



EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 on TUESDAY 2 APRIL 2019

Independent Improvement Panel issues its final report today

The Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel today published its final report to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Panel stood itself down at the end of March. It has been four years since it was established, following the Kerslake report into the governance and financial capability of Birmingham City Council.

The Panel's report is published alongside the City Council's own *Stocktake Report* (attached) which provides an assessment of the Council's improvement progress since June 2018.

Commenting on the Panel's report the Chair, John Crabtree, said:

'Our report to the Secretary of State outlines the Council's progress during the last 10 months together with our overall conclusions and reflections on our four years in Birmingham.

In the report we acknowledge the meaningful progress that the Council has made since June 2018 and the huge amount of work that it is doing to get itself on the right track and tackle deeply entrenched problems. We recognise too the many significant opportunities available to the City Council, notably the Commonwealth Games 2022. But, despite creditable efforts and achievements, the Council's financial position remains immensely serious and the risks to its financial resilience are considerable.

Crucially, the Council's progress has been badly affected by industrial disputes and poor industrial relations. It understands that it must modernise its industrial relations if it is to make the improvements to service provision that are needed. The Council recognises that it is in the foothills of its improvement journey. In this context, if it is to succeed, it will need to consistently demonstrate courageous and creative political leadership and muster all the capability, capacity and support that it can.

The Panel is standing down because we have done all we can within our existing terms of reference and powers to provide robust challenge, support and advice to the Council.'

In its report the Panel acknowledges that the Council is intending to maintain constructive and critical challenge through internal scrutiny and sector-led arrangements.

But, in the light of the exceptional risks that the Council is facing and particularly its industrial relations context, the Panel considers that this type of challenge will be insufficient. The Panel has recommended that the Secretary of State should put in place external independent challenge and support, additional to that proposed by the Council, to replace the Panel, now that the Panel has stood down.

ENDS

For further information please contact Louise Wright, PA to John Crabtree, on 07828078227.

BACKGROUND

In December 2014 Lord Kerslake published *The way forward: an independent review of the governance and organisational capabilities of Birmingham City Council*.

Alongside the recommendations in the Kerslake report relating to action Birmingham City Council should take, Lord Kerslake recommended that the Secretary of State appoint an Independent Improvement Panel to work with the Council to provide robust challenge and support.

The Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel formed in January 2015. Its members are John Crabtree OBE (chair), Frances Done CBE (vice chair), Cllr Keith Wakefield OBE (former leader of Leeds City Council), and Steve Robinson (former chief executive of Cheshire West and Chester Council). Dave Hill, the Birmingham Children's Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Education, is an ex-officio member of the Panel.