Part 6
Moving forward

Some proposals from BCASE to the local authority

Our key aims are to ensure that:

- The position of the ‘Putting Birmingham School Kids First’ campaign, as expressed in its launch statement, is reflected in the Council’s plans;
- The community (i.e. parents, teachers and their unions, headteachers, governors, schoolstudents and the wider community and its representatives are fully involved in the development and implementation of the Council’s plans.

A priority of recent Council policies is to increase local community involvement in the policy process. What we are proposing aligns with and builds on existing Council policies on education, social cohesion and on local democratic renewal.

Leader’s Policy Statement on local democracy

The most recent statement on local democracy is Albert Bore’s Leader’s Policy Statement (1 July 2014).


One of its three themes is ‘A Democratic City’. The statement says:

‘To enable residents and communities to have a bigger say and take control we will seek to build the support necessary to make this happen for real.’ (p23)

‘...we will commit to devolving more power within the city, to support greater community leadership, democracy and flexibility in our local neighbourhoods.’ (p24)

These commitments are spelled out in much more detail in ‘Transforming Place: Working together for better neighbourhoods’, approved by Cabinet on 17 March.

http://fairbrum.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/transforming-place-working-together-for-better-neighbourhoods-framework.pdf. Its focus is on empowering neighbourhoods as communities of place. Below are some key quotes.

Communities of place and communities of interest

This framework is rooted in more effective and integrated models of managing and serving place, bringing together public, private, voluntary and community sectors. In doing so, it seeks to encourage better targeting of communities of interest in place. However, it also recognises that complementary strategies will be needed to serve communities of interest that share other characteristics such as age, faith, disability, gender and sexuality. (p10)

Why neighbourhoods?

These are the questions that this document seeks to answer. From the city’s experience of neighbourhoods working and what local people have told us suggests at least four reasons to embed a neighbourhood approach in how and where we deliver our services. These are:
1. Neighbourhoods are where people live most of their lives and access (or fail to access) many services they rely on.

2. Neighbourhoods are where many people construct a sense of place and identity.

3. Although communities come together around many interests and identities, geography (neighbourhood) is a major focus for community organisations and volunteering.

4. Community engagement in shaping services and their environment, and in developing local solutions to local problems, works well at a neighbourhood level.

It therefore makes sense to adopt a neighbourhood approach across all neighbourhoods in Birmingham. (p12)

The public, private and community sectors will need to work more closely together to develop and deliver services and initiatives that improve neighbourhoods. They will need to ‘co-design’ and ‘co-produce’ local solutions to local problems. (p13)

*Progress Report on Implementation: Strengthening the Birmingham Family of Schools – The Role of the City Council*

The most recent relevant Council document specifically about education is the *Progress Report on Implementation: Strengthening the Birmingham Family of Schools – The Role of the City Council* which was approved at the Education & Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22 January 2014. The report states that in the original policy, approved by Council on 8 January 2013:

‘There was recognition that fundamental changes to City Council working with schools are required in order for Birmingham to meet not only its legal requirements but other no less valid expectations based on the wider remit of local government. The findings made clear that the following three roles are all essential:

i) Convenor of Partnerships – between a wide range of stakeholders.

ii) Champion of pupils, parents and communities.

iii) Maker and shaper of effective commissioning – alongside continuing to provide some education services.’

The first two roles provide the policy basis for the Council to support the two aims of PBSKF as stated above, by convening a partnership between the schools and the community, and by championing pupils, parents and the local community.

In that context there are some specific points in the Scrutiny Progress Report which are particularly relevant:

‘Recommendation 1
That the Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services:

i) Prioritises the agreement of a new vision for education in Birmingham and communicates the future local authority role in education that reinforces its statutory responsibilities, succinctly through a set of key principles and values to schools, parents, students and Birmingham residents;

- In progress

}
iii) Convenes a time-limited Strategic Board with an independent chairperson including city education leaders from diocesan authorities, early years, primary, secondary, further education and higher education sectors to formulate both the vision and key principles and values.
- The time limited strategic board is still to be convened although there have been meetings with all of the partners listed.’

BCASE agrees that we need a new vision but insists that the concerns and aspirations of the community must be integral to it, which means that the community should be represented on the strategic board. While dealing with the issues in East Birmingham is a priority, we stand for the opening up of the Strategic Board, and of all school education policy-making in the city, to enable the effective participation of the wider community – parents, teachers, governors, citizens, and the creation of democratic structures to make this possible. The following Recommendation from Scrutiny is a step in the right direction:

‘Recommendation 7
That Elected Members commit to developing relationships with all schools in their ward and to becoming local champions for education by:
i) Affirming their commitment to quality Education for all Birmingham Children at City Council;
ii) Affirming to parents and carers in their local area that they will endeavour to represent their interests in working with local “families” of schools;
- Not achieved (progress made)
- Increasingly work is being undertaken through engagement with the Districts as local families of schools.

What is important here is the focus on the local level of organisation – the ward, local families of schools, the District, and involvement in education by local councillors. Similar sessions on governance could be arranged in our area. Again we stress that it must be in partnership with those ‘on the ground’: parents, community and teachers.

The Progress Report on Implementation: Birmingham: Where the World Meets, adopted by the Committee on 6 May 2014, refers to ‘The Transforming Place Strategy, developed in response to one of the key commitments from Making Birmingham and Inclusive City White paper: to empower local people to shape their neighbourhoods.’ ‘Transforming Place’ was agreed at Cabinet in March 2014.

Two of the Report’s recommendations are particularly relevant. One concerns more collaboration with communities:

‘The framework calls for a new relationship between communities, voluntary, community and public sector organisations allowing greater co-design of services, one that encourages greater collaboration between agencies and supports individuals and communities to action in their neighbourhoods...’ (from Recommendation 8)

The other concerns the school curriculum, including the proposal for ‘twinning’ between schools in different parts of the city.

‘The City Council should explore how all schools can be encouraged to incorporate teaching about local history and cultures into the curriculum. This could include: exploring the potential for holding a Brummie history week with special emphasis on work in schools and colleges, in order to raise awareness of the development of Birmingham, its achievements and how different cultures and groups have contributed to the city;
exploring the potential for the development of resource packs to support teachers in delivering aspects of the curriculum eg history of a range of cultures, citizenship with a local focus; encouraging "twinning" between schools in different parts of the city to enable schools to share information and learn from one another. Revised date for completion September 2015.’ (Recommendation 9)

These are all positive proposals which should be implemented, and which would be enriched by community involvement.

The current policy of the Council is Birmingham City Council Response to the Ofsted Inspections of Birmingham Schools and Trojan Horse, published on 9 June 2014. (http://birminghamnewsroom.com/2014/06/trojan-horse-briefing-june-9/). Here are some specific points.

‘We will work hard with our communities to restore any lost confidence in their governors, as well as ourselves and Ofsted and DfE’

This is a positive starting point, but what will be the structures and processes by which these words are translated into action?

In relation to Governance of schools the Council’s Response says:

• individual action plans will be drawn up with each community school that has been inspected
• continuing suspension of recruitment to local authority governor posts for the immediate future whilst we work to introduce a new policy from September
• revising the process for the recruitment, appointment and training of governors using the expertise of the National Governors Association with whom we are already engaged. This review is close to completion and we expect to publish the findings shortly. The new procedures will become ‘live’ in September 2014
• using the best practice seen in some of our secondary schools to support other schools across the city. Where there is further outstanding practice in the school community we will ensure that is available to all by building this into the training provided by the council and signposting schools to it
• publishing a good governance guide for all schools which includes a defined process for quality assurance including regular external review of governance (via the National College for Teaching and Leadership)

Will the community, and teachers, not just headteachers be involved in this? Governors need to be fully aware of the characteristics of the communities that the schools serve and their implications for governance. This is best achieved by community involvement in training, planning and the sharing of good practice, arranged in association with the Birmingham Governors Network, the local authority’s Governor Support unit, and with Councillor Martin Straker-Weld as the Education Scrutiny Committee member responsible for governance issues.

In relation to Safeguarding and Prevent the Council’s Response says the following:

‘we will review and agree expectations for schools in Birmingham in relation to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and set that into a context that celebrates the values of diversity, fairness, multi-culturalism and democracy.'
• safeguarding in all schools needs to have an appropriate and sustained focus on tackling the risk to children of extremism and radicalisation and, for some schools, this needs to be better supported by the local authority through training for Head teachers, governors and staff in schools

• further training would be of benefit to schools around certain areas, in particular the risk of forced marriage and female genital mutilation
• schools would also benefit from further training of designated safeguarding persons (DSP) relating to Prevent
• we need to do more to help schools with best practice to share their good and outstanding practice around risk of extremism and radicalisation

We recognise the importance and value of the Prevent programme in tackling radicalisation and violent extremism, and will continue to work to promote the programme and to provide support and advice to schools, ensuring that robust safeguarding mechanisms remain in place.

We welcome the role of the local authority in providing support and guidance via training and awareness of the Prevent agenda and expect that we will continue to deliver this in partnership with the Home Office, working closely other local partners and national departments such as DfE.

• producing regular six monthly reports to the Safeguarding Board and Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) and other relevant bodies (eg academy chains and free schools) with regard to the effectiveness of training relating to the prevention of radicalisation and extremism in all settings
• making sure that all senior managers in the Directorate for People will regularly refresh their understanding of the prevent agenda and their role and responsibilities in relation to it
• consulting with the Home Office on rolling out of further Prevent training. To ensure adequate capacity is available, the Council will appoint in readiness for the new academic year a dedicated school Prevent co-ordinator to be jointly funded by the Home Office and the Council
• ensuring that the previously mentioned good governance guide will set out clearly the responsibilities of governors, heads and principals, define their training needs and agree a city wide programme to ensure appropriate participation’

The Prevent Strategy has been deliberately used by Ofsted as the main criteria for failing Birmingham schools in the wave of inspections ordered by Wilshaw. No inspections of schools elsewhere have made use of Prevent in this way. It is claimed that its purpose is to identify ‘extremists’, though no evidence of ‘extremism’ was found. The consequence has been not the safeguarding of children and young people but the whipping up of Islamophobia.

It is worth looking at what the Prevent strategy policy document, published by the government in 2011, actually says. Pages 65-71 deal with schools.


‘10.15. All schools are required by law to teach a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. Publicly funded schools are required to promote community cohesion...’

10.16. There are also safeguards against biased or unbalanced teaching and the promotion of partisan political views in publicly funded schools. These require that all reasonably practicable steps are taken to ensure that, where political or controversial issues are brought to pupils’ attention, they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.’
The document also says that there is NOT ‘a significant problem that needs to be resolved’. As even the Ofsted inspections in Birmingham were forced to admit, they found ‘no evidence of extremism’.

‘10.44 We regard Prevent work with children and with schools as an important part of the strategy. But this work needs to be proportionate. It must not start from a misplaced assumption that there is a significant problem that needs to be resolved. We have seen some evidence of very limited radicalisation of children by extremist or terrorist groups. There is further evidence that some schools – and some supplementary schools – have used teaching materials which may encourage intolerance. And we know that some extremist or terrorist organisations have held positions of influence in education or in other organisations working closely with children. But these issues must be kept in perspective.’

The conclusion that the Scrutiny Committee should draw, and highlight in its recommendations, is that it is essential that the Prevent strategy is interpreted and translated into appropriate ways of teaching and integrated into the curriculum, suitable for different age groups, so that it becomes a real learning experience, not a reinforcement of Islamophobia. Every child’s and young person’s education should enable them to develop a critical understanding, informed by a sense of social justice, of the big social and political issues in the world (and a critical engagement with the concept of ‘British values’), in ways appropriate to pupils’ ages. One place for it in the curriculum is citizenship education, but it will also permeate many other subject areas. One element in this is the specific issue of ‘terrorism’, enabling pupils to understand the historical causes and power relations that give rise to it, and while there may be valuable inputs from external providers it is vital that it is not a bolt-on extra and that the responsibility for teaching remains that of the teacher herself or himself.

Another element in the curriculum is multicultural and anti-racist teaching. Many teachers already address these issues but the Trojan Horse events and the attacks by Gove and Wilshaw have made the expression of racist views more apparently legitimate. This needs to be tackled with renewed vigour in the classroom, not just in the 21 schools but in schools across the city, and perhaps especially in majority-white schools.

It is obvious that the involvement of the community in all of this is absolutely vital, both to ensure their support and to ensure that provision satisfies the real needs, and entitlements, of the whole community.

There is good practice in our schools and a key recommendation that Scrutiny should make is that there are structures put in place for its sharing and development by teachers with community involvement, and not just a reliance on ‘training’ by external providers.

**For a local Education Forum as a framework for moving forward**

In the coming months the schools will be responding to the requirements and recommendations various reports that will have been published by the end of July. Each school has its own specific situation and needs and will chart its own path forward. But many of the issues apply in various ways across many or all of the schools, as do many of the community’s concerns and aspirations. There is an opportunity here for a collaborative approach which brings together the schools and the community to share and develop ideas and practices on a whole range of issues, including anti-racist teaching, responding to Prevent in educationally effective ways, and developing a curriculum that critically engages with life in Birmingham and celebrates multiculturalism. We know that
collaboration is the best way to improve, and here we have a unique opportunity to develop a way of working which could be a model for other areas of Birmingham and beyond.

To seize this opportunity we need the local authority to take the initiative and set up a local Education Forum as a partnership body bringing together all the stakeholders. It would be an inspiring example of putting into practice the Council’s policies around local democratic renewal that we have quoted above.

**Putting Birmingham school kids first: a Children’s Zone approach in East Birmingham**

At the joint Scrutiny Committees meeting on 30 July Councillor Miriam Khan asked what we think is the crucial question about moving forward after the Trojan Horse reports: What plans are there for a new education framework bringing together schools, communities and the council?

We believe that the concept of Children’s Zones can contribute to an answer. A Children’s Zone approach has been successfully pioneered in Manchester and is now being launched in the north-east. It could be the way forward in East Birmingham.

**What is a Children’s Zone?**

A Children’s Zone brings together all the resources in a local area that can support the educational development of children and young people. They would include the following:

- The schools – their teachers, support staff, governors and parents…and the school students themselves
- Other support agencies such as social services, youth services, the police…
- Local community organisations and groups of every sort
- Local community facilities – libraries, community centres, allotments, sports facilities, ‘places of interest’…
- Local workplaces and companies
- Ward Committee meetings, Neighbourhood Forums etc.
- Other resources outside the Zone area: universities, arts and cultural organisations etc…
- And of course the City Council.

The idea of Children’s Zones was originally developed to raise standards in education in socially deprived areas. This is what Mel Ainscow, leader and researcher of the successful Manchester Challenge, says:

> …closing the gap in outcomes between those from more and less advantaged backgrounds will only happen when what happens to children outside as well as inside the school changes. This means changing how families and communities work, and enriching what they offer to children. [...] there is encouraging evidence from Greater Manchester of what can happen when what schools do is aligned in a coherent strategy with the efforts of other local players—employers, community groups, universities and public services. This does not necessarily mean schools doing more, but it does imply partnerships beyond the school, where partners multiply the impacts of each other’s efforts. (Ainscow 2012, pp307-8)

Of course we know that there are schools in East Birmingham which are already achieving high standards. But the Children’s Zone approach is still just as valuable, promoting social cohesion by bringing all the partners together in a local area and sharing and developing excellent practice in education.
What might be the first steps in setting up a Children’s Zone?

The first step is to bring together the potential partners - the schools, the local community, councillors and relevant support agencies, to discuss the idea and commit themselves to adopting a Children’s Zone approach. Most of the building blocks are already there – they just need to be brought together.

The next steps might involve the following:

- Carrying out an audit of the schools serving the ward, identifying both areas for improvement and areas of particular strengths.
- Carrying out an audit of support agencies – local authority and other – active in the area: early years, social and adult care, education welfare, youth services, health, etc.
- Carrying out an initial audit of community resources in the area and nearby: institutions, organisations, bodies of expertise, community activities, sites of potential educational value, workplaces, and key individuals - and their existing links with schools, if any. (This doesn’t exclude drawing on resources outside the area, including other schools, FE colleges, universities, cultural resources such as the CBSO or the Nature Centre, and other workplaces.)
- On that basis, bringing together all the partners to discuss and agree an Education Development Plan for the area.
- Establish a Zone Partnership Body comprising representatives of all the main participants in the Zone, with a strong community involvement.

The ideas above are taken from a briefing paper which was published by Birmingham CASE (Campaign for State Education) some six months ago (before the Trojan Horse issue became public). ‘Children’s Zones: bringing together Birmingham’s school support policies and its devolution and neighbourhood development policies to raise attainment and reduce inequality in education in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods’ is at [http://birminghamcase.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/childrens-zones.pdf](http://birminghamcase.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/childrens-zones.pdf)

Some useful sources about Children’s Zones


