



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Mr JRA Crabtree
Chair
Birmingham Independent
Improvement Panel
By email

The Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP
*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government*

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Dear Mr Crabtree,

Thank you for your letter of 2 April covering the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel's final report on progress at Birmingham City Council in response to Sir Bob Kerslake's report of December 2014.

First of all, I would like to thank you, your fellow Panel members, and the Panel's advisor for the sustained work that you have all done over the last 4 years to help the Council in its improvement journey. I know that this has not always been easy and am very grateful to you all for your commitment. The progress that the Council has made is very largely down to your support and challenge and you can be proud of what you have achieved.

I am also grateful for your thoughtful analysis of the Council's position (as of April) in your report. It was good to read of the "considerable progress on many fronts" that you note in your report and your positive assessment of the management team. I have also noted the challenges and risks the Council faces. The progress that you have recorded means that it is wholly appropriate that the Panel stepped down when it did.

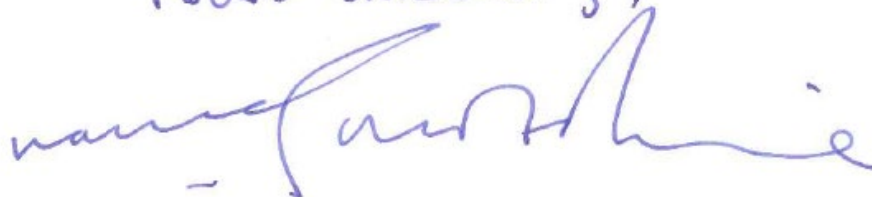
In considering next steps, I have taken into account your report, and also the Council's external auditor's report containing statutory recommendations under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, and documents from the Council including their stocktake and the proposals that they have since made for a New Model of Progressive Assurance. It is very important for the people of Birmingham that the Council's improvement continues.

Since your letter, the Council has (in discussion with my officials) worked on equipping itself with the additional "external independent challenge and support" that you recommended, and have developed a New Model of Progressive Assurance. Key to the Council's proposals is a formal governance structure incorporating a Strategic Programme Board with Non-Executive Advisors (NEAs) each focussed on an area of concern pinpointed in your report and acting as a strong and independent source of challenge, support and innovation. The Council is appointing NEAs who are each highly respected individuals whose experience from across the sector speaks for itself, and who will not shy away from giving hard messages if

needed. Their work will be backed up by quarterly publication of feedback from statutory partnership chairs, opposition elected Members and key partners.

I have today written to Cllr Ian Ward (Leader of Birmingham City Council) to endorse the new Model of Progressive Assurance: in my view it constitutes a sophisticated framework for tackling the challenges you and the Council have identified. I have agreed with the Council that the Strategic Programme Board will report to Cabinet and also to me, three times a year. These reports will include individual commentary from the NEAs, as they see fit, and will be published – a robust mechanism by which I and my officials can be assured of the Council's progress on its improvement journey.

I look forward to receiving these reports and continuing to work closely with the Council to ensure continued improvement over the next 12 months. A copy of this letter has been sent to Cllr Ian Ward and to your fellow Panel members and the Panel's advisor.

Yours sincerely,


RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP