerU, preparation for adulthood team who work with children and adolescents from age 14-25, our multi systemic therapy team (MSTe) who work with children aged 10-14. Our voluntary sector worker with lived experience continues to work with our missing and support workers within EmpowerU, providing critical reflection on safer return home interviews, offering training and improving practice.

In our inspection in 2023 inspectors recognised that safety plans and risk assessments are updated regularly, with interventions having a positive impact on children and reducing risks.

## Families Together

Our families together offer supports service areas across the trust delivering a broad range of evidence-based programmes and interventions. We routinely collate family feedback and complete audits and direct observations of practice, which provides us with assurance that we are making a positive difference and improving children's situations.

In a recent assistant director visit to a family where a child protection plan had recently ended the Mum shared how grateful she and her children were for the help and support from families together family support workers. Mum and the children had experienced domestic abuse for over 15 years. Mum said that "without D and N's help, I would still be in a toxic relationship or not alive. We are much happier now and this is credit to D and N". The assistant director reflected on the life-changing impact of our help and support for this family.





# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is one of the most prevalent concerns for children needing help or protection at the point of referral.

We have a dedicated head of service leading our approach. Our domestic abuse and interpersonal violence service offers support to practitioners working with children experiencing domestic abuse. They also deliver training, support the delivery of MARAC and have brokered strong relationships with the police and housing and commissioned Richmond Fellowship and Women's Aid to provide help and support to families.

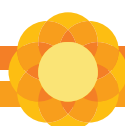
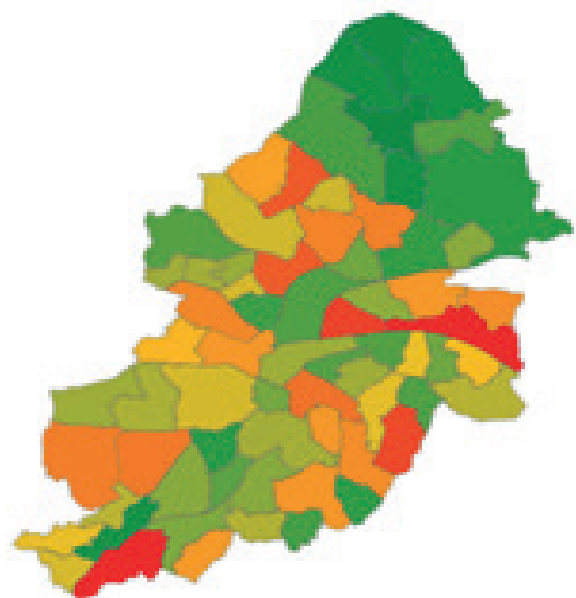
The team, alongside commissioned services, provide clinics and consultations to practitioners to consider how to best work with families where domestic abuse has been identified. This includes, supporting risk assessments, safety planning, joint visits, disruption activities and direct work which staff can observe to develop practice. We have also identified additional champions across the Trust who share best practice and signpost to the wealth of resources and the range of support programmes available for survivors and perpetrators.

Our audit activity shows when this support has been accessed, outcomes are better for children and families. We are seeing less children entering care with domestic abuse as the primary concern. We know we have further work to do to make sure that more families access the help and support available to them. Our refreshed training offer and promotion through our routine comms will support us over the coming year.

We complete quarterly audits of police decision making in MASH. From this we are assured that our Police colleagues apply threshold effectively and refer the right children to us.

# 800

**Domestic Abuse  
contacts per month,  
and our hotspots...**



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Neglect

Working with children and families where neglect is a concern is a significant part of the work of the Trust. Across the partnership our aspiration is to recognise and respond to neglect at the earliest opportunity. The Trust hosts a dedicated partnership funded neglect manager to lead the system response.

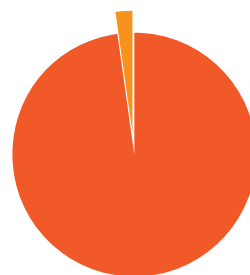
Over the last 12 months we further embedded use of the Neglect Toolkit launched in November 2022. Multi-agency GCP2 practitioner training is taking place weekly during term-time. Over 1800 practitioners across the partnership (700+ within Trust) have now been trained and licensed. The training is supported by multi- and single-agency guidance, monthly newsletters, SharePoint site, refresher training and access to NSPCC practice workshops.

In the coming year we are launching a neglect e-learning offer for all partners through the BSCP website. We have 14 workshops planned to deliver in Practice Week in April. To date over 1600 practitioners across the partnership have booked to attend. We are also expanding our training offer for Trust staff considering planning, support, direct work and reviewing impact, which will complement the GCP2 training offer.

A survey was undertaken in September 2023 to measure impact of our updated strategy and Toolkit. 273 practitioners responded to the survey from 14 agencies. The survey showed that practitioners working for the Trust demonstrated good awareness of the Neglect Toolkit and of GCP2, with many already using these in their practice.

Our audits show that GCP2 assessments are included in 50% of child protection plans where neglect is the abuse category. We have made progress, but we have more to do to fully embed use of GCP2. We have neglect champions and GCP2 trainers within services and neglect is discussed regularly in team meetings and practice workshops.

Data regarding GCP2 use is shared with team managers and used to highlight good practice and explore barriers to its use. We have also developed a neglect screening tool to help identify neglect at an early stage and improve the quality of referrals; this is promoted to partner agencies via the CASS/MASH and its partnership forum.



**98%**  
**of neglect referrals  
go on to have a  
s17 assessment**

Our regular multi-agency and Trust audits focusing on neglect have identified that where we use GCP2 and resources from the Toolkit, they are impactful. We know that many families need longitudinal support. In addition to this our neglect lead manager produces Impact Reports, which includes examples of how we have used the GCP2 tool to strengthen our earlier support with families, as well as better identification of risk where children require protective action.

Our Trust 2025 Programme will help us to shape our own services and continue to influence the wider partnership to tackle childhood neglect.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

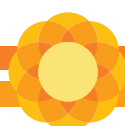
## Private Fostering

We currently have 22 children in private fostering arrangements, including three children that we are supporting under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Private fostering arrangements are supported across three service areas, ASTI, Fostering and Safeguarding. We have eight private fostering leads that sit across ASTI and Safeguarding to raise awareness and ensure consistency of practice. The complexity of some of the arrangements means that time can be spent establishing whether the arrangement is private fostering. To make sure we make the right decisions for children we have introduced a joint Reg 4 visit that includes a worker from our fostering service.



Our audits tell us that outcomes for our children in private fostering arrangements are generally good. Social workers undertake Reg 8 visits to children routinely to ensure their welfare. The carer receives support from the fostering service with access to additional support/training from the charity Kinship if required. A number of our privately fostered children have been supported through to permanence via a child arrangement or special guardianship order.

We work closely with Birmingham safeguarding children partnership and their communications officer is a member of our private fostering task group which meets quarterly and is led by the assistant director for safeguarding (partnerships). The number of children in assessed and supported private fostering arrangements has remained at between 18 to 25 over recent years and there is more work to do with our partners in terms of identifying children living in such arrangements. We have a series of webinars and a toolkit of resources that are available to our staff and partner agencies (examples of our posters are above). Identification of children in private fostering arrangements is a national issue and the agency decision maker and senior practitioner are members of the Coram BAAF private fostering working group for shared learning and new initiatives.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## **Elective Home education and children missing education**

We understand the vital importance of children that are 'out of sight'. We work effectively with the Director of Thriving Children and Families in the City council who leads jointly with the Director of Nursing for Birmingham and Solihull ICB on the partnership approach to seek out such children to assure ourselves about their safety and welfare.

SENAR, the Trust, health, education safeguarding, virtual school, 14-19 service, admissions service, fair access service, school attendance order team work together and exchange information on children 'out of sight' to make sure they are safe and supported.

Generally, partners are good at identifying and referring children that they are concerned about including those that are missing. The EHE team is leading the work to develop a formal pathway to further improve our reporting and to strengthen the process for raising concerns about children who become out of sight.

The EHE team maintain a register of children electively home educated through a database that is shared with schools, which supports effective two-way communication. A weekly cross-matching exercise identifies children open to the Trust. The number of children electively home educated (EHE) has risen by 438 in the last 12 months.

At the end of March 2024 there were 2899 children who were registered as EHE. 119 of that total number were known to the Trust: 76 receiving early help support, 22 receiving support services with a child in need plan and 21 children with a child protection plan.

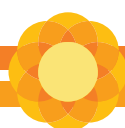
EHE advisors assess the suitability of education for home educated children.

All staff in the EHE team have received safeguarding training and are required to complete learning about applying Right Help, Right Time (RHRT) guidance. They know when to make referrals to children's social care. In addition, all staff in the team have accessed GCP2 (neglect toolkit) training.

Managers screen all EHE referrals that are received into the team and refer to the RHRT threshold document to inform appropriate responses where there are concerns.

Assessments are shared with key partners where it is appropriate to do so to inform wholistic assessments of the child's circumstances. Where education is judged not to be suitable, referrals are made swiftly to the school attendance order team to initiate proceedings to return the child to school.

There are a number of home educating groups across the city who provide support to families. Where parents choose to return their children to school, they are routinely helped and supported by EHE and admissions to do so.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Elective Home education and children missing education

There were 157 missing education as of end March 2024 (children who are on roll at school but have not attended and not provided a reason for their absence).

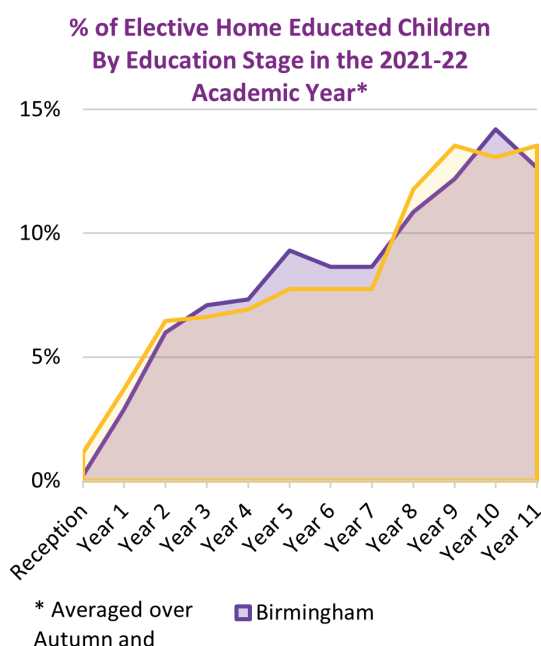
We have a dedicated team that maintains oversight of children missing education, to locate them and re-integrate them. As soon as referrals are received into the CME Team, detailed checks including health, UK Border Agency, electoral roll, any agency where the child/family might have registered for a service are undertaken.

The CME team consider individual children's circumstances and know to contact the Trust in accordance with RHRT.

For children that are not on a school role our fair access panel arrangements make sure that children go onto a school roll, or schools are directed to admit them.

For children with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) who are home educated EHE advisors assess the suitability of their education and SENAR case officers have oversight of the EHCP. SENAR approve budgets to provide tuition for some children not in school or registered with EHE but classed as education otherwise than at school (EOTAS).

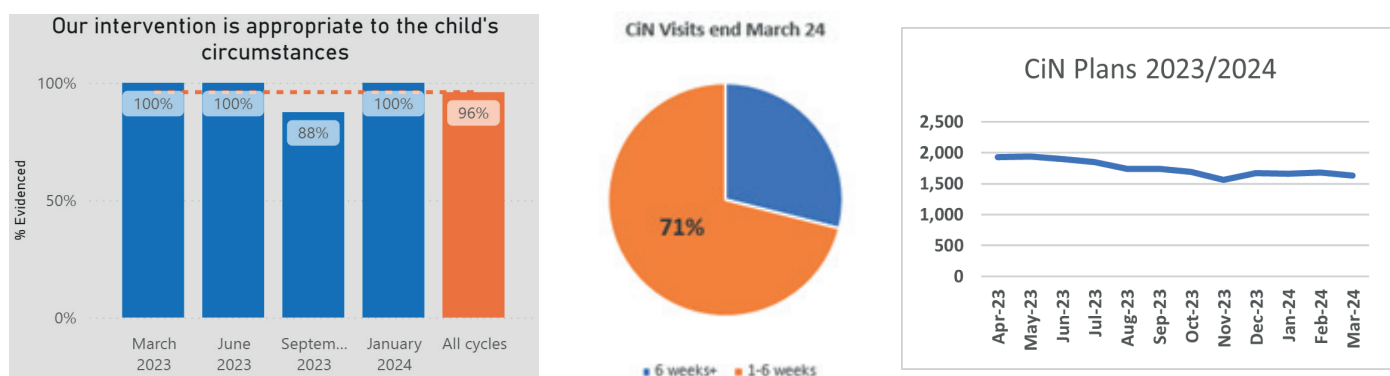
We know that there is more to do to make sure that children with EHCPs receive consistently effective help and support. The Trust has invested in a SEND improvement lead who is leading the Trust's work with the Council to this end.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Children in Need

The number of children receiving help and support through a child in need plan has fallen over the course of the last year. We are slightly lower than comparators and the national average. We have seen a decrease in the duration of child in need plans from October 2023.



We see our children but not always in the timescales that we want. To give greater focus and oversight to our children in need of support services we piloted a bespoke children in need team.

We have now expanded to three teams, one in each geographical area of the City.

As a result, we are starting to see more intensive help and support for children and families in shorter periods and improving timeliness of visits (71% at the end of March).

Our audits tell us that the help and support provided is appropriate to the child's circumstances, that we develop effective relationships with our children and their wishes and feelings are understood. Most children have a clear plan in place.

We have reviewed and updated the format of our written plans to make them more accessible for families.

A key component of our Trust 2025 programme is reviewing our approach to children in need and how we can better utilise locality and multi-disciplinary teams to provide effective help and support services.

Understanding family's experiences of our services is of vital importance to us.

A priority over the coming year is to explore ways that we can routinely collate feedback from families across our ASTI and safeguarding services.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Child Protection

The number of children with a protection plan has fluctuated over the year. More recently numbers are rising with a 7% increase over the year. Our average is higher than comparators and the national average. We have seen a significant impact on families, post-pandemic, because of contextual factors such as poverty, deprivation and increased austerity. We are seeing an increase in domestic abuse, parental substance and mental health problems that impact parenting capacity. Our ongoing development work across the partnership seek to continually improve our response.

Over the course of the year, we have increased the timeliness of initial conferences and reviews. We perform better than comparators and the national average. We have reduced the percentage of children becoming subject of a child protection plan for a second time. Only 2% of children have a child protection plan for longer than two years. Our well-established joint review process between child protection conference chairs and safeguarding managers maintains regular oversight of these children to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

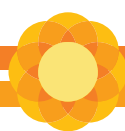
We are achieving increasing consistency in the completion of midway reviews by child protection chairs resulting in timely progression of plans for children. By March 2024 a total of 721 midway reviews had been completed. We are currently refining our practice guidance to further strengthen the impact of midway reviews in effectively progressing children's plans. Following multi-agency audit activity, we have revised reporting templates to conferences to assist professionals to be more succinct and analytical in their written reports.

We regularly seek feedback from families and professionals about our child protection conferences. From the overall feedback gained we can be assured that child protection chairs are professional, compassionate and inclusive; keeping the meeting on track whilst making sure that everyone, including the child's voice, is heard in the meeting.

We see lower response rates from families than we would like. We are working on ways to gain a more representative view of their experience of conferences. From the feedback gained parents/carers consistently tell us they understand what is being discussed at the meeting, and the majority understand the outcome. We have more to do to make sure that families leave conference with a clear understanding about the detail of the plan – what actions they and others need to take to improve the child's situation.

Professionals consistently tell us that children's individual voices are heard during conferences, and that the main focus of the meeting remains, and is brought back to the needs, safety and concerns for the child/ren. Professionals leave conferences understanding the outcome, the plan moving forward and what they need to do to support the family.

Overall, feedback received, gives us confidence that our child protection conferences are purposeful, and that the team working around the child have a good understanding of their roles in supporting the family.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Child Protection

*"Definitely our chairperson. She has really helped me feel understood, supported and she has made me feel I am capable to move forward with my life."* (Feedback from parent/carer)  
*'The chair was very empathetic towards the mother, taking time to hear her voice and involve her in the discussions professionals were having'.* (Feedback from a professional)

*'The Chair was excellent and put the parents at ease he has very good communication skills I commend him'.* (Feedback from a professional)

Other feedback collated over the year tells us that when our families together are involved, families understand why they are referred for support. 91% of families providing feedback rated the help received as 4+/5. 97% of children agreed that their family support worker helped them and their family.

# 1,442

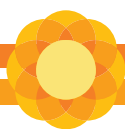
## Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (March 2024)

Our audits tell us that children with child protection plans benefit from effective partnership working and that the support being provided is appropriate to many children's circumstances. We have seen incremental improvements in children understanding why we are involved and having their wishes and feelings understood, with a consistent trend of wishes and feelings effectively informing plans. This is likely underpinned by the high and sustained finding that practitioners have positive relationships with the children they work with. More children are benefitting from the use of age and developmentally appropriate direct work to gain insight into their lived experience.

Most children have a clear plan in place. We have reviewed and updated the format of our written plans to make them more accessible for families. Our recent child protection plan audit in July 2023 identified that plans are increasingly focused on the most pressing need. We are also seeing plans being written that are easy to read and formulated in plain language.

A key priority for improvement for child protection conference chairs over the coming year is making sure that when child protection plans end, we are consistently clear about the ongoing help and support children need and who will provide that for them. Exit planning discussions is an area that requires strengthening.

We are seeing a general trend of improvement in the quality of supervision records. More supervisions are happening within timescales that are good quality, reflective, hold space for professional curiosity and challenge and progress previous actions. We have also updated how we record supervision in children's records, which is helping to better demonstrate the quality of supervision that our practitioners tell us about.

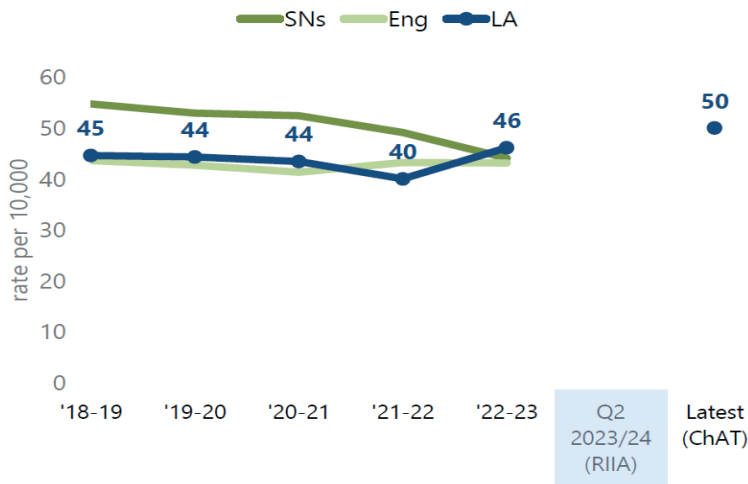




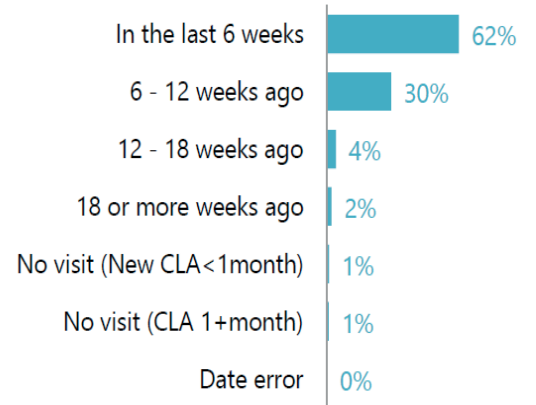
# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Child Protection

Rate of CPP per 10,000 children aged 0-17



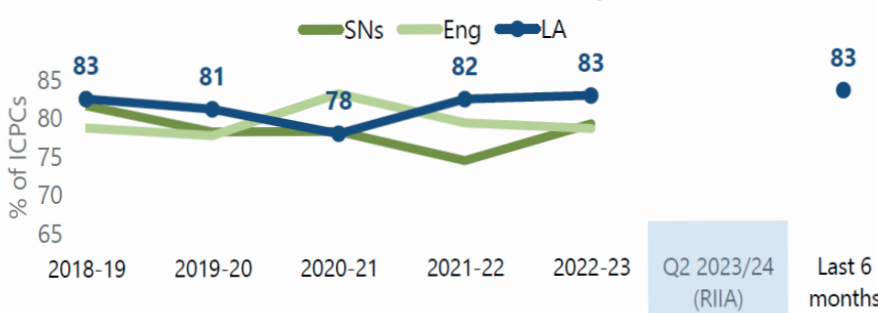
Time since the child was last seen



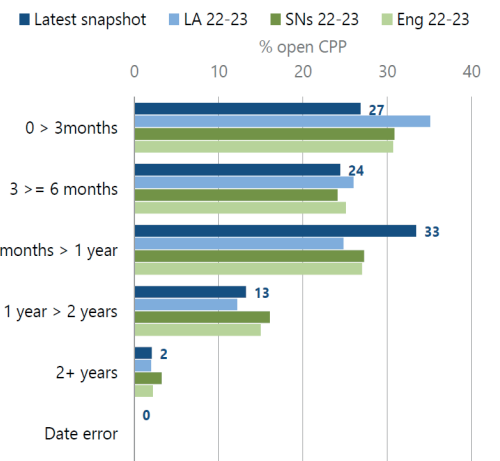
# 11%

## Children becoming subject to a second plan within 24 months

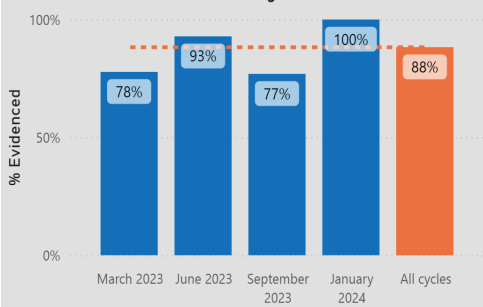
Trend of ICPC timeliness (within 15 days of S47 start)



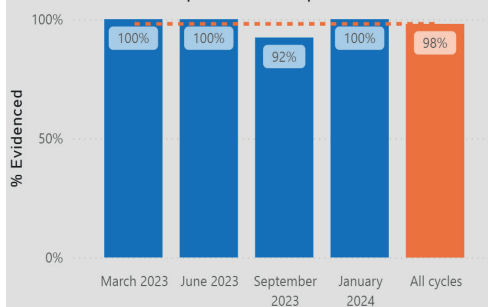
Comparing duration of open CP plans



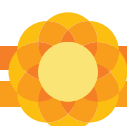
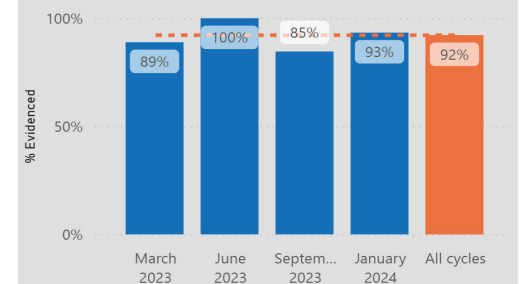
CYP's wishes and feelings are understood



Positive relationship between the practitioner and CYP



Our intervention is appropriate to the child's circumstances



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Pre-Proceedings

In our ILACS in 2023 inspectors found that whilst we had improved practice and oversight of pre-proceedings, some children were experiencing delay, and we could do more to make the language in our letters to parents more accessible. Also, that legal oversight of some children was not sought early enough.

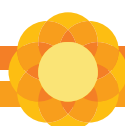
We have improved management oversight and scrutiny of pre-proceedings through the Citywide PLO meeting and the work of our court progression officers. We have engaged in regional improvement work funded by the DfE and using the learning from that have developed a new suite of PLO/pre-proceedings templates and practice standards, which includes a new letter to parents.

A recent review of unborn children by the case progression officers identified that LPMs are still not always held as early as they should be for a small number of children where risks are high.

A pre-birth tracker has been developed that is shared weekly. It is used to track progression and escalation of unborn children to LPM where required. The case progression officers have also noted an increase in complex case discussions taking place since the pre-birth teams moved under the auspice of one head of service. As a result, more unborn children are coming through LPMs.

We know that we have achieved much tighter management oversight and grip of pre-proceedings following the alignment of the case progression officers under one head of service and the introduction of the citywide PLO meeting. We now have a citywide tracking mechanism for all PLO work.

From this oversight we know that as a general trend the numbers of families offered an opportunity of pre-proceedings is increasing, with less families going straight to issue.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Pre-Proceedings

# 4.75%

**Children open in pre-proceedings (per 10,000 children)**

In the National Data Study, at the end of September 2023, the rate of children open in pre-proceedings in Birmingham was 4.7 per 10,000 children. This was 3rd highest out of 10 West Midlands LA's who reported and higher than the national average (4.59 children per 10,000).

Our diversion rate away from care proceedings has been roughly 35-37% with the average number of weeks in pre-proceedings being 15. In the national study the average duration was 21 weeks.

Some families do have longer pre-proceedings, but this is reviewed and agreed by heads of service. We are assured that extensions are right for children.

For pre-proceedings that commenced since the beginning of September 23, the average number of days between LPM and the initial pre-proceedings meeting is 14 days. This is an improvement in timeliness. Public law working group (PLWG) guidance is 10 working days.

In the national study the average number of days between LPM and initial meeting was 21 days, with the West Midlands average being 24 days.

In a recent audit completed by senior leaders in the Trust numerous examples of effective work was seen where timely and effective planning and support through pre-proceedings supported children to remain with their families or, where risk was too high, decisive action was taken to issue proceedings.

Equally, there were a small number of examples where it is arguable that we should have initiated pre-proceedings sooner given the positive impact they have had once initiated.

On balance we have seen more good work that is improving children's situations. Our main challenge is how we can better reflect in our recording practice the quality of the work that is taking place.

We will continue our relentless focus on embedding consistent use of our practice guidance and templates to support timely and effective responses to children, which aligns with the priorities in the local family justice board action plan.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Youth Justice

486 children are currently working with our youth offending service (YOS), of which 11% have a child in need plan, 6% have a child protection plan and 10% are children in our care.

The recent youth justice board quality assurance validation visit in January 2024 highlighted significant progress having been made in assessments, which were of 'good quality and demonstrated good use of information from a range of sources' and that 'the service should be commended for the progress they have made in this area', but recognised that we could further develop the assessment of risk levels, and to ensure we fully align with 'child first principles', by ensuring our assessments are more strength based.

We are confident that the relationships between staff and children are strong; feedback from 22 children tell us that this is one of our key strengths.

The Youth Justice Board quality assurance report made noted staff:

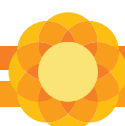
*"Were passionate and tenacious in meeting the needs of the children they supervised. They all had gone above and beyond to meet the child's needs and were regularly advocating and championing the children in order to get their needs met...this is a credit to the staff and the management team."*

The YOS prevention offer has been strengthened. The new Turnaround initiative enables the YOS to provide an innovative range of interventions and strength-based provision for those on the fringe of the criminal justice system. It is making a palpable difference to those engaging in this offer.



The YOS welcomes the planned external evaluation to show the positive impact this initiative is making, and to explore how this can be continued after the turnaround funding ends in March 2025.

Additionally, In December 2023 YOS also launched the prevention team, an innovative programme for 9–17-year-olds at risk of offending and/or becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, serious youth violence and/or child criminal exploitation.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Youth Justice

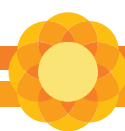
This is a voluntary early help and support offer with the aim of empowering and supporting children and families to prevent further involvement with the criminal justice system, and to improve their overall health outcomes through a plan of tailored support to meet the child's needs for three-six months.

In October 2023, the Trust launched a joint working protocol for social care and youth offending services to clarify the respective roles when working with children who have offended and those at risk of offending.

The protocol provides a clear framework for strengthening collaborative working between children's social care and YOS within the Trust.

We are starting to see more seamless wraparound support as a result.

We recognise the improvements YOS have made and that there is still more to do, particularly in our day-to-day meetings with children, such as places we meet, structure, consistency and purpose of meetings, and supporting children to have better understanding and experiences at court.



# CHILDREN IN NEED OF SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

## Children with disabilities

Our Children with Disabilities (CWD) service continues to improve following the service review in 2021. We have successfully shifted the culture within the service so that our practitioners understand their safeguarding responsibilities alongside the provision of help and support.

We have three safeguarding teams, our new Ascent team, EHCP officers and our reviewing officers. Our new Ascent team is successfully supporting young people with complex and enduring mental health issues to remain at home or successfully discharge from Tier 4 hospital. The service is intensive and continues to build on the success achieved in supporting children to move back into their family homes or into supported living and to reintegrate into their communities.



We have 900 (March 2024) children being supported by the service. 450 children across the safeguarding/Ascent Team of which, 339 with a child in need plan or whose needs we are assessing, 36 children with a child protection plan and 75 children in our care. Our reviewing officers provide effective oversight of our children who are receiving a package of care where there are no other social work concerns. We hold multi-agency meetings; parents, children and young people are encouraged to attend and contribute.

Children are visited in their homes and/or school/placements as part of the review to make sure their wishes and feelings are understood.

Our Community Resource Panel is a multi-disciplinary meeting decides on short break packages. Over the year 212 children's packages have been considered to make sure their needs are being effectively met. If changing needs require more urgent decisions, timely decisions are made outside of panel. We have completed a review of all of our policies and our eligibility criteria. We will be consulting on this in June 2024 and from that we will work with families to coproduce family friendly guidance. To ensure high quality social care input and engagement with the EHCP assessment and planning process we have invested in EHCP officers.

Parents are contacted to engage them in collating social care advice. We have a standard set of questions that results in increasingly more consistent quality of our social care advice. Our audits demonstrate improving practice, but we have more to do to make sure that all children experience a consistently good service. For those children evaluated we found most were receiving appropriate support that was improving their situation.

A small number of children have experienced some drift and delay, which management oversight and supervision should have addressed in a timelier way. Children have positive relationships with their workers. The quality of assessments is improving. Strengths in family networks are being consistently considered. Assessments concluding with an effective analysis and next steps has also improved.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Making good decisions

# 2,289

## Children in our care (80 per 10,000 children)

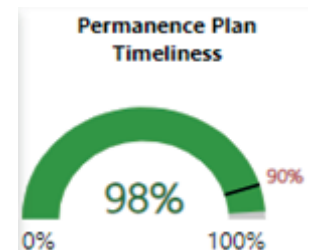
As of end March 2024 there are 2,289 children in our care, a rate of 80 per 10,000. Our yearlong average is 79 per 10,000, which is above the national average (70) but below comparators (87).

Our fundamental belief is that children should grow up within their families or wider networks where it is safe to do so.

We have therefore invested in a range of help and support services to achieve our aim:

- Family Group Conferences
- Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST)
- Contextual Safeguarding Hub 'EMPOWERU'
- Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)
- Reuniting Families
- Moving On Programme
- Safer Families
- Breaking the Cycle (BtC)
- Lifelong Links
- Edge of Care

Permanence plan		
	Number	%
Return to family	380	17%
Adoption	207	9%
SGO/CAO	155	7%
Supported living	182	8%
L/T residential	182	8%
L/T fostering	965	42%
Other	74	3%
Not recorded	144	6%

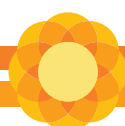


Decisions for children to come into our care are made by our assistant directors. We have introduced a coming in to care panel to increase oversight and scrutiny of our decisions.

The panel alongside our auditing means that we can be assured that decisions to bring younger children into our care are the right ones and in children's best interests.

Fathers are known but not always actively engaged. This is largely due to refusal but at times we could be more persistent to engage them.

Wider family members are appropriately explored through use of FGC or family network meetings. Our family support and edge of care services are increasingly responsive to 'on the day' requests, responding quickly in crises to prevent family breakdown, including out of hours.

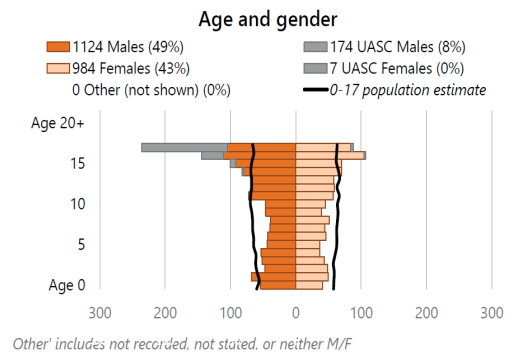
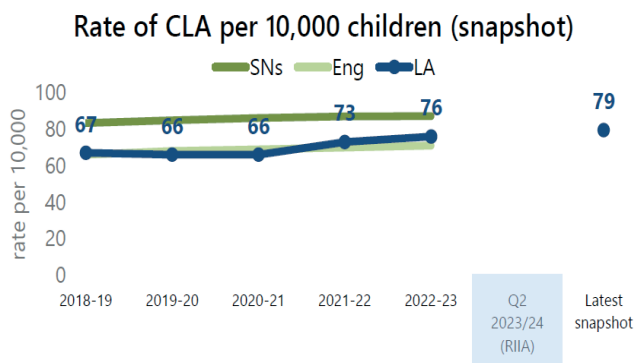


# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Making Good Decisions

From April 2023 to March 2024, 76% of children and young people remained living with their families or friends following edge of care support.

Our challenge is with older children and the consistency of thinking and attitudes to risk and what is 'good enough' both across the Trust and the wider partnership. For many older children coming into our care there has been periodic intervention over time, often linked to neglect. Many families need enduring support over many years to maintain 'good enough' parenting, including preparedness for managing the challenges of adolescence.



Capacity and resource pressures can make this difficult to achieve. We are therefore reviewing, through our Trust 2025 Programme, how we can best meet need through a locality based multi-disciplinary response and engage local community and universal services to scaffold enduring support for families.

We have developed 'coming into care well' practice guidance for our staff, partners and families to support consistency of thinking and response.

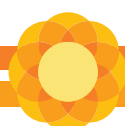
For children who need to be in our care we strive to achieve timely permanence planning. 94% of our children have a plan for permanence with 86% of children having a permanence plan by the second review. Inspectors recognised in our 2023 ILACs that "decisions about children's long-term plans are made sooner".

Audits completed by IROs provide assurance that nearly all children experience suitable care planning for permanence and that children's voices are clear and at the centre of planning. A small number of children experienced some delay in their plan progressing. For the most part, including suitable escalation, IROs raise issues of delay.

Our court progression officers work closely with social workers and our legal team to maintain effective oversight of children before the court. On average the length of care proceedings from April 2023 to March 2024 is 40 weeks. We compare favourably and are close to the best performing core cities.

We know that the duration of proceedings is lower where there has been a period or pre-proceedings (35 weeks versus 45 where there are no pre-proceedings).

Through the LFJB action plan we are working with partners to further reduce delay in our local Court.





# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

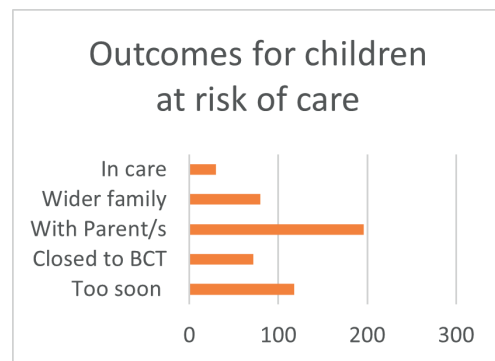
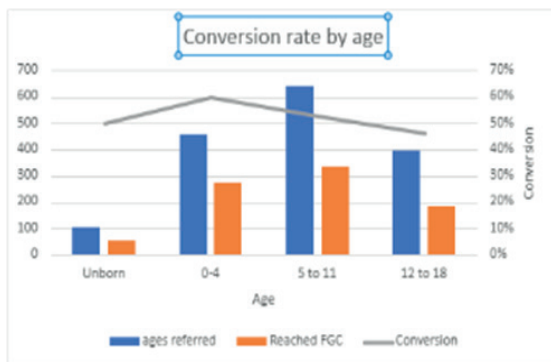
## Family Group Conference and Lifelong Links

The service has seen a 10% increase in referral rates for FGC with 1647 children from 811 families referred compared to 737 families last year. Between April 1st 23 and March 31st 24 our team delivered a total of 431 initial FGCs and 156 reviews involving 844 children.

The age ranges of children referred is also much more evenly represented through the age brackets. Our conversion rate from referral to FGC is above national average (55%) for 0–4-year-olds but drops slightly below as the age of the children increases.

Over 70% of all children referred with child protection plans remain living within their families. The service is proud to support children who cannot live with their parents to live safely within their wider network of family and friends.

Of the 490 children considered to be at risk of care by the referrer at the point at which they contacted the team, only 8% (30 children) have moved into care away from their familiar networks.



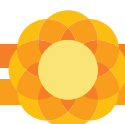
Our fast-track FGC offer is continuing to grow. We have seen an impressive 116% increase in referrals from 56 in 2022-23 to 121 this year.

We work closely with our colleagues in front door services to adapt the FGC model so that social workers have the best possible opportunity to engage and work with the whole family network to support children.

We have further expanded our lifelong links service following a successful bid for c£400k from the DfE.

Lifelong links offers care experienced children and young people aged between 8-25, the opportunity to maintain important connections that are so often fractured because of their journey through the care system. Independent lifelong links facilitators work directly with children and young people.

Family connectors support social workers to explore and identify wider family and network support. For 75% of referrals, family connectors have been successful in increasing the size of the support network around the child.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Participation and direct work

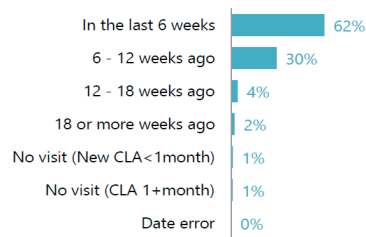
Children in our care are seen and engaged. Visits are timely but not always recorded as quickly as we want them to be. 94% of reviews are held in time. 95% of children's views are shared in the review.

Over half of our children participate by directly attending their review and for the remainder their views are represented by a known adult. IROs routinely visit their children as part of the review process. They tell us that many children do not want to attend their review because their views can be represented by others.

### Inspectors recognised in our ILACS that:

*"Care plans are reviewed effectively by independent reviewing officers and children are encouraged and assisted to attend their review. Children's wishes and feelings are well considered and integrated into care plans."*

Time since the child was last seen



Our audits tell us that we are seeing a steady improvement in children's wishes and feelings being understood and effectively informing their plans.

This is echoed in the feedback from children through their IROs:

- **87%** of children felt their IRO always or sometimes involved them in decisions and listened to them,
- **85%** of children are always or sometimes asked for their views before a meeting, and,
- **81%** of children are informed about the decisions made at meetings when they do not attend.

We have a range of participation groups in the Trust.

### Our children and young people have said:

*"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."*



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Participation and direct work

In response to a range of 'asks' from our young people we have coproduced a corporate parenting video designed to gather support from businesses individuals and organisations across the city of Birmingham for our children and young people.

This was launched at Arup's new offices in Paradise Circus, where over 60 people attended from a range of businesses and institutions to support our young people and commit to supporting the corporate parenting agenda.

Young people were part of filming. The video is live on our website and showcases our children and young people and ways to support them.

Our young people told us they want more support with employment, training and improved housing opportunities. In response we have worked with companies such as Lovell.

They have created a new programme that develops training, employment and housing options for children in care and young people experiencing homelessness in partnership with St Basil's.

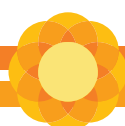
Our social media and marketing apprentices have designed Lovell's 'We Got You' branding, video and flyer.

Over 30 young people were also involved in a consultation event to shape the programme in the three key areas.



United & Unique have told us that they want to increase their participation work in the coming year to reach more children and young people.

They have set themselves and us clear priorities for 2024/25 that will be overseen by our corporate parenting board.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

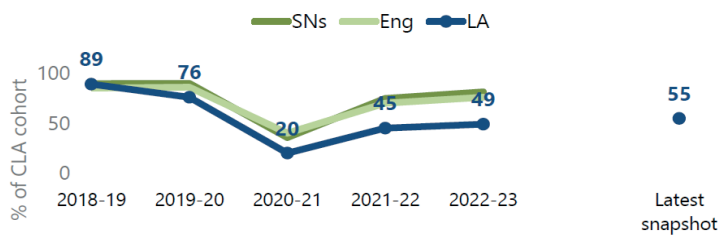
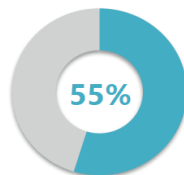
## Health

Children in our care are supported with their health and wellbeing. Over the last year we established a short life project with our health colleagues to improve the timeliness of and engagement with health assessments, improve referral pathways and to enhance our performance reporting. We are seeing incremental improvements as a result but have more to do to make sure that all children benefit from an annual health assessment (as a minimum dependant on age and circumstances).

As with the general population gaining access to regular dental checks since the pandemic has proven challenging. We take a consistently proactive approach, which is slowly improving the number of our children with a dental check in the last 12 months.

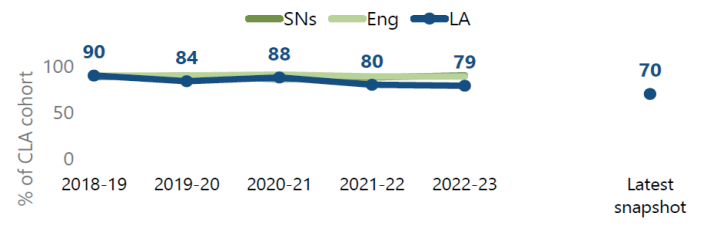
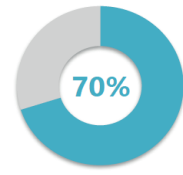
### Dental checks

Current open CLA who have been looked after for at least 12 months who have had a dental check in the last 12 months.



### Health assessments

Current open CLA who have been looked after for at least 12 months with an up to date health assessment (in the last 6 months for CLA aged under 5, and in the last 12 months for CLA aged 5-plus)



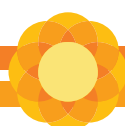
Our therapeutic emotional support service (TESS) is an emotional wellbeing service for our children in care and young people who have left care.

The team builds resilience rather than 'treat' difficulties or problems, with a focus on supporting the development of secure attachments, helping children recover from the complex trauma they have experienced and supporting them through the various transitions they experience whilst in care.

The number of children and young people receiving support has increased year on year – 608 during 2023 and 127 in the first quarter of 2024.

We know through SDQ scores that for most children, young people and carers who receive support from TESS they experience positive changes in their emotional wellbeing, placement stability, and trauma recovery.

Analysis of the SDQ total scores suggest that 81% of young people post-TESS show evidence of positive change.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Learning and Enjoyment

The virtual school sits within the City council. Leaders are ambitious and have high expectations. There is an unremitting focus on ensuring the best outcomes for pupils. To support this, leaders have built capacity, developed relationships, and grown partnerships.

There is an emphasis on impact, so the whole team can see what needs to be done and is enthusiastic about doing it. As a result, the Birmingham virtual school is well able to provide challenge, support and guidance to schools and other key partners. Our children in care, safeguarding, adoption and foster carer services and teams maintain effective links with the virtual school.

The virtual school education advisors work is now triaged within a locality model to enable more intensive support for our children most at risk of poorer educational outcomes. We identify these young people using the Rees Centre research into which key variables affect attainment and progress. The service is growing by a further eight advisors to further increase our capacity for intensive support accessible within our school localities; establish strong partnerships post 18 with higher education providers; and further grow our support to parents, carers and guardians with education queries.

We have strengthened our arrangements to support looked after children's education using allocated schools' budgets. We have a dedicated pupil premium plus manager to support the virtual school headteacher in implementing effective and un-bureaucratic arrangements for the spending and reporting of PP+.

The attainment of our children and young people across our key stages continues to increase in relation to national attainment for children in care:

We are above national and regional for CIC for 12 months + (OC2) achieving good levels of development. Achieving the expected level in Numeracy was the only area we were below national and regional.

We are below national and regional figures for CIC for 12 months + (OC2) achieving the expected level in RWM combined at Key Stage 1 although we are above national in reaching the expected level in reading, writing and maths individually.

We are above national and regional figures for our CIC pupils achieving the expected level in phonics. We are below national and regional figures for CIC for 12 months + (OC2) achieving the expected level in RWM combined at Key Stage. We are above national and regional figures for our CIC for 12 months + (OC2) achieving the expected level in reading, writing and grammar, spelling and punctuation individually at Key Stage 2.

We are not yet matched with all pupils but our average attainment 8 scores for CIC for 12 months + (OC2) and CIC all were above national and regional across Eng, Maths and Ebacc. Our Progress 8 showed higher progress levels than national and regional.

We are considerably above national and regional for CIC for 12 months + (OC2) and CIC all achieving GCSE 5-9 with Eng, with maths and with Eng and Maths combined. We are above regional and national achieving the EBacc including those with a triple science.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Learning and Enjoyment

For the full academic year 2022-23 attendance rates were at their highest levels since 2019. Our persistent absence has also dramatically reduced, falling by over 17% from our figures in 2201-22 and we are 2% below the national average of children in care all and 13.8% below children in care 12 months or more. This means more of our children, than at any point in the last six years, are in school every day and learning.

Similarly, our proactive and robust interventions ensured that 99 exclusions have been rescinded since we started tracking this data in Spring 2022 and our suspension rates for children in care are now 2% lower than they were before the pandemic and the lowest rate for over six years.



This means more children are in school learning. We have clear impact evidence that the commissioning of two early emotional and mental health support services – Barnardo's and Evolve to work with individual young people has reduced the risk of fixed term and permanent exclusions for several of our young people and are continuing to develop and commission this work.

PEP completion rates are high in Birmingham. For example, in Autumn term 2023 completion rate was 99.96% PEP completion.

Only nine pupils did not have a termly PEP – this was expected as six pupils were in the process of adoption, two were aged 2 years old and do not currently attend an early year setting, and one pupil was new to care on the 21st of December 2023 so their PEP would take place in the spring term.

Inspectors recognised in our ILACS that:

*“The virtual school has established and embedded effective links with schools, other council departments and a wide range of external partners. Care plans and personal education plans are well integrated.*

*“This means that those with oversight of any child work together very effectively to ensure that children can make good progress. Children in care are well supported by the VS for their next steps at all transition points.”*

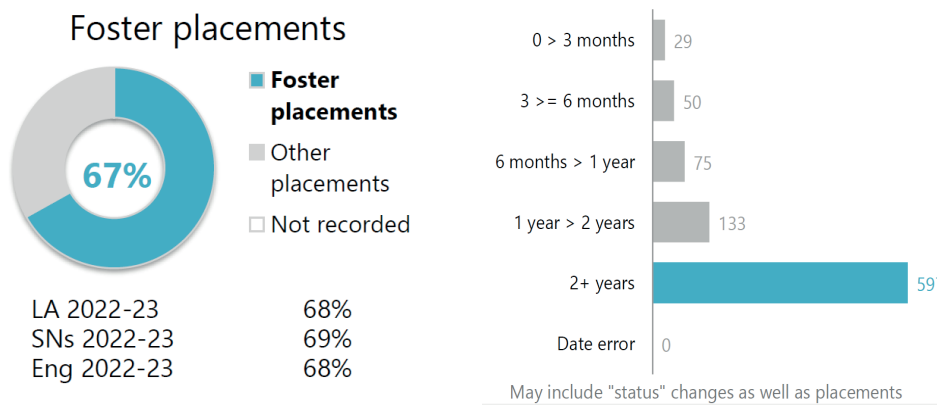


# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Stability and permanence

We want our children to live with families or alternative nurturing care, and close to their home address where this is in their best interest. 72% of our children live within 20 miles of their home address.

We carefully consider children's identity needs when seeking appropriate matches. Where this is not possible supervising social workers support carers to meet children's holistic needs. We undertake effective together and apart assessments to make sure that children can live with their brothers and sisters when it is in their best interest to do so. We actively encourage and support children to keep in touch with the important people in their lives. Arrangements are routinely considered in children's reviews.

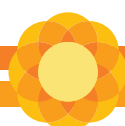
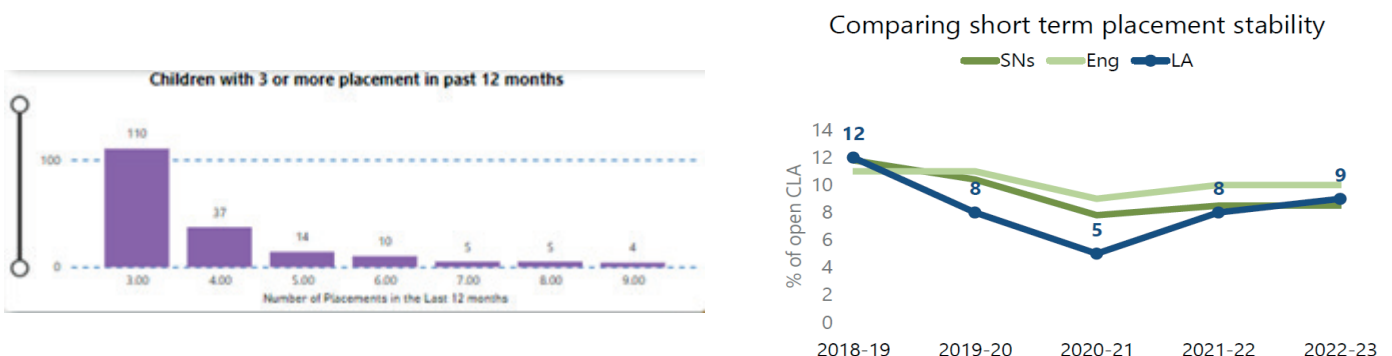


We have increased staffing across our placement and commissioning service to meet rising sufficiency challenges. We, as many others, experience challenges across the residential and foster care market, with demand exceeding supply, adding to the rising costs of care.

Homes for our most complex young people are increasingly difficult to source (often with 40-50 referrals for each vacancy).

We work hard to develop effective relationships with providers that enables us to secure placements for our young people. We have developed what are essentially relationship manager roles to make sure that the Trust is the local authority of choice. Building on these strong relationships with providers, we have also supported applications to both the planning department and to Ofsted.

We strive to work effectively with the market to make sure they are aware of our commissioning intentions and sufficiency gaps.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE



## Stability and permanence

The Trust has been commended by the high court on the tenacity in securing placements for our most complex young people. This is reflected in the low numbers of children living in unregistered children's homes, five as of the 31st March. Effective oversight and planning for these children continues through our monthly Director's Assurance Meeting.

67% of our children live with foster families. We are broadly in line with comparators and the national average. We have 589 registered foster homes and 799 of our children living in them, which equates to c35%.

Our fostering agency was judged to be 'good' by inspectors in our inspection in August 2021. Since then, there has been stable leadership driving continual improvement. Quarterly detailed quality assurance (regulation 35) reports provide assurance about the continuing 'good' quality and effectiveness of the service.

An average of 8% (9% at end of March 2024) of our children live within their family networks, which is slightly higher than comparators and the national average (7% respectively). We are seeing increasing numbers of referrals for assessments of connected carers.

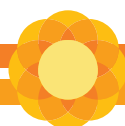
In our inspection in 2023 inspectors found that "for many children in care who live with their parents or with connected carers, there are delays in progressing special guardianship applications and the discharge of care orders, sometimes many years after it is clear that these are stable long-term placements. There is a 'lack of effective management review' of these children to ensure that the drift and delay is addressed.

This means that some children do not have the opportunity for legal permanence when the time is right for them and, in some circumstances, children remain subject to statutory social work intervention for longer than is necessary" and "for children who are placed at home with their parents on care orders, parenting assessments are not routinely reviewed and updated to ensure that their care arrangements remain appropriate and continue to meet their needs".

We are seeing increasing numbers (compared to last year) of SGOs granted. In quarter three – 16, of which 12 to foster carers and four as alternatives to care. We still have more to do to bring traction to securing SGOs for children where this is their plan.

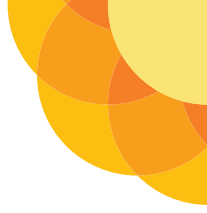
Immediately following the inspection, we initiated our care discharge and review project. Heads of service have reviewed all children living with their parents with a care order to make sure that the arrangements remain suitable for their needs and that up-to-date schedule three assessments are in place.

We have also reviewed and updated our guidance, which has been incorporated into our case management system to support practitioners.





# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE



## Stability and permanence

Our court progression officers maintain oversight of children identified for care order discharge, reporting into the Citywide PLO meeting that provides strategic oversight.

As of the end of March 2024 there are 107 children (72 families) identified for care order discharge – 49 placed with parents and 58 with a plan of SGO. Since March 2023 40 children's care orders have been discharged. There are 27 children with our legal colleagues where we are preparing for issue and five children with applications made. High social work caseloads are impacting in the pace that orders can be discharged.

An average of 11% of our children live in children's homes (10% at end of March 2024). Our fostering and family-based care project considers children who are identified and assessed as being able and ready to live in a family setting. The project utilises the BERRI assessment tool, which uses psychological perspectives to understand the complex needs of children and how best to support transitions for them. The project is currently reviewing 89 children.

For six children we are actively family finding, of which we have plans for one child to return home and foster families identified for two children.

The number of children experiencing three or more moves in 12 months has remained stable at 7%. Again, lower than comparators (9%) and the national average (10%).

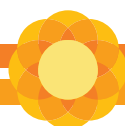
We are just below comparators and the national average (69% respectively) at 67% of our children living in their home for 2.5yrs or more. We are proud of the fact that most children in our care are settled and stable. TESS provides key support in sustaining stability for our children.

An analysis of TESS data for a cohort of 426 young people open to TESS from 2019 to date has been undertaken to test placement stability during and after TESS support was offered. The analysis showed that most young people did not experience a placement change during or after TESS support, and that the level of placement stability increased over time.

The analysis also suggested that TESS may have a positive impact on the long-term stability of young people in care, by helping them and their carers to develop coping skills, positive attachment, and resilience.

Over the last year 48 foster carers who received a consultation provided feedback on their experience of support. 40 stated that they were completely satisfied with the service received. We have a dedicated IRO that reviews children's circumstances where their living arrangement has disrupted. The findings are collated into learning themes to inform practice improvement and sufficiency planning.

We recognise the importance of children understanding their life stories to achieving a felt sense of stability and security. We want all children in our care to have this understanding not just those with a plan of adoption.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

## Stability and permanence

To help us to achieve this we have expanded our life story student hubs and now have three hubs across the City. Students work directly with children where this is right for the child or through parents/carers where this is assessed as the right approach.

Our regional adoption agency is delivered in partnership with Adoption Focus and is currently rated as 'good' with 'outstanding' for leadership and management.

Financial Year	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Number of children placed (Adoption)	83	85	105
Placed Internally	43 (52%)	48 (56%)	64 (61%)
Placed within 12 months of plan	70 (84%)	71 (84%)	88 (84%)
Average A1 Timeliness (Days)	575	668	560
Number of children placed (Early permanence)	9	13	6

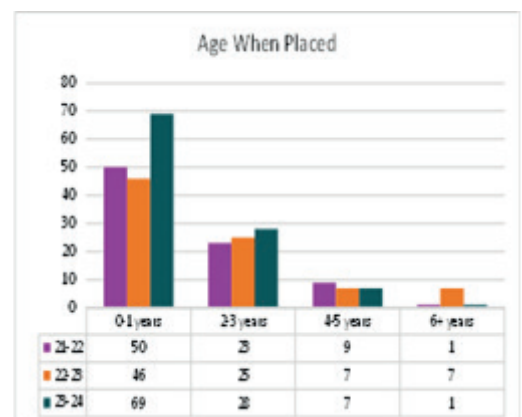
For the first time in the history of the Trust we have achieved triple figures with over 100 (104) children being placed for adoption compared to 85 last year. We have more to do so that more children benefit from early permanence arrangements. 5.7% of the total placed. We are more aspirational for our children. Our adoption service is working with colleagues across the Trust to build collective understanding and confidence in the early permanence approach. We anticipate increasing numbers over the coming year.

Use of our own adopters grows stronger year on year (61%) and is bucking the national trend. This has resulted in a reduced need for inter-agency placements during the period and has kept children in the city of their birth. For children adopted in year 23/24 we can see that it is taking slightly longer to approve adoption plans and to be granted a placement order, 25 days on average.

Conversely, when given permission by the court to place, Adopt Birmingham has taken 52 fewer days to match the child to their new family. In addition, Adopt Birmingham has reduced the time taken for adoptive introduction processes by 12 days year on year, taking only 20 days to place the child in their new home.

This is a total of (on average) 64 fewer days in foster care for each child placed – a total of 6,720 fostering days saved.

The main benefit in freeing up fostering households is to be found in maximising sufficiency of the 'best match' fostering offer to more children.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

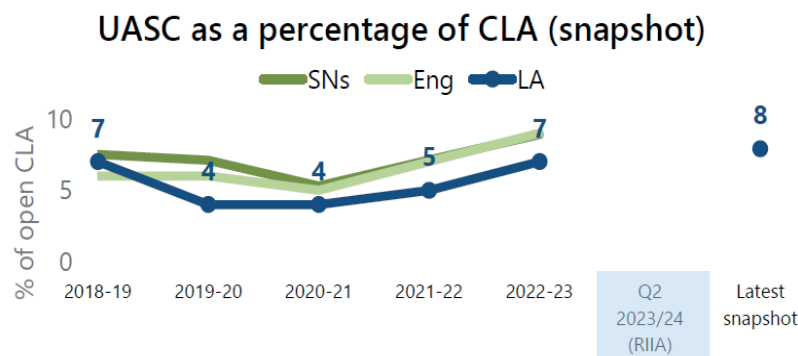
## Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

We are proud to provide sanctuary for children and young people seeking asylum. At the end of March 24 there were 181 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) supported by the Trust, which represents 8% of the children we care for.

We have seen increasing numbers of UASC in Birmingham, which presents complex challenges, such as navigating language barriers, effectively supporting the trauma they have experienced, financial pressures and limited numbers of experienced carers. Birmingham is a diverse city and so many of our regional local authorities also seek placements in Birmingham for unaccompanied children, which creates challenges in finding suitable placements.

Despite this, we remain confident that our UASC children experience good quality accommodation, as supported by the findings of inspectors in our 2023 ILACS.

181 open unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)



We have recently appointed a care leaver apprentice to the placement and commissioning team.

We are also recruiting to a commissioning officer role that is also ring fenced to applicants who are care experienced.

These additional posts will contribute to the development of the service and lead the development of a young people's due diligence scheme.

To meet rising demand, we have increased capacity within our UASC service, which is now made up of four teams, two for minors and two teams for care leavers. Additional care leaving capacity is still needed and a new team is being set up. Our UASC service is well-established, with permanent workers that have adapted to the needs of the ever changing local, national and international landscape in the support of UASC.

We have embedded a trafficking risk assessment that is completed for all new UASC on their first encounter. We have a strong track record for effectively applying case law to age decisions and age assessments.

Given the sharp increase in demand some children are currently waiting up to seven months to receive an age assessment. During this time young people are provided with accommodation on a non-prejudice basis and treated as minors until the assessment is completed.



# CHILDREN IN OUR CARE



## Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

The backlog is being reduced systematically and plans in place to manage this are working well. We take our responsibilities under the national transfer scheme seriously, so children do not experience delay with transfers and do not have to wait in unsuitable accommodation.

We have well-established relationships between our UASC service and EmpowerU. Consequently, UASC children and young people at risk of exploitation are identified and benefit from timely safety planning and disruption activity that is reviewed regularly.

We have established strong partnerships with other agencies, such as the exploitation police, Home Office, third sector agencies such as the Refugee Council, the Children's Society and other partners, enabling us to be more effective in the identification and prevention of modern slavery/trafficking.

Within this work we have a clear UASC missing protocol that has worked well and has led to successful instances of re-accommodation. Overall, we are seeing reductions in missing UASC children.

We recognise the additional complexity of the health needs of our UASC. We have collaborated with our NHS Health colleagues to establish a 'New to Country Clinic', which has proven to be particularly successful in both providing a consistent and sensitive service to all our new arrivals and early identification of serious health conditions.

We are extremely proud that our model of practice has been recognised nationally by 'CiC Health colleagues' as an exemplar to be replicated.

We recognise the need for triple planning and making sure that our young people have an effective understanding of their asylum applications and how the Home Office decision will affect all future planning for them. We effectively use the NRM for children and young people where trafficking is a concern.

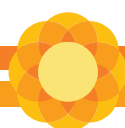
We are relentless in our ambition to provide highly effective support, protection and care for children and young people seeking asylum in our City.

We are currently agreeing our approach to the recent Illegal Migration Act. \

We will continue to make best interest decisions for our young people in line with the Children Act.

We will strive to make sure that the Act does not impact adversely upon our unaccompanied young people.

Our young people are given constant assurance that they will be continually supported throughout the process to the best of our ability.



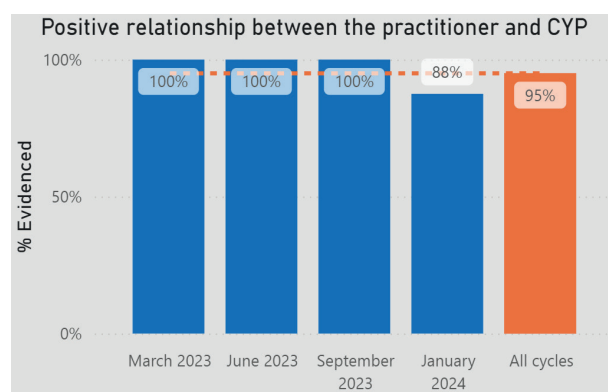
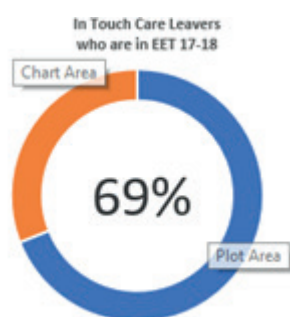
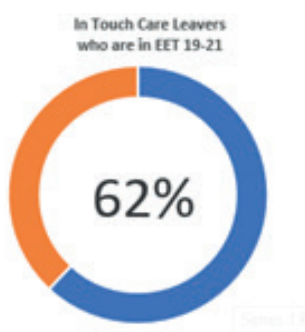
# OUR CARE LEAVERS

## Relationships and participation

In our last Ofsted recognised that “care-leavers benefit from personal advisers (PAs) who make time to develop strong and supportive relationships with their young people, understanding their lived experiences and their needs”.

We know that for some young people, a PA is not allocated soon enough. Investment into the service to increase PA capacity to address this has had to be repurposed to respond to increasing numbers of unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

We remain committed to providing the best possible support for our children as they transition to adulthood and in the 24/25 budget settlement additional funding has been allocated to deliver the required increase in PA capacity.



We complete a needs assessment close to children’s birthdays, allocating our PA resource to those that will most benefit from PA support. A key priority is improving the quality of our support to children transitioning to adulthood through effective pathway planning. We also plan to align our care leavers service with our children in care service so that children receive the continuous support they need. We offer two programmes – Next Steps and Develop Me to help young people prepare for adult life.

All our young people have access to our own advocacy service. We actively promote this service to make sure young people are kept well-informed about their rights and entitlements. We take very seriously representations from our young people. We respond swiftly and explore key themes for learning and improvement in our regular management and team meetings.

# 1,575

## Care leavers as at 31 March 2024



# OUR CARE LEAVERS

## Health and wellbeing

Young people are supported to register with a GP (Doctor), dentist and opticians and can access health services as required. PAs attend appointments, if this is what the young person wants.

The health team meets the young person near to their 18th birthday and provides a health summary record, sometimes referred to as a 'health passport'. Ofsted inspectors found that most care leavers people have good access to their health records, are registered with a GP and can access health services as required. The health team work to ensure that appropriate information is shared, with the young person's consent, across health and social care services, for a smooth transition to services that support adults. Ongoing advice and guidance is given to young people to access the support they need.

Care Leavers are supported by TESS with emotional well-being and mental health needs until age 25. TESS are supporting an increasing number of young people – 131 an increase of 28% compared to the previous year. specialist support is also available for those with additional needs, such as the 'breaking the cycle' service for pregnant care leavers. We also have our young parents project, which provides a place for care leaver parents to meet, make friendships, support each other and share information about help and support services that benefit them.

Our care leavers are entitled to free prescriptions. PAs and designated nursing team actively support our young people applications for this making sure they have access to necessary medications without additional costs.

In February 2023 Ofsted said: *"Young people's emotional well-being is routinely held in mind by PAs, who undertake skilled direct work where the young person is not ready to engage with other services."*

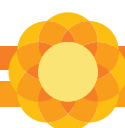
## Feedback from Care Leavers who completed online questionnaire

TESS helped CL's to cope with the impact of their past experiences on their present wellbeing:

- Past trauma experiences (65%)
- Confidence, self-esteem, or relationships (40%)
- Anxiety or stress (30%)

Care Leavers were highly satisfied with TESS Service when they rated it out of 10 at the end of their support:

- The average score was 8.50
- The percentage of care leavers who rated TESS 7 or higher was 80%
- The percentage of care leavers who rated TESS 10 was 25%



# OUR CARE LEAVERS

## The Local Offer

Our Local Offer serves as a valuable resource for keeping young people informed about the wide range of support and services available to them. In early 2023 we reviewed and enhanced our offer in conjunction with our young people. We continually create opportunities to engage and listen to our young people to make sure that the services offered are what they need.

A dedicated webpage provides a monthly newsletter (this is also sent out), which is co-produced and co-edited by our young people. This keeps care leavers up to date with the latest news, events and things such as, enhancements to the local offer or changes that may affect services available to them. Care Leavers have access to their own advocacy service and rights and participation service (RAP), that hosts several groups and forums for young people to join and contribute to the delivery of the service. Inspectors recognised in our 2023 ILACS the accessibility and comprehensiveness of our offer. They found that young people were familiar with it.

## Making good decisions

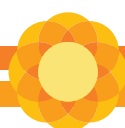
Currently we support care leavers across two service areas (children in care service and our 18+ service). Pathway needs assessments and planning are more effective in our 18+ service. Our audits tell us that pathway assessments are mostly up to date. They show sensitivity to culture, identity, equality, rights of the young person, and identify risk and needs. They conclude with clear and appropriate next steps. Plans are effective in improving the young person's situation and demonstrate good collaboration with partners. Ofsted commented that "PAs are aspirational for their young people, encouraging them to set their goals high and helping them to try and achieve them".

PAs maintain positive relationships with the care leavers and feedback is complimentary of the support they receive. Supervision is reflective and of a good quality, effectively progressing the young person's pathway plan to achieve good outcomes. There is good evidence of collaboration with partners to help the young person reach their full potential. We have more to do to make sure that effective pathway planning and supporting transition to adulthood commences early for all our children, particularly those in our children in care service.

Improving the quality of our early pathway planning and preparing children for adulthood is a key improvement priority for the coming year.

*"She always makes me feel listened to and cared for and is always prompt with doing anything I ask for or need. (SW) really is a cut above the rest."*

*"(SW) helps me a lot. She is really quick with responses to emails and messages, she is always up to date with our meetings and she understands me very well. I love having her as my social worker!"*



# OUR CARE LEAVERS

## Helping and protecting

As a corporate parent maintaining young people's safety and wellbeing is of vital importance to us. We want our young people to feel safe and secure where they live and in their community.

With an emphasis on the prevention of harm and provision of quality support, we work closely with St Basils, TESS, Birmingham housing, Forward Thinking Birmingham, Empower- U Hub and DWP.

We recognise the relationships are crucial in addressing potential risks or harm in and outside the home.

We therefore, through our own relationships with young people, support them to build a network of positive people around them.

Our 18+ service currently support 113 young people over the age of 21 years, all of whom have an allocated PA.

We encourage them to utilise services, such as Lifelong Links, to broker supportive relationships. Empower U and our care leavers service have an agreed specific 18+ risk assessment to help us to identify and respond effectively to risk of harm.

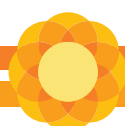
For those young people who find themselves in custody or remand, support is offered up to the age of 25 years.



Close working relationships are maintained with local prisons and resettlement officers.

Young people coming out of custody have a support offer that includes accommodation, finance support and practical help with resettlement, which is all included in their pathway plan.

It is recognised that at times young people may find it difficult to share their worries and concerns. Guidance and practical advice are available on how to keep practically and emotionally safe. With consent a referral can be made to a counsellor or mentor for additional support.





# OUR CARE LEAVERS

## Employment, education and training

Education plays a vital role in the lives of our care leavers. We strive to provide the best possible local offer to young people and will not be satisfied until they are all in some form of education, employment or training (EET). Many of our young people are in appropriate education, employment, or training – 62% of our 19-21yr olds. We compare favourably to comparators (54%) and the national average (56%). We are proud of the fact that currently have 15% of our care leavers are at university. A specialist manager co-ordinates EET options for care leavers, working closely with a wide range of employers.

We offer young people an increasing range of apprenticeship opportunities with the council, the Trust and the local business sector, helping them to develop skills and obtain permanent employment. We are proud of the number of paid apprenticeships we offer for young people, who have been in our care, across many Trust service areas.

Effective links are maintained with the virtual school when young people continue their education post 16yrs to 18yrs. Aspirations and educational needs are captured in both the pathway plan and the personal education plan (ePEP).

Our local offer includes a wide range of financial and practical support for those continuing their education. PAs support young people with college attendance and if they decide to go to university.

We work in collaboration with young people and education providers (with consent) to access additional support so that our young people achieve their aspirations.

Young people who are not in education, employment or training are monitored and a monthly return is completed in line with statutory requirements of the DfE. PAs maintain dialogue with the young people and proactively explore options with them, engaging other services as appropriate.



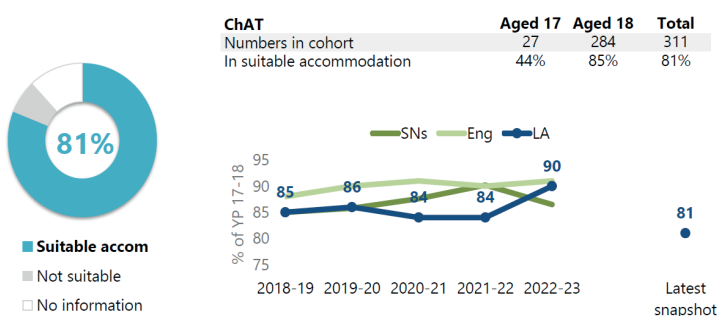
# OUR CARE LEAVERS

## Support into adulthood

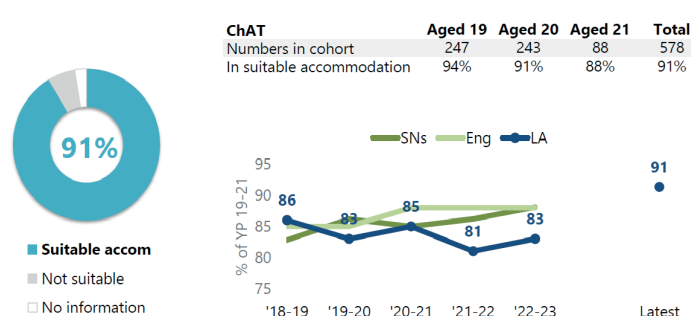
We know, from listening to our young people, that whilst we are committed to actively supporting them in successful transitions to adulthood, we do not always get this right, particularly about where they live.

Our last inspection found that: "accommodation options for young people are carefully considered with the young person's input and in their best interests. The majority are in suitable accommodation. However, for some young people as they turn 18, planning has not been effective in securing the right accommodation and a small number have had to move to placements less suitable in meeting their needs".

Accommodation suitability of 17-18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)



Accommodation suitability of 19-21 year olds (former relevant)

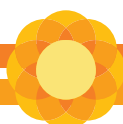
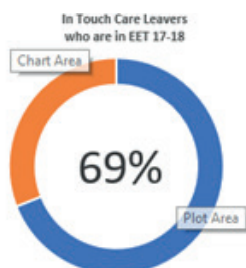


In response we have developed an internal Trust practice and commissioning joint action plan that sets out the actions needed to improve our offer in relation to post 16 accommodation. In addition to this we have recently established a joint Trust, housing and adult social care accommodation working group chaired by our assistant director for vulnerable young people focused on making sure that services are developing and delivering provision in line with our responsibilities as corporate parents.

Our Local Offer includes the provision of discretionary rent deposits and rent guarantees where applicable. Through the housing and accommodation protocol young people should not have an 'intentionally homeless decision' made against them if they are under 25 years old.

We understand the importance of essential documents like birth certificates and National Insurance numbers. As part of our commitment, we cover the costs associated with obtaining and processing these.

We support our asylum-seeking young people with applications for travel documents, and for those entitled to British citizenship, we will support with completing the application.



# OUR NEXT STEPS

In Birmingham, we want our children to be cared for within their families where it is safe to do so or to experience alternative nurturing care. We recognise the strength of relationships in creating the counter-conditions for adverse childhood experiences. We build on family strengths and work with them to create their own solutions.

We want the very best for our children, young people and their families/carers. We will continue to work tirelessly so that every child and young person is afforded the opportunity to be healthy, safe and successful.

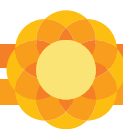
## Building on our strengths

- Workforce – our workforce is our greatest asset. We will use our early adopter status (ECF) to further enhance our social work progression pathways and embed our new Trust wide learning offer.
- Continual practice development – we have a proven track record in continual improvement. Our investment in quality assurance and improvement will help us to focus on our priority areas for improvement.
- Learning Culture – our practice model sets out a clear framework for ‘how we be’ with our families and with each other. This, in tandem, with our more rigorous accountability and governance framework will drive optimal conditions for practice improvement.
- Effective leadership – stable and visible leadership helps us to embed our vision and values for our children and for our staff – to be the best they can be.

## Areas of focus

- Children to have their needs met at a lower level of intervention at all points in our system. We have a major transformation programme Trust 2025 to deliver improved system conditions for delivery of our practice framework Connections Count, in line with the national direction of travel set out in Stable Homes, Built on Love.
- High support/high challenge culture – we will be strengthening our quality assurance approach as the driver of consistently good practice; seeking to have more rigour in our continuous improvement plan and how we drive it, as well as being more systematic in identifying and addressing inequalities and discrimination.
- Team and Collaborative working – starting with being more systematic in listening to and acting upon the voices of children and families, focussing upon strengthened partnership working and the potential for a new locality operating model to deliver that, including ensuring that our own teams across the Trust work more closely.

Our context is a challenging one, but that has not diminished our ambition and we are determined to demonstrate continued improvement. We will demonstrate progress through our continuous improvement plan.





**BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST**