



BIRMINGHAM
**Safeguarding
Children**
PARTNERSHIP

Independent Chair's Accountability Report 2023-24



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1. Introduction to my 8th Accountability Report

1.1 This is my 8th Accountability Report as Independent Chair. As I said last year, independence is a frame of mind not a length of time. However, now that the Government have published 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023', change is afoot and the Safeguarding Leaders and the Partnership are thoughtfully planning how Birmingham can achieve compliance and build on the progress of the last eight years. Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) remains absolutely committed to our shared purpose of ensuring improvement in how children, young people and families in Birmingham are supported to be safe and to flourish. We are doing this at a time of significant change. Resources have been severely compromised with the Council issuing a S114 notice and other partners facing the impact of austerity, the cost-of-living crisis, and the implications of the post-pandemic world and international turbulence. The impact of the pandemic, the economy, and social media on the lives and experiences of children and young people is being recognised in the upsurge of mental and emotional instability, absence from school, and a rise in serious youth violence. This is a concerning backdrop to my 2023/4 Accountability Report which is an account of my activity and a reflection on the effectiveness of BSCP arrangements over the past year.

1.2 The description of my role is attached as Appendix 1.

1.3 In my last report I was able to cite evidence that the progress I was seeing had been reinforced by the Inspection of Birmingham City Council Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) by Ofsted. This wide-ranging Inspection took place between 20th February – 3rd March 2023 and was published on 18th April 2023. Their unequivocal conclusions are worth repeating:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families - GOOD
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection - GOOD
- The experiences and progress of children in care - GOOD
- The experiences and progress of care leavers - GOOD
- Overall effectiveness – GOOD

1.4 Ofsted evidenced that "much progress has been made" since the last inspection in 2018. These judgements, which were formed by listening to children and young people, practitioners, partner professionals, and by scrutinising records, provided valuable assurance to the public.

1.5 Whilst the lead provider of these services, Birmingham Children's Trust, could be justly proud of their positive impact, the Local Authority, Police

and Health Partners should also take their share of responsibility for the effectiveness of the improvement journey so far. Clearly, there was, and is, no room for complacency; complacency is the enemy of excellence. As if to reinforce that point, Police and Health partners have received Inspection reports over the past year that have signalled a need for improvements, which I see being responded to with seriousness and vigour.

When I met with Assistant Chief Constable Jennifer Mattison, she explained her role in Chairing a Gold Group addressing improvements needed to move the Police out of “engaged status” for issues in Public Protection. Recently, I have met with both ACC Mattison in her role as Accountable Officer for the PPU and Serious Crime, and ACC Claire Bell in her role as Accountable Officer for Local Policing. Whose safeguarding responsibilities have been delegated to them by the Chief Constable.

- 1.6** Whilst I contributed to the Care Quality Commission inspection of the Integrated Care Board’s functioning, that advisory report has not yet been published. However, I understand that through the Improvement Plan for Health’s ‘Forward Thinking’ children and young people’s mental health services, progress is being made.
- 1.7** In this past year, I have seen both the ambition to continue to improve support for families in their communities and a commitment to learn from inspection and scrutiny.
- 1.8** Two key areas highlighted for further partnership progress by Ofsted were already priorities in our [Business Improvement Plan 2023-25](#). These are: “Ensuring effective implementation of the [Childhood Neglect Strategy \(2022-26\)](#)” and “Assuring a coordinated and coherent inter-agency response to children impacted by domestic abuse and violence in families”. Both issues have remained the focus of sustained activity. These efforts include investing in our Neglect Programme Manager, Luisa Fraser, who provides training and support, as well as focusing on the impact of domestic abuse on children and childhood at the Annual BSCP Practitioners' Conference in November 2023.
- 1.9** The further two priorities in our current plan are: “Developing a joint approach to understanding and responding to children who are, or who become, invisible to services” and “Enhancing anti-discriminatory practice, by improving partnership focus on the work we do in the context of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.” I will return to actions to address our priorities, including the planning for the 2024 Practitioners’ Conference.
- 1.10** For the rest of my Accountability Report, I will reflect on key aspects of the Independent Chair’s role, undertake a high-level reflection on the past

year from the perspective of Safeguarding, further review progress against our priorities, and offer a few concluding remarks about the next steps on our improvement journey.

2. Convening, Assurance and Accountability

- 2.1** My role is fulfilled on behalf of the Accountable Safeguarding Partners: Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, Chief Executive and Accountable Officer for the NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board, and the Chief Executive of Birmingham Children’s Trust. They lend me their authority to support and challenge their organisations and systems’ leadership in the interests of safeguarding children. Together they are committed to delivering on the ambition that “Birmingham is a family friendly city where children will flourish, feel safe, listened to, learn and grow up to actively contribute to society”.
- 2.2** They, or their delegated Safeguarding Leads, sit on the BSCP Executive Board and share responsibility for our Governance and Accountability arrangements. Through 2023/4 there have been several changes at the most senior level; with a new Chief Constable, Craig Guildford, a new Chief Executive for the Children’s Trust, James Thomas, in December 2023, and the announcement of a change of Chief Executive for Birmingham City Council, with Graeme Betts once again fulfilling the role in the interim.
- 2.3** I would like to thank James Thomas and Andy Couldrick (Birmingham Children’s Trust CEO until December 2023), Sue Harrison (Director of Children’s Services, Birmingham City Council), Richard North (Chief Superintendent for Birmingham, West Midlands Police), and Lisa Stalley-Green (Outgoing Deputy CEO and Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board) for being the locally accountable leaders, comprising the Birmingham’s Safeguarding Leaders Group.
- 2.4** Whilst there has been some change in key roles across all the lead partners there has been no reduction in the commitment to partnership working and mutual support, which is both commendable and essential, especially in the face of many challenges, resources being not the least of them.
- 2.5** It is important to clarify that whilst the leadership of Safeguarding arrangements sits with the four key partners identified above, the delivery of support to families and children and an effective response to safeguarding concerns sits with a much wider range of professionals and organisations. Schools, early years settings and community and voluntary organisations are key to supporting children and young people in their communities. Their engagement with BSCP is a vital part of our

arrangements and over the past year attention to the quality of communication with, and support to, our diversity of practitioners has been a priority. The introduction of the partnership newsletter, my blog, and the introduction of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review webinars to help cascade learning are examples of this.

- 2.6** Over the last year I have continued to convene and chair the BSCP Executive Board on behalf of partners and to support and challenge, without fear or favour, in the best interests of children and young people. I have sought to ensure the effective running of BSCP through direct observation, analysis of data, and quality feedback. This is my approach to strategic scrutiny, supported by being visible and accessible, encouraging openness, learning, mature relationships, and a commitment to improve partnership engagement and performance. Last year I reported on a “new normal” involving a mix of face to face and virtual meetings. We are now holding Executive Board meetings, Safeguarding Leaders Assemblies, the annual Practitioners’ Conference, and some Sub-Groups face to face. However, we have found that quarterly Practitioners’ Forum sessions and some Sub-Group meetings work better virtually.
- 2.7** I am pleased to report that we have returned to Executive Board meetings being hosted by partners. This past year’s highlights included our September meeting at Adderley Primary School, where young ambassadors took us in groups around their vibrant school. Our meeting in November at Birmingham Women's Hospital was able to reinforce the significant role played by Health colleagues in the vital weeks and months before, during and after a child’s arrival in the world. We have also been hosted by Birmingham Children’s Trust, Lakeside Children’s Centre, NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board and West Midlands Police. Moving the Executive Board around the City Partners for hosting provides an excellent opportunity to see and hear from practitioners, and sometimes to meet actual children!
- 2.8** I have attended at least one of each of the Sub-Groups during the year as an essential way of achieving assurance on the practice of our values, sharing of common purpose and active pursuit of our priorities. Each one is co-chaired and has a key work programme. I continue to be impressed by the maturity of these vital elements in our arrangements. In each Sub-Group I have witnessed respectful, open, challenging discussions and the delivery of quality products. These products include conferences and courses from Learning & Development; insightful audits and reviews from Quality, Impact and Outcomes; and thoughtful, valuable reviews, Learning Lessons Briefing Notes, and now webinars from Serious Cases, telling powerful stories and describing action orientated improvements.
- 2.9** In addition, I have attended the Health Safeguarding and Safeguarding in Education Partnerships, both of which have key coordinating, support and

awareness raising functions. Both groups when I attended them had full and relevant agendas and the right people in the meeting, participating fully. They were well chaired, demonstrating learning and a willingness to wrestle with challenging issues. It is clear that Safeguarding responsibilities are receiving a high priority within the Children's Directorate of the Council, with the active engagement of Schools, who are on course to becoming seen as a fifth Partner in the arrangements, in practice.

- 2.10** The four Safeguarding Leaders and I meet virtually on a regular basis to plan agendas, problem solve, and chart progress. Subsequently building and sustaining the strong fundamental relationships that are at the heart of our Safeguarding arrangements.
- 2.11** In addition, with Simon Cross (BSCP Business Manager) I hold induction meetings with any senior leader taking on the lead safeguarding portfolio for their organisation. I cannot underplay the importance of establishing clear expectations and open productive relationships across the large and complex safeguarding partnership landscape.
- 2.12** The Practitioner Forum now has 739 members, who receive regular updates, Newsletters and invitations to training and events. I chair the quarterly forum which continues to achieve a good attendance, suggesting that it continues to be relevant and helpful for colleagues. January's meeting had 78 attendees. This past year has included topics; on improving quality of referrals, how to access support for families and identifying children who are criminally exploited and should be subject to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Fixed items include an open question and answer session and a learning and development update. Having open access to practitioners through this Forum and the annual conference is integral to my assurance function.
- 2.13** Councillor Karen McCarthy takes her responsibility for Children and Families in the Council Cabinet very seriously, being a regular observer at the Executive Board, member of the Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly and a present and involved councillor on behalf of children and families. Councillor John Cotton who chaired the Community Safety Partnership, is now Leader of the Council. Councillor Nicky Brennan has succeeded Cllr Cotton as Chair of the Community Safety Partnership and my meeting with her reinforced a shared commitment to two of the key issues facing young people, namely Serious Youth Violence and Criminal Exploitation. Cllr Brennan also chairs the Domestic Abuse Local Strategic Partnership Board for the City.
- 2.14** This year's two Safeguarding Leaders' Assemblies were held in April and November 2023. April's Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly benefitted from each of the four Lead Birmingham Partners presenting on Organisational

and Partnership improvement. The importance of accessing locality based Early Help and support were the key themes. The session concluded with a workshop examining how to deliver the ambitious partnership priorities for 2023-2025. In the process they were refined, and key actions defined.

- 2.15** November's Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly recognised the launch of the 'Tackling Exploitation of Children and Young People Strategy 2023-25' whose implementation will be assured by the Contextual Safeguarding Board. The assembly was also updated on the impact of the annual Practitioners' Conference earlier in the month, whose theme was 'Working as Partners to Safeguard Children from Domestic Abuse', addressed by Nicole Jacobs the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.
- 2.16** The Safeguarding Leaders Assembly also received a presentation from the Co-Chairs of the 'Children Out of Sight' group; Di Rhoden, Director of Nursing, Safeguarding for NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board and Razia Butt, Director of Thriving Children and Families at Birmingham City Council. They facilitated a workshop to examine case studies on Professional Avoidance, Elective Home Education, Children Out of Sight, and Private Fostering. The workshop recommended the creation of a pathway that enables frontline practitioners to access advice and support from a Panel of Safeguarding Experts on complex cases where children are out of sight.
- 2.17** Birmingham continues to play a key convening role in the regional arrangements supporting children's safeguarding. The West Midlands Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements' (MASA) Network is co-chaired by our Business Manager, Simon Cross, and Liz Murphy, Independent Scrutineer of Sandwell Safeguarding Children Partnership. The group oversees the maintenance of online multi-agency safeguarding procedures and regularly shares learning from case reviews. In March 2024 the network held an in-person development session with Government Advisors on the implications of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023'. The session was attended by 58 people - including good representation from the Police at Assistant Chief Constable and Detective Chief Superintendent level, and the Chief Executive Officer of Birmingham Children's Trust - enabling good discussion of potential approaches to implementing 'Working Together'. This session built upon learning from the National Panel Webinar in January.
- 2.18** The National Safeguarding Panel chaired by Annie Hudson, continues to play a positive role in supporting local and regional learning from cases and research, and the development of best practice. The constructive, thoughtful style and production of analytical themed reports is adding real value. The National Panel webinar in November 2023 fed back on national reviews and themes from local reviews, highlighting the issues of neglect

and race, both of which resonate and are reflected in our own priorities. Their recent Annual Report published on the 30th January 2024 will be considered by BSCP.

- 2.19** In individual cases the panel offers helpful feedback. This year they responded positively to my request for their expert input to our webinar following the publication of the 'Child A' Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. Dr Jahnine Davies' knowledgeable contribution enhanced awareness of adultification and cultural competence was especially valuable. I should also add that the National Panel recognises the timeliness and high quality of our Rapid Reviews, whose recommendations they have consistently endorsed.
- 2.20** As a founding member of the Birmingham Children and Young People's Partnership, with its ambition for all Birmingham's children to thrive, I welcomed thorough and inclusive work on the development of a Birmingham Children's Plan. However, the changing financial position of Birmingham City Council and partners in-year has necessarily impacted planned investment in universal services, as well as targeted support to the neediest parts of the city. It was truly encouraging to be part of extraordinary partnership meetings in January and March 2023 which discussed the developments and implications of Commissioners in the Local Authority. The commitment to work together in the interests of children and families and the assurance that the most vulnerable would be prioritised was vital. There was also a spirit of creativity and an appetite to turn a challenge into an opportunity, with support for the review of provision for young people, for example.
- 2.21** On behalf of the Children's Partnership, I am the nominated representative on the Birmingham City Partnership Board. It has been impacted by changes in the Local Authority with the new Deputy Leader, Councillor Sharon Thompson, taking over as Chair and understandably taking some time to review its purpose, membership, and focus.
- 2.22** Having pressed for a meeting focussed on Children and Young People, which took place in July 2023, the poor turnout was disappointing. Unfortunately, the meeting clashed with a very difficult time for the Council and partners, and consequently, the impact of a well prepared session was negligible. I feel that the potential of the City Board and its place in the City's Partnership and Governance arrangements is still to be clarified, but its potential has been glimpsed.
- 2.23** On the other hand, under the leadership of Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services, the Children's Partnership, after a few false starts, does seem to have the potential to play a key role in supporting the wider children's agenda. The addition of representatives from Schools and Early Years Heads is very welcome, and even though the ambitions of the

Children's Plan need to be clipped in light of resources, the drive to work together better, and to share resources and responsibility was never needed more. A very constructive session in early March 2023 revisited the Children and Young People's Partnership Priorities and settled on four:

- Hidden children (recognising the lead BSCP role here)
- Children and Young People vulnerable to violence
- Early Help
- Special/additional needs and serious conditions including Mental Ill-Health

2.24 The expectations on BSCP to demonstrably provide leadership and accountability for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) to support safeguarding of children and young people in our second city are properly exacting. They include specific protocols for reporting to the National Panel and Ofsted regarding serious incidents and a challenging 15-day turnaround for Rapid Reviews. Acknowledgement must be given to April Walker, Serious Cases and Communications Programme Manager, who coordinates the Rapid Review process, ensuring consistency in the timeliness and quality of our Rapid Reviews.

2.25 I must recognise the invaluable role played by the Business Support team led by Simon Cross, BSCP Business Manager. With commitment, knowledge and expertise, Simon and the team support me in my role, support the Sub-groups with their exacting work programmes, and ensure that we meet the quality thresholds and timelines for reporting. Through their great work we have achieved a sound reputation for the management of our business and our learning culture. Like swans they glide on the surface whilst below the waterline they are paddling fast! I would not want leaders to underestimate the value and necessity for this team when they examine the changes needed to comply with the new 'Working Together' guidance.

2.26 At a development session on 20th March 2024 Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership undertook a thorough consideration of the key elements of 'Working Together' 2023. Seeking to be both compliant and to build on local progress and learning, the BSCP will sustain much of the current set of arrangements which are working well. As well as renewing their commitment to work towards a more equitable funding agreement, they came to the view that they will introduce a Co-Chairing approach from 'Delegated Safeguarding Leaders'. They will move to develop the role of an Independent Scrutineer and recruit to that post. In the meantime, I will be sustaining my strategic scrutiny and will continue to look to the Quality Impact and Outcomes (QIO) Sub-Group to support operational scrutiny. My contract ends in September 2024 to coincide with the new Independent Scrutineer arrangements. Additionally, the BSCP hope to explore opportunities to work more collaboratively with other Safeguarding Partnerships across the region, around shared safeguarding

priorities, peer support and challenge, as well as commissioning some specialist independent reviews. From a positive reflective session that self-critically appraised our current arrangements, the key area for further progress was the direct voice and/or the involvement of children and young people in local arrangements. This will be the subject of further consideration and action, building on what works.

- 2.27** The role of QIO as the home for undertaking and coordinating operational scrutiny has been strongly developing over the last year. At its most recent meeting as a participant observer, I was able to join in a detailed discussion of their regular programme of audits. It was confirmed that Learning Lessons bulletins should be produced to summarise findings and practice improvements. The current Board Assurance Framework will be reviewed as part of moving towards the new strategic and operational scrutiny arrangements. However, its three-cornered commitment to qualitative, quantitative, and experiential information will be sustained, supported by the triangulation of these elements to gain a sound picture of safeguarding arrangements.

3. Review of the Year 2023-24

- 3.1.** This has been a memorable year. On a personal note, Storm Babet on the 20th October 2023 not only flooded the whole of our ground floor, it took with it my work notes for the year and my laptop! I must personally thank Helen Johnstone from the BSCP Business Support Team for helping me to recover records, and for continuing to support me, managing my diary, and helping me meet competing demands on my time.
- 3.2.** There have been five Rapid Reviews of serious cases and incidents which have required assiduous review and analysis of learning to meet the challenging 15 working day turnaround expected of us. This contrasts with ten Rapid Reviews the previous year.
- 3.3.** Of the five reviews, two involved young black boys (aged 16 and 17 years old) being fatally stabbed, two involved black 17 year olds in what may well have been accidental shootings, and one was the neglectful death of a three month old of white British/European heritage. These tragic events shine a light on two of our biggest safeguarding issues, namely serious youth violence, neglect, and children hidden from sight. The Rapid Reviews identified important local learning, obviating the need for a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. As Independent Chair I scrutinise, comment on, and sign off Rapid Reviews.
- 3.4.** We have cascaded the learning from these Rapid Reviews and published

two other cases; the 'Child A' Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review in October 2023 and a legacy Serious Case Review in February 2024.

- 3.5.** The 'Child A' report was a very unusual and immensely sad case in which a 14-year-old girl of mixed heritage, who identified as black, fatally stabbed her mother's partner. She is now in a secure unit serving a significant sentence and the Inquest will be held either later this year or in early 2025. The review thoroughly considers the complex and traumatic history of 'Child A', mostly spent in Birmingham but later in West Sussex, where the tragic incident occurred. The learning that stood out for me was the inadequate recognition of trauma and neglect being signalled early in childhood. In particular, early school exclusions failed to illicit an effective partnership assessment or response, or indeed to be recognised as red flags. Later in childhood, episodes of the child being missing from home or being involved in criminality were harshly dealt with, and the impact of being a victim of serious crime, was underplayed. Thus, highlighting the impact of 'adultification' on Child A's lived experience. The review, Briefing Note and webinar entitled 'Are you listening to me?' are all valuable learning tools that are available on our [website](#).
- 3.6.** The Serious Case Review we published is no less complex and also involves a child who has survived their experiences, albeit with lifelong disabilities. The learning here is profound for national and local agencies and focuses on recognising the challenge of children parenting children, the impact of inadequate accommodation, and the need for effective professional collaboration and planning when a safeguarded child is hospitalised. Again, the Briefing Note and Webinar entitled 'The importance of early planning and continuity of care for children with complex needs' are valuable learning tools for practitioners.
- 3.7.** Currently there are ten ongoing Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews at different stages of completion. Delays in the Criminal Justice System and a shortage of expert witnesses is impacting on finalisation and publication of the vast majority of these reviews. However, this has not prevented the embedding of emerging learning from these reviews.
- 3.8.** Whilst workforce pressures remain, it does seem that this year has seen a more settled 'new normal'. At this year's very well attended Practitioners' Conference at Millenium Point, there was a real sense of enthusiasm and engagement with the challenging topic of Domestic Abuse and its impact on children. The fact that the National Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, stayed for the whole day and participated in the 'question time' session was noticed and appreciated. The workshops were of a very high standard and I for one will not forget the impact of virtual reality letting me experience what it would be like to be in utero hearing violence and abuse being inflicted on my mother. Pre-birth trauma is, sadly, a very real thing.

- 3.9.** This year the work of our Communications Officer, Katherine Adams, has really helped us make a step change in support of practitioners. As well as leading the wholesale renewal of our website, Katherine has introduced a regular partnership newsletter, encouraged me to start blogging, and has supported the initiatives we have developed to make our work and its value to practice more immediate. Perhaps our next step is surveying practitioners to test the impact of the changes.
- 3.10.** This year Health and University colleagues collaborated to produce a weeklong Safeguarding Leaders Training programme for their Safeguarding specialists, and I was pleased to contribute, alongside many others from partner organisations. The first iteration in September was very well received and was therefore organised for a second time at the end of January.
- 3.11.** Interestingly, one question I was asked in January was why it has taken us until now to recognise the significance of race, racism, and adultification. This was a fair point, and the questioner stated that all organisations need to self critically consider why they have not given sufficient attention to the cultural competence of practitioners in all settings and to do something about it. She was of course right, and it is one of our partnership priorities informed by evidence from our Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.
- 3.12.** The issuing of the Section 114 notice by Birmingham City Council and the Government's appointment of Commissioners has been a major development during this year, with a huge financial challenge translating into eye-watering savings that must be made by the Local Authority. In January I met with one of the Commissioners, John Coughlan, to seek assurance that the most vulnerable young citizens in the city would be protected from the worst impact of these changes. I followed up in writing and received assurance that statutory duties would be prioritised for protection and the SEND improvement agenda sustained. In turn, I have been able to see and experience BSCP working together to optimise resources and effectiveness. The challenge is daunting but the continued programme launching Family Hubs across the city, five so far and five in the pipeline, is encouraging and evidence of a shared commitment to early and local support for families.

4. Review of Partnership Priorities

- 4.1** Whilst the primary focus of this chapter is the first year of the current Improvement Plan 2023-2025, it would be remiss not to reflect on the impact of the previous one. Its first two priorities were system focused –

“Strong Leadership and Strong Partnership demonstrating effective accountability” and “Continuously Improve Child Safeguarding Practice across the system and in all agencies”. I think this report has provided evidence that these priorities are now ‘business as usual’. Leaders and Practitioners are inducted into a system where ‘Safeguarding is Everybody’s business’ and collaboration, openness and learning are values that are lived daily. The effectiveness of our management in demonstrating grip and accountability of serious incidents and the energy and commitment from Leaders who step up to take on initiatives is reassuring. The partnership response to the Council’s predicament in terms of its budget is further testimony to a maturing partnership.

- 4.2** These system priorities have not gone away, they remain at the heart of our way of working. In my recent meeting with a Health Provider Chief Executive, I was struck by their recognition of the importance of collaboration and inter-dependency across the system. Collaboration is finally trumping competition in our complex system.
- 4.3** The third priority in the 2021-2023 Improvement Plan was “Developing an effective multi-agency response to Child and Adolescent Neglect”. The Partnership judged that whilst a response was developed, its implementation was not yet complete and so that should be a priority focus in the next plan.
- 4.4** The final previous priority was “Evaluating and addressing the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Safeguarding Children”. It’s safe to say that the consequences of the pandemic continue to be seen and felt. We especially judged that the impact on children’s emotional and mental wellbeing and socialisation was significant. This led directly to the recognition of the increasing numbers of children ‘out of sight’ of services and support, including formal education. This is a priority in the 2023-25 Improvement Plan. A further impact, or at least a noticed development since Covid 19, has been the upsurge in serious Youth Violence and Domestic Abuse. This recognition has also spawned a further priority in the new Improvement Plan.
- 4.5** Our four safeguarding priorities in our Business Improvement Plan 2023-2025 have an evidence base and build on the previous Improvement Plan. They are enthusiastically being championed by colleagues and they benefitted from refinement at the Safeguarding Leaders Assembly in November 2023. They reflect a maturing partnership which is less concerned with the structure of its arrangements and more focused on advancing key policy and strategy issues and assuring quality and positive impact on the lives of children and families.

Priority 1- Ensuring effective implementation of ‘Birmingham Neglect Strategy 2022-26: Working Together to Build Strong Family Foundations’.

- 4.6** As indicated above, this priority builds on the foundations established over the past two years. BSCP’s agenda for effectively addressing neglect is reflected in both the leadership of the Neglect Operational Group and its continued investment in our Neglect Lead Manager, Luisa Fraser, and the comprehensive training delivery programme, including Graded Care Profile 2. Luisa and Kerrie Dawkins have developed a Neglect e-learning module soon to be launched and overseen by the Learning and Development (L&D) Sub-Group. Overall ownership and accountability for this priority comes from the Executive Board. Memorably, the 2022 Practitioners’ Conference and the Safeguarding Leaders Assembly later that year, both benefitted from powerful lived experience, reinforcing the importance of this issue.
- 4.7** The Quality Impact and Outcomes (QIO) Sub-Group has conducted neglect audit work and briefings were produced in May and October 2023 which are accessible on the website. Additionally, a great deal of planning has been undertaken to deliver a series of free webinars and workshops throughout the BSCP Neglect Practice Week (22nd – 26th April 2024). The Neglect Operational Group are making substantial progress on implementing the strategy and I have requested that a summary be presented to a forthcoming Executive Board, enabling Leaders to gain reassurance and to reinforce the importance of practitioners and managers utilising the resources and training to enhance their practice.

Priority 2 - Assuring a coordinated and coherent inter-agency response to children impacted by domestic abuse and violence in families.

- 4.8** A key element of our response to this second priority was the Practitioners’ Conference held in November 2023. The conference was well attended and delivered a range of powerful informative presentations and workshops. The agenda was trauma informed, practical and much of it was recorded and is available on our website for future reference and use by practitioners and their managers.
- 4.9** At the Safeguarding Leaders’ Assembly in November 2023, colleagues received a presentation on the draft ‘Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2024-2029’, built around six key priorities. The presentation was delivered by Graham Tilby on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership. The Strategy will be launched in Spring 2024. Whilst the Safeguarding Partnership does not lead on Domestic Abuse, we have a key role in keeping the spotlight on the traumatic impact of Domestic

Abuse on children.

- 4.10** It was encouraging to learn at the QIO Sub-Group about their audits of MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) which focus on the coordination of partnership intervention where there are serious Domestic Abuse concerns. One outcome has been Birmingham Children Trust's Domestic Abuse Head of Service, Nikki Plummer, taking over as Chair of MARAC Governance and has introduced a Learning Bulletin to highlight good practice.
- 4.11** Recognising that serious youth violence manifests outside the family, with terrible consequences for the family, BSCP is encouraged by the work of the EmpowerU Hub. I look forward to hearing more about a possible extension of its role strengthening "transitional" safeguarding for young people beyond exploitation, which was the subject of a local 'Strengthening Safety' workshop with input from Dez Holmes (Director of Research in Practice - RiP) and Luke Billingham (Researcher and Youth Worker) last October.
- 4.12** We continue to support and encourage the Community Safety Partnership to sustain a proactive lead role in highlighting and tackling Serious Youth Violence. As a partnership, we continue to see the adult age limit on 'Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews' as a missed opportunity. Despite our representations to the Home Office, supported by the National Panel, no change has yet been forthcoming.

Priority 3- Developing a joint approach to understanding and responding to children who are and who become invisible to services.

- 4.13** This priority emerged from a growing realisation that post-pandemic an increasing number of children were not in school or early years provision. The Practitioners' Forum held on 22nd March 2023, entitled 'Safeguarding Children who are 'Out of Sight' is Everyone's Business', focused on children Electively Home Educated. The Forum was well attended (58 participants) and benefitted hugely from Razia Butt's (Director, Thriving Children and Families) presentation. Practitioners reinforced their concerns for these children.
- 4.14** Now there is a 'Children Out of Sight' group with clear joint leadership from Razia Butt (Director, Thriving Children and Families) and Di Rhoden (Director of Nursing and Safeguarding, NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board). The 'Out of Sight' Group is developing support for practice, including a pathway and panel to which professionals can bring concerns and seek support. Council Education colleagues who are

focusing on this group of children have triaged 800 children and have a grip on the increasing numbers and are raising awareness of safeguarding responsibilities for them.

- 4.15** In early March I met with the Acting Head of Safeguarding for Education and learnt that 2,846 children are in Elective Home Education, an increase of 120 since January. These children are now the focus of increased attention and communication, with clarity that any safeguarding concerns must warrant proactive follow up.
- 4.16** BSCP have recognised the importance of this group of children, the fact that they are everybody's business, and has made them one of the four key priorities.

Priority 4 – Enhancing anti-discriminatory practice by improving partnership focus on the work we do, in the context of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

- 4.17** This priority referenced earlier comes from a recognition that so often the culture and identity of children and their families does not get adequately considered. Whilst not racist in intent, the result of this omission can indeed be discriminatory; leading to inadequate assessments and plans.
- 4.18** By highlighting this issue, organising training, and deciding that it should be a thread throughout our conferences, including our forthcoming conference addressing children who are unseen, we hope to make a positive difference. These plans are not new. At last year's conference on Domestic Abuse, an intersectional perspective was addressed by one of the main speakers, Meena Kumari and one of the workshops focused on 'Working in a culturally competent way with children and families experiencing harmful practices'.
- 4.19** We encourage our Independent Reviewers to address these issues and, as mentioned earlier in this report, we were appreciative of the support from the National Panel's expert, Dr Jahnine Davies, in the delivery of our webinar 'Are you listening to me?' on the learning from the 'Child A' review.
- 4.20** BSCP's investment in a Faith Coordinator and our work with the city's diverse faith communities aims to reinforce and support safeguarding awareness, is making progress, and will be sustained into the next year.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. I hope you have managed to reach the end of this report, describing another busy year charting continued improvement in Partnership practice and sustained challenge to practitioners and managers across the safeguarding network in Birmingham.
- 5.2. Commendably, pressures on individual organisations are not driving them to hunker down and look after themselves, but rather to renew and reinvigorate their commitment to collaboration, Partnership working, shared accountability and effective Leadership.
- 5.3. Of course, there are challenges. Resource pressures must be navigated whilst sustaining the service improvement agenda. The partnership must finalise its compliant arrangements to address 'Working Together 2023'. Furthermore, there is the successful delivery of progress against the four priorities in the Business Improvement Plan 2023-5. Most vital of all is the committed delivery of the day job: 'Safeguarding is Everybody's Business'.
- 5.4. As indicated throughout this report, I am immeasurably appreciative of the support and responsiveness of the innumerable professionals whom I have encountered this year. So, I would like to end with a big "thank you" and a metaphorical raising of my hat. Never give up!

Penny Thompson CBE

BSCP Independent Chair

4th April 2024

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Role of Independent Chair

Appendix 1: Role of BSCP Independent Chair – Leadership of Assurance, Learning, Partnering Key Functions:

- a) Independent convener of all those charged with the wellbeing, including safeguarding, of children and young people in Birmingham;
- b) A champion for children and best practice;
- c) Independent Chair of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Board and Safeguarding Leaders' Assembly;
- d) Supporting and challenging the Birmingham leadership in their quest to achieve a sustainably safe city for children and young people, in the context of family, community and wellbeing;
- e) Modelling openness, challenge, support, mutual respect, professionalism and learning for application by leaders in Birmingham;
- f) Ensuring political and managerial leaders are demonstrably accountable for the resourcing and strategic priority given to the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people;
- g) Ensuring the Safeguarding Partners' leadership role is understood, valued, respected and fulfilled;
- h) Demonstrating a robust approach to evaluation, practice audit & research whose dissemination will support valuable learning for multi-agency leaders, managers and practitioners in their critical roles;
- i) Through robust independent support and challenge, contribute to developing confidence of citizens and the state in the city of Birmingham.

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