

# **Trojan Horse Review Group**

## **Report to Leader of Birmingham City**

### **Council**

**18 July 2014**



## **Trojan Horse Review Group: Report to Leader of Birmingham City Council**

### **Index**

- 1. Covering note from Trojan Horse Review Group to Leader of Birmingham City Council**
- 2. Overall conclusions and recommendations from Trojan Horse Review Group –**  
including assessment of the Independent Chief Adviser's Investigation Report.
- 3. Summary of key themes considered by the Trojan Horse Review Group**
- 4. Annexes**
  - Annex A - Terms of Reference of THRG, with full details of membership, and dates of THRG meetings.
  - Annex B - key documents considered by THRG:
    - B1 - ICA's Investigation Report
    - B2 – Leader of Birmingham City Council statement of 18 July 2014
    - B3 - SofS for Education Statement of 9 June 2014
    - B4 - Ofsted letter of 9 June 2014
    - B5- EFA reports into Park View Educational Trust and Oldknow Academy Trust of May 2014
    - B6 - DfE handbook for school governors of January 2014
    - B7 - DfE guidance on keeping children safe in education of May 2014
    - B8 - Evidence from Ofsted Chief Inspector on 9 July 2014.
    - B9 – Ofsted inspection report of Birmingham City Council Children's Services of May 2014.
    - B10 – Birmingham City Council factual description of actions post-receipt of Trojan Horse letter enclosed.

- B11 – Birmingham Muslim Community Reference Group statement of 10 June 2014 enclosed.
- B12 – Birmingham City Council letters to Headteachers, Parents and Governors of 17 July 2014 enclosed.

**From: Trojan Horse Review Group**

**To: Leader of Birmingham City Council**

You commissioned us on 14 April 2014 to review the findings of the Independent Chief Advisor – and any other reports that may be made available by DfE, Ofsted or others – with a view to publishing a report (in July 2014) that, insofar as is possible, explains the authenticity or otherwise of the Trojan Horse allegations and makes recommendations to the city council and any other relevant bodies to ensure effective future governance and safeguarding arrangements in all schools.

2. We are now enclosing our report which fulfils this commission, subject to the important caveats set out in paragraph 3 below.
3. The Review Group has met seven times - between 2 May and 18 July 2014 - and has had a consistently high level of commitment and focus from its members. The Group has sought to avoid any preconceptions about the nature of the issues it has examined, and has given careful consideration to the weight of relevant material listed in Annex B. The Group recognises that it has had exceptionally limited time – a matter of a few hours – to have sight of, absorb, reflect upon and consider the executive summary of the Independent Chief Adviser’s report, and with reference to the ICA’s full report. The Group understands the intense pressures to which the ICA himself has been working – and the absolute need for a rigorous and independent investigation – but this has inevitably reduced the scope for proper consideration of relevant material. Also of concern is the fact that the Group has had no sight of Peter Clarke’s investigation, sponsored by DfE, which would clearly have added significant detail to the assessment the Review Group has been able to make at this juncture. Furthermore, to run separately two independent investigations of the same issues has unquestionably served to reinforce suspicions that there are “parallel universes” between central and local government. In the interests of all Birmingham school children, this tendency towards “parallel universes” must cease forthwith.
4. The most important constraint within the process we have overseen, however, has been the level of engagement with communities, parents and children and young people to date. Again, the necessity of confidential investigation makes this understandable. But it would be deeply and unhelpfully ironic if a process aimed at uncovering unaccountable and untransparent behaviours itself operates in a less than transparent light. **The Group cannot overstate the importance of the Council and a much wider range of credible and independent civic leaders now engaging directly with communities across Birmingham to determine swiftly a profound and radical shift in this great City’s approach to educating all of its school children and building integrated communities for all.**
5. You know as well as anyone what a difficult few months this has been for the health and confidence of this city and particularly for some of its communities.

The Group believes very strongly that implementing the recommendations we have put forward to the Council and other key partners presents a genuine opportunity to move away from crisis and towards practical steps in securing the right learning environment for all our children across Birmingham. They are our future and they deserve nothing less.

6. On behalf of the Group, we commend this report to you.

Amra Bone: Birmingham Central Mosque

Liam Byrne MP: Member of Parliament, Hodge Hill

ACC Garry Forsyth: West Midlands Police

Kamal Hanif: Headteacher Waverley School

Peter Hay: Strategic Director, Birmingham City Council

Councillor Zafar Iqbal: Birmingham City Council

Councillor Brigid Jones: Cabinet Member, Birmingham City Council

Emma Knight: National Governors Association

Andrew Mitchell MP: Member of Parliament, Sutton Coldfield

Councillor James McKay: Cabinet Member, Birmingham City Council

Christine Mitchell: Headteacher Clifton Primary

Stephen Rimmer: Chair of Review Group, West Midlands Strategic Leader PVVP

Councillor Habib Rehman: Birmingham City Council

Fran Stevens: Birmingham Governors' Network

Bishop David Urquhart: Bishop of Birmingham

**Participant observers:**

Paul Rowsell: Department for Communities and Local Government

Mela Watts: Department for Education

Rob Kelsall: National Association of Headteachers was a full member of the Group but was not able to endorse this report in full.

## Overall Conclusions and Recommendations from the Trojan Horse Review Group

2.1 The Group has had a brief opportunity, ahead of its publication, to consider the executive summary of the **Independent Chief Adviser's Investigation Report** and refer to the full redacted Report. The Group has also been advised – as we worked up our own report – by the ICA in respect of any incompatibility with his emerging findings.

2.2 The Investigation Report summary speaks for itself. It is a powerful, hard-hitting and credible exposition of inappropriate activity by a small number of governors in a small number of schools in East Birmingham. It makes clear that such “activists” have regarded the role of being a school governor “as a means to end”. It also makes clear that there is little evidence of a systematic plot and no evidence of a conspiracy to promote radicalisation or violent extremism.

2.3 The Report is very critical indeed of a range of failings committed by Birmingham City Council over a number of years. These criticisms are in our view justified, although it is important to note – as the Report briefly acknowledges – that a number of other significant stakeholders have major responsibilities for aspects of schools and governance within Birmingham. Our Group's recommendations are, therefore, deliberately ranged more widely. Nevertheless we agree with the direction of the Investigation Report's recommendations, which should be read and acted upon alongside ours. We expect our proposed civic leadership group to be at least as important in progressing all of these recommendations as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee process proposed here.

2.4 We note that the Investigation Report did not establish the authenticity of the Trojan Horse letter itself. We take it that it was not possible to do so. That is unfortunate as we believe too many people will continue to be distracted – or choose to be distracted – by the provenance of this letter itself. Nonetheless, we accept that – even if the letter was a hoax generated by malicious intent – what it has triggered by way of investigation has been important, substantial and needs urgently addressing.

2.5 We therefore see the ICA's report as the catalyst for a radical and far reaching response from the Council and its partners to the threats against our collective vision of an integrated city, and an opportunity to accelerate and sustain real progress in this endeavour.

2.6 Taking into account both the ICA report and the wider range of material before it, the Group has therefore reached the following key **conclusions**:

- The problems and failings documented by the ICA report and elsewhere in relation to a small number of schools in the city of Birmingham are totally unacceptable. They go directly to the heart of what this city is about – its tradition and aspiration for fully integrated communities. And they specifically undermine the inclusive values appropriate to all of our schools, whatever their status – respect for the law, democracy, equality and tolerance of different faiths and other beliefs. This threat has been documented in the ICA's report in relation to strands of Muslim thinking, but it is not exclusive to one (or any) religion.
- At the same time, we endorse the ICA's conclusion that these issues relate to risks of small groups of activists seeking to subvert a small number of schools, and the ICA's recognition that many of the 437 schools in the city are successful in meeting the educational and social needs of our children.

- We agree that the key issues to be addressed relate to the development of good governance across all schools, while recognising that teachers, parents and communities all have their part to play too.
- Good governance across schools in Birmingham requires a strong central support – and where appropriate – challenge mechanism. While other partners have a role to play, it must be the overriding responsibility of Birmingham City Council – as “place leader” - to ensure that each and every child’s interests are properly safeguarded by the education system across the city, a responsibility the Council has not gripped effectively over a period of time. **All of our recommendations are therefore based on an approach that must extend to each and every school across Birmingham, irrespective of its specific legal status.** The Group also considers that transparency of intelligently analysed information direct to parents and communities is the best protection against any governance “takeover” from any quarter.
- The Council and all key partners, including faith based institutions – and preferably including Ofsted itself – need to agree key actions now that can rapidly deliver confidence in a collective commitment to effective governance across all Birmingham schools, so that there is visible progress by the start of the next school year (September 2014).
- There are broader, and inevitably contentious, issues this process has exposed which are not Birmingham-specific, but are essentially national issues. These include the degree to which British values can be specified and absorbed through education; the purpose and role of faith and worship within our education system; and the relationship between ideology, radicalisation, extremism and violence. These matters should be addressed through mature, evidence based debate, and with much greater precision in the use of terminology, than has been seen generally over recent months.

2.7 The Group accordingly makes the following **recommendations** to the Leader of the Council and to other named partners, in addition to the public commitments made by the Leader of the Council in his statement of 18 July 2014, all of which we unequivocally support:

- To endorse the direction set by the ICA report and its overall recommendations.
- For Birmingham City Council to develop a clear plan to implement these recommendations by September 2014, with sustainable capacity and capability, effective and transparent sharing of information and intelligence, clear visible leadership in raising school standards and appropriate involvement of the wider Birmingham education community, for example an annual advisory conference.
- For Birmingham City Council to ensure a proper and transparent process of accountability for the failings of the past, for appropriate recognition of the damage done to individual Heads, teachers, parents, governors and worst of all children, and for early impact in reassuring Muslim and other communities in the city about the value and achievability of effective governance arrangements.
- To strengthen significantly the system of schools governance, particularly in respect of effective appointment procedures and training, audit systems and credible whistleblowing arrangements, including the provision of a single public telephone number for complaints about school leadership and governance. This work must also make explicit the core values appropriate to our liberal democracy

across all schools – respect for the law, democracy, equality and tolerance of different faiths and other beliefs. To give practical effect to that purpose, for example, much more regular joint work of projects across different schools from different neighbourhoods within the city should be supported by the Council, Birmingham Education Partnership and Birmingham Governors Network in particular.

- v. To produce a clear, simple and concise re-statement of the legal framework within which governors must fulfil their responsibilities with particular reference to their accountabilities around the proper use of public funds and good employment practice.
- vi. To sharpen, monitor and account for the circumstances within which it is genuinely appropriate for any individual to be a governor of more than one school In Birmingham at any one time; and to ensure strict enforcement of the National Governors' Association position in limited terms of appointments.
- vii. To work directly with Ofsted, Birmingham Children's Safeguarding Board and others in sustaining a sharp focus on any school exhibiting "isolationist" tendencies, and to work with any such school to reduce that risk. Ofsted must ensure that it is no longer possible for any school to be assessed as outstanding or good without having good Safeguarding standards.
- viii. To reinvigorate a Birmingham-wide approach to inclusivity, integration, openness and transparency across all schools, taking into account in particular the demographic trends across the city and emerging new communities – including that children and young people from minority ethnic groups now account for 60.6% of all children living in the area, and proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in Birmingham primary schools is 43% and in secondary schools is 38%. This must include strong and visible support towards empowering all girls in all our schools, and to ensure they are treated with total equality and respect.
- ix. For Birmingham City Council to develop with partners, including the Birmingham Education Partnership and the National Unions of Head Teachers, a clear Code to give effect to the duty of care and responsibilities towards Headteachers.
- x. For Birmingham City Council, in concert with partners, to issue a clear and simple statement of "what good looks like" in primary and secondary schools across the City in respect of Preventing Extremism, within a wider context of ensuring a good education for all school children.
- xi. DfE to issue revised national guidance for school governors, taking full account of the key learning from Trojan Horse, as soon as possible, particularly in respect of transparency of appointments; and to ensure **all** schools have a broad and balanced curriculum with regards to Religious Education, Personal Social Health Education, Sex and Relationships Education and assemblies, considering introducing statutory school policies for all primary and secondary schools accordingly.
- xii. For all of this work to be taken forward now in direct engagement with communities across Birmingham - particularly in working up any mobilising campaign around securing a brighter future for Birmingham's children – and overseen by a **civic leadership group** to ensure effective and sustainable



implementation, chaired and strongly represented by credible independent voices.

- 2.8 The Trojan Horse Review Group is clear that this is a critical moment in the history of this great City, and of the leadership of the Council in particular, in restoring confidence, purpose and cohesion to its future – its school children – and to the communities its civic leadership serves. The impact of these recommendations needs to be felt within schools **as they start the new school year in September.**

## **Summary of Key Themes considered by the Trojan Horse Review Group**

3.1 In reaching its conclusions and recommendations, the Group had particular regard to the following key issues.

### **Birmingham Schools and Governance**

3.2 The Group is clear that the central challenge emerging from this investigation and related matters is the credibility and transparency of the framework within which school governors operate. The Group is encouraged by the statement of public commitments the Leader of the Council has made on 18 July 2014. These commitments need to be implemented as soon as possible. The Group is clear that there are two major risks to be addressed in this context. First, the risks of any particular network or clique of governors to pursue an agenda beyond the clear and consistent interests of all children in all schools across the City must be systemically minimised. This should include strict enforcement of the National Governors Association position that no chair should serve more than six years in any one school and all governors should be restricted to two terms of office (eight years) in more school. Secondly, this must not be pursued in such a way as to signal to members of Muslim communities that they will be looked on with any suspicion in relation to becoming school Governors. Schools with predominantly Muslim communities need a strong range of governors, not least from within Muslim communities themselves.

3.3 Related Police investigations and the work of the EFA also suggest there may be risks in relation to financial improprieties. The Group has not been able to examine this in detail, but it is clear – as with any other public body – there remains an essential role in providing assurance against any financial improprieties by either individual or collective groups of governors. This extends to any poor recruitment practice also. Again, transparency and clarity is the best approach to mitigating these risks.

3.4 Underpinning these points is a clear reflection of the critical importance – beyond capabilities – of school governors embodying the ethos and pride in their local school and connected to a broader set of values appropriate to our liberal democracy. It is very clear to us that existing DfE guidance does not give anything like sufficient emphasis on this ethical and values driven basis for the work of governors. In particular, it seems to the Group inappropriate that the encouragement within DfE guidance for governors to pick up a series of schools, on the basis that this will provide a degree of managerial “compare and contrast”, should be sustained. Instead, the focus should be a realistic expectation of what volunteer governors, with big commitments but limited time, can do – primarily focused on the best interests of their school – working with a smaller number of “expert” governors, with clear and relevant skills for improving standards. The Birmingham Governors Network has a key role to play here, not least in relation to developing effective support mechanisms, including the provision of “governor mentors”. The era of the “professional governor”, using school positions as sinecures of status and power, must end.

### **Birmingham Schools and Leadership**

3.5 The strongest voices, in the Group’s view, around the importance of a new approach to governance across the city has come from many of our excellent Headteachers. There is an important challenge to Heads and other school leaders in dealing with governors fulfilling their responsibilities – that it is to say, it is entirely appropriate for Heads to be challenged and be receptive to challenge which is appropriate. Nonetheless, the Group is clear that in a small number of cases uncovered by the ICA’s investigation and elsewhere, some Heads have been – and are continuing to be – put under unreasonable pressure, whether from governors, or other avenues. Excellent schools always have strong and confident leaders,

particularly their Headteachers. It is therefore essential that the Council works with partners in ensuring a clear simple and enforceable Code, setting out the duty of care towards all Heads and what that means (and does not mean) in clear, simple and specific terms.

### **Birmingham Schools and Safeguarding**

3.6 We have considered whether there are any specific safeguarding risks that have been highlighted by any of the Trojan Horse-related material available to us. There are massive challenges in safeguarding children at risk across the City, which have again been highlighted and reinforced by Ofsted in its May 2014 report. Under Lord Warner's Commissioner leadership, the Council has started to show some momentum. We are clear that there is a fundamental question here of the overarching responsibilities for safeguarding children taking precedence over individual roles and responsibilities around the governance of different types of schools. There is a particular challenge to the Council to take fully on board its responsibilities to the safeguarding of every single child across the city, irrespective of which type of school she or he goes to. There is also a clear responsibility for Birmingham Safeguarding Children's Board to ensure that the governance of schools does not enable any agenda that places any child on a pathway towards extremism, of whatever kind. And we need to see the era of any school arguing that it can deliver high academic standards without a broad and inclusive approach to safeguarding being well and truly over. Any school that pursues an "isolationist" culture is not equipping its children to deal with the realities of the modern world, on the streets and online. This applies to a small minority of schools – as evidenced, for example, by the schools who do not comply with the statutory audit under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002. The only schools with a fundamental problem about these issues, and about safeguarding in general, are those schools that say they do not have a problem, a point we look to see Ofsted vigorously enforce.

### **Birmingham Schools and Parents**

3.7 Parents have a right to expect their children are educated to become confident members of a liberal democracy in the modern world. For some parents, there are always challenges around how some aspects of the curriculum play into their own values, and Heads and Governors manage these issues on a regular basis. The Council can do much more to reinforce that approach to all parents of all schools on a regular basis. We note the Leader's letter to all parents on 17 July and we support such a direct and engaged approach on sensitive issues. But we want to see a more structured level of engagement with parents across all communities in setting, sustaining and protecting the right ethos for schools, building on where this has already worked, for example in relation to specialist schools.

### **Birmingham Schools and Values**

3.8 Birmingham has a proud record of pulling together all of its communities into a sense of shared pride and values in this great City. This reflects in particular the reality of a fast moving set of demographics – including the fact that children and young people from minority ethnic groups now account for 60.6% of all children living in the area, that the proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary schools is 43% and in secondary schools is 38% and that the total population in the area under the age of 18 is 25.5%. This is a young and increasingly diverse City. The Group is clear that a much more sustained focus on reinforcing an approach to inclusivity across all our schools is fundamental to our future wellbeing as a society. That needs to be reinforced, in terms of school measures, with some practical reinforcement of existing good practice, such as different schools from very different communities across the City "twinning" together to work on joint projects, learning from each other and the different environments from which a collective sense of experience grows. Again, Ofsted reinforcing this collaborative and

community focused approach in assessing what good looks like would be welcome. We also strongly support the broader measures which will reinforce a shared approach across our young people, and are particularly encouraged by the initial statement from the Birmingham Central Mosque which gives a clear commitment to improving leadership and management, governance, training, parental understanding and engagement across communities. And we recognise the importance of the Council and other key partners delivering economic growth, particularly within those communities in the City suffering significant and endemic deprivation.

3.9 Birmingham Schools should develop as a clear expression of the increasingly cohesive and integrated communities across the city to which all but the most ideological and culturally isolationist aspire. An exemplary test of how genuine this expression is relates to the treatment of all girls across all our schools. We share the concerns in this context expressed by Ofsted and the EFA in relation to a small number of schools, and we expect to see total transparency in governors and others publically accounting for how they are ensuring girls in their schools are getting exactly the same opportunities as boys, and are not being subject to any subtle (or not so subtle) undermining of their development.

### **Birmingham City Council**

3.10 The Group recognises that the complex web of roles and responsibilities in relation to schools governance does not easily enable an overarching and clearly recognised leadership role for Birmingham City Council. Nonetheless, the Group is very clear that the Council needs quickly to establish a distinctive “place leadership” role in supporting all children across the whole City. The Leader’s statement of 18 July 2014 is a good start on that front. Some members of the Group remain sceptical that good statements get systemically translated into high impact and sustainable practice, and we urge the Council to ensure full and speedy delivery of these commitments, while taking into account the new recommendations coming out of this report. The environment within which the Council increasingly operates – as its resources reduce further – should be maximised as a means of rejecting any vestiges of the old “command and control” operating model, and instead focus on how information, directly available and accessible to parents and communities, can drive learning and good practice and challenge bad. Transparency and openness need to be the reality, not the rhetoric, of the Council’s post Trojan Horse leadership.

### **Birmingham Partnerships**

3.11 Notwithstanding the central role of the Council, the Group strongly endorses an approach which builds on a strong set of links with key partners in this context. Four in particular stand out. First, the Birmingham Education Partnership is a significant and still relatively new body developing collaborative approaches to working with schools across the City including safeguarding, and its impact is likely to grow with the appointment of its first Chief Executive. The Group would welcome the commitment from the BEP to the broad recommendations of this Group, and sees it as a key partner in developing strong and confident executive leadership working within this environment. Second, the role of interfaith groups can reinforce strong and diverse links amongst children and young people across the city, and can provide a really positive dynamic in improving standards across the board. Third, the developing impact of Police and Schools Panels across the City can provide a valuable forum for exchanging information and insight on safeguarding risks and issues. And fourth, the Birmingham Governors Network and the National Governors Association are key and valued partners in securing and sustaining strong and effective governance.

## **Department for Education**

3.12 The Group has welcomed the direct engagement with DfE officials and recognises the need to work collaboratively with central Government, given the importance of these issues. The Group expects significant changes to national guidance in relation to school governors as a result of these matters under review - including total transparency of all appointments - and a much stronger reinforcement of the needs for a broad and balanced curriculum across all schools. The Group also expects DfE – as it does with Birmingham City Council – to show real collective leadership and not engender any sense of “divide and conquer” in respect of different schools with different governance arrangements: our children are far too important for that. The Group would welcome in turn DfE’s leadership in ensuring a more integrated approach to these types of sensitive and cross cutting social policy issues with other core Government departments, such as CLG, Health and Home Office. And the Group expects DfE to engage broadly with all communities as to the developing meaning of British values and the role of schools in reinforcing those. The Britain of 2014 is fundamentally different from even the Britain of the 1990s let alone a sepia tinted past, and DfE need to listen directly to communities in the younger parts of this nation accordingly.

## **Ofsted**

3.13 The Group recognises the authority and impact of Ofsted reports, but does not regard its overriding “narrative” for Birmingham – in terms of consistently portraying a headline message of systemic failure – as a fair or accurate reflection of what is going on in many good and outstanding schools across the City. Ofsted has a crucial role to play in securing high standards, but it cannot adopt an isolationist approach any more than any school with which it would be rightly concerned. Direct engagement with Ofsted in taking forward schools in Birmingham can be developed on a more collaborative basis – without in any way reducing the impact of Ofsted’s independent regulatory functions - and the Group would welcome sustained engagement on a more positive footing accordingly. The Group also wish to see the reinstatement as a statutory responsibility of Ofsted’s duty to promote cohesion.

## **Preventing Extremism**

3.14 The Group has noted the conclusion from the ICA report that “there is no evidence of a conspiracy to promote an anti-British agenda, violent extremism or radicalisation in school in East Birmingham”. The Group recognises that there are responsibilities for the Council, West Midlands Police and others in supporting schools – primary as well as secondary - in respect of the Prevent agenda and endorses the further capacity and capability on this work signalled by the Council in 9 June statement. The Group does not however, support the lazy conflation – frequently characterised in the national media in recent months – of what Ofsted have termed issues around “a narrow faith based ideology” and questions of radicalisation, extremism or terrorism. The Group is under no illusion of the importance of confronting any ideology in relation to schools governance in whatever shape or form it takes. But it does not consider those threats automatically lead to these other terms, all of which have been described in different contexts by different commentators. These are issues that need much more considered analysis and are for the nation as a whole, not just Birmingham. In the meantime, the Group recommends to the Council and West Midlands Police to draw up a short and simple description for both primary and secondary schools of “what good looks like” in Preventing Extremism, with sign up from the Home Office and other national partners as appropriate, and clear in its understanding of the respective focuses on cohesion, extremism and violent extremism.

## The Way Forward for Birmingham

3.15 This has been a damaging and difficult time for many schools across Birmingham. Whatever issues and debated points have surfaced – and some of them have gripped the nation – the real cost has been borne by parents and children themselves in specific schools which, through no fault of those parents let alone the children, have become embroiled in controversy and uncertainty that seriously risks damaging some children’s educational prospects. That situation must end now, and the process of moving forward is very clear to the whole of the Review Group: it is about clear, radical and compelling action led by the Council and agreed with all other key partners, for realising the commitment to and potential of school children across Birmingham in practical and immediate terms. And in taking this work forward, the Council and partners must with immediate effect engage the communities themselves fully and transparently. While the Review Group itself has necessarily been tied to a process aligned to a confidential investigation, that is not the way to take engagement forward. We need a sustained process over the rest of the summer of putting the case for a positive way forward for the City honestly, acknowledging the importance of the issues and the faults of the Council and others in dealing with them previously, but in particular engaging parents, children and communities more generally about building the best possible set of schools across the whole of this diverse and vibrant City from the new school year onwards. Key partners such as the Birmingham Education Partnership and the Birmingham Governors Network can facilitate these types of conversations. We see the creation or development of a strong **civic leadership group** overseeing this work – chaired independently and with a range of credible and independent voices within it – as being the best means of ensuring the momentum is sustained, in turning a serious crisis of confidence into a substantial opportunity for our children and our communities.

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