



REPORT TO CABINET

18 November 2020

Subject:	Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2019/20
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Joyce Underhill
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	 
Key Decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Joyce Underhill:
Director Approval:	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger, 12 th October 2020
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply to the content of this report
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Implications are borough-wide, no need for specific ward councillors to be consulted
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Sandwell Children's Trust attended Scrutiny on 20 th July 2020
Contact Officer(s):	Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's Services 0102 589 8338 Lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet, in its capacity as the body that is responsible and accountable for the discharge of the relevant children's social care services functions:

- a) formally receives the Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2019/20;

- b) notes the progress made to date by Sandwell Children's Trust in delivering services as set out in the Contract between the Council and the Trust, as set out in the Annual Review 2019/20;
- c) notes the feedback from the Department for Education following its recent 6-month review of Sandwell Children's Trust;
- d) notes the reports from Ofsted for the period covering the Annual Review 2019/20;
- e) notes the comments made by the Scrutiny Board following the attendance of Sandwell Children's Trust to its meeting on 20th July 2020.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) requires that an annual review of services is completed and presented to the council. At the Cabinet meeting on 22nd March 2017, it was agreed that the Cabinet will perform this function on behalf of the council in its executive role to agree certain 'reserved matters' that are set out in the Contract.
- 1.2 This report presents SCTs Annual Review 2019/20.
- 1.3 Consideration of these reports by the Cabinet form an important part of the governance of SCT; providing assurance to the council in its capacity as the body that is responsible and accountable for the discharge of the relevant children's social care services functions.

2 IMPLICATION FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) is contracted to deliver services that contribute to Vision 2030 ambitions, and particularly:

Ambition 1 - Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience. SCT supports families to improve children's life chances.

Ambition 2 - Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared

for. SCT ensures coordination between social care and the NHS to better protect vulnerable children.

Ambition 4 - Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families. SCT works with foster carers and schools to support the achievements of vulnerable children and those in the care of the council.

Ambition 5 - Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods. SCT works closely with the police to ensure that children are protected from the impact of crime, domestic violence, and all forms of exploitation.

Ambition 10 - Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities. SCT is contracted to improve the performance of children's social care services with an Ofsted judgement of at least 'requires improvement' by 2020 and 'good' by 2022.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The contract with SCT has a comprehensive programme of governance arrangements. The contract requires that the Executive Director of Children's Services, together with council senior officers from finance and legal services, and the Chief Executive of the Trust meet on at least a monthly basis to consider performance and operational matters. In addition, each quarter, the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Chief Executive meet with the Chair of the SCT Board and the Chief Executive of SCT, at a Strategic Partnership Board.
- 3.2 In accordance with the terms of the contract, an initial 6 months grace period was agreed before formal reporting commenced, to allow SCT time to establish processes and governance arrangements. A report to the Cabinet on 19th September 2018 set out these arrangements and advised that a suite of performance indicators would be agreed by the end of September 2018. As a result, 15 performance indicators were agreed and are robustly monitored in the monthly Operational Partnership Board meetings.

- 3.3 The contract with the Trust specifies that representatives of the Trust should attend Council meetings when reasonably requested, specifically referencing attendance twice a year at the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board and at the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board if requested. To date, Trust representatives have attended the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board on the 24 September 2018, 18th March 2019 and 16th September 2019, and 20th July 2020 (the meeting scheduled for 23rd March 2020 was cancelled due to the Covid pandemic).
- 3.4 The contract requires SCT to provide a comprehensive annual review for consideration by the Operational Partnership Board, the Strategic Partnership Board and then by the Cabinet. Progress against the performance indicators for the first year of SCT operations is set out in the Annual Review 2019/20, together with information about financial, workforce, and other performance areas.
- 3.5 An Improvement Board, chaired by a DfE appointed consultant, continues to meet regularly to assess progress against the Improvement Plan 2019/22.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Of the 15 Key Performance Indicators, 10 have improved or been maintained above target, 3 have remained broadly the same and 2 have declined. This is very favourable performance when compared to the previous years' Annual Review, when 8 areas improved and 7 declined. Performance from the start to the end of the year 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 is set out below:

PI 1 The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours

The target is 75%.

Performance in April 2019 was 83.5%.

Performance in March 2020 was 87.8%.

Performance has improved and exceeds the target.

PI 2 The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population.

The target is 65 per 10,00 child population.

Performance in April 2019 was 73.6 per 10,00 child population.

Performance in March 2020 was 82 per 10,00 child population.

Although performance was 66.1 in October 2019 it has since declined and has not met the target. This is an area for intensive focus in 2020.

PI 3 The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary.

The target is 80%.

Performance in April 2019 was 82.1%.

Performance in March 2020 was 89%.

Performance has improved and exceeds the target.

PI 4 The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days

The target is 85%.

Performance in April 2019 was 78.1%.

Performance in March 2020 was 78.8%.

Performance has improved and exceeded target for 4 months of the year but has remained broadly the same overall.

PI 5 The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days

The target is fewer than 10.

Performance in April 2019 was 7.

Performance in March 2020 was 0.

Performance has improved and has remained below 10 for eleven months during the period, exceeding the target.

PI 6 The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks

The target is 80%.

Performance in April 2019 was 76.8%.

Performance in March 2020 was 71.9%.

Performance has declined and although it exceeded the target for 8 months during the period it has remained broadly the same overall.

PI 7 The percentage of Children whose Child Protection Plan has been updated within the last six months

The target is 95%.

Performance in April 2019 was 87.9%.

Performance in March 2020 was 85.2%

Performance has declined but exceeded the target for 4 months during the period but had remained broadly the same overall.

PI 8 Of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the percentage who have evidence of formal case supervision within the previous 4 weeks

The target is 65%.

Performance in April 2019 was 54.2%.

Performance in March 2020 was 66%.

Performance has improved and exceeded the target for the majority of the period.

PI 9 The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours

The target is 70%.

Performance in April 2019 was 71.9%.

Performance in March 2020 was 81.8%.

Performance has improved and exceeded the target for 11 months during the period.

PI 10 The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks

The target is 73%.

Performance in April 2019 was 69.9%.

Performance in March 2020 was 62.9%.

Performance has declined although has exceeded the target for 9 months during the period, and so performance has been maintained.

PI 11 The percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements

The target is 90%.

Performance in April 2019 was 87.9%.

Performance in March 2020 was 88.3%

Performance has improved and exceeded the target for 7 months during the period.

PI 12 The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales

The target is 80%.

Performance in April 2019 was 98%.

Performance in March 2020 was 85.3%.

Performance has declined but still exceeds the target and has done so for 11 months during the period, and so performance has been maintained.

PI 13 The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers

The target is less than 32%.

Performance in April 2019 was 29.6%.

Performance in March 2020 was 39.4%.

Performance has declined and has not met the target for 10 months during the period.

PI 14 Average caseloads across the service

The target is 18.5.

Performance in April 2019 was 19.8.

Performance in March 2020 was 19.62.

Performance has declined and has not met the target during the period, but performance generally has been maintained.

PI 15 The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better

The target is 55%.

Performance in April 2019 was 56.9%.

Performance in March 2020 was 78.6%.

Performance has improved and has exceeded the target for the whole period.

- 4.2 The Annual Review 2019/20 also sets out the budget performance. The council provided £63.54m of funding to SCT during 2019/20. Further funding of just under £9.27m was provided by a range of other partners. The outturn position for SCT was overspent by £4.3m, an improvement on the previous year, but nevertheless £1.3m above the agreed Medium Term Financial Plan. This deficit is expected to be mitigated throughout the course of the next three years and is largely due to agency staffing costs and the costs of services for children in care; a cost savings plan is in place.
- 4.3 An external value for money review of SCTs financial arrangements is to be facilitated by the DfE in the autumn 2020.

- 4.4 The DfE carries out a 6-monthly review of SCT and following its visit on 17th September 2020 was satisfied that progress was being made. The review was attended by council representatives: Lead Member for Best Start in Life, Chief Executive and Executive Director of Children's Services.
- 4.5 Sandwell Children's Trust is subject to different types of regulatory inspections by Ofsted, HMIP, and CQC as follows:
- a) Regular thematic Monitoring Visits that make judgements about the progress of improvements required following the Inadequate full inspection report published in January 2018;
 - b) Adoption inspection due to the need for the Trust to be registered as a voluntary adoption agency;
 - c) Fostering inspection due to the need to the Trust to be registered as an independent fostering agency;
 - d) Youth Offending inspection.
- 4.6 The Trust also contributes to the inspection of the local authority's arrangements for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- 4.7 During the first year of operation SCT was subject to full inspections of adoption, fostering, and youth offending, together with a number of monitoring visits. SCT also contributed to the SEND inspection re-visit. In total there were 7 inspection visits within the first 12 months – overall inspection visits recognised the improvement from a low base but also identified that there was much more to achieve.
- 4.8 During 2019/20 there were 5 inspection visits, four of which were monitoring visits and one which was the regulatory inspection of the Independent Fostering Agency. Ofsted has continued to recognise the improvements that have been made. Reports are made by the Executive Director of Children's Services to the Leader and Lead Member for Best Start in Life following each inspection visit.
- 4.9 The Chair and CEO of SCT attended the Children's and Education Scrutiny Board on 20th July 2020. Whilst the Annual Review Report was not available for the meeting, the discussion covered each of the elements of the report in details. The Scrutiny Board questioning was extensive and covered the following areas: performance, pressures, risk and business continuity arrangements during the Covid pandemic, support for vulnerable children, audit performance information, recruitment and retention, caseloads, management structure, training for social workers, serious incidents and budget. The Scrutiny Board expressed its gratitude to staff working in difficult circumstances during this time.

4.10 Whilst the Annual Review does not cover the period of the Covid pandemic, it would be remiss not to mention it in this report to the Cabinet. SCT has worked closely with the council during this period, staff have adapted to working in different ways and performance has continued to improve. Nevertheless, the longer-term impact on children is yet to be seen and it is likely that there will be an increase in the demand for services, and an increase in the associated costs. The council and SCT continue to work closely together to monitor all aspects of the impact of Covid and agree appropriate actions.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

5.1 This report does not require consultation. However, ensuring that children and young people's voices are heard and their wishes and feelings are taken into account when planning services and support for them is an important part of SCTs practice, and is one of the priorities in the Improvement Plan 2019/22.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2016, Cabinet was advised of the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996) to set up a new arrangement in the form of a children's trust to deliver children's social care services. As a result, Sandwell Children's Trust started operating on 1st April 2018. Any alternative to the current arrangement must be agreed by the Secretary of State for Education.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Sandwell Children's Trust receives a significant financial resource to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities for children's social care, and also to provide targeted early help services.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council must comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's own Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules 2019/20. The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and SCT is performance managed via a monthly Operational Partnership Board, a quarterly Strategic Partnership Board, and SCT is required to attend up to 2 Children's Scrutiny Board meetings and 1 Budget Scrutiny meeting each year. There is a partnership Improvement Board independently chaired by a DfE appointed consultant. Additionally, the Trust is required to submit its Annual Review to the Council annually.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children's services will have a positive effect on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 There are no data protection implications relevant to this report.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 There are no crime and disorder issues relevant to this proposal.
- 11.2 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) identifies two red risks relevant to this report, one regarding the increased demand for services and one regarding the cost of the service. These risks are regularly monitored and reported to the Audit and Risk Committee.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 12.1 This report ensures that the council's statutory responsibilities are met to ensure that it continues to be accountable for the discharge of children's social care functions. Following an increase in demand for services SCT is reporting stabilisation, however, the increased cost of services must be addressed to ensure longer-term sustainability. The cost of children's social care is a national issue awaiting the outcome of the Care Review, announced in March but on hold since that time.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 The health and wellbeing of children and young people is a vital part of improving their lives.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 14.1 There are no implications for the Council's material assets arising from the proposal. There is no impact from this report on any council managed property or land

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The recommendations will ensure the council meets its responsibilities as set out in the Service Delivery Contract and will ensure that the governance of the arrangement between the council and SCT is robust and purposeful.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 Reports to Cabinet dated:

19th October 2016

7th December 2016

22nd March 2017

19th September 2018

20th October 2019.

17 APPENDICES:

17.1 SCT Annual Review 2019/20.

Lesley Hagger
Executive Director of Children's Services