

Front page pictures to be added

2019/20

Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review



Sandwell
Children's Trust

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Foreword

We are very pleased to present Sandwell Children’s Trust’s second annual review report, which details our progress over the last year. The Trust was set up in April 2018 to improve services for the most vulnerable children and families in Sandwell and we are proud of the progress we have made. This report forms part of our contractual arrangements with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, and is a ‘look backwards’ to all our continued successes and challenges within our second year of operation.

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the serious impact the Coronavirus pandemic has had on the people we serve; the Trust and its staff; and the services we deliver to children and families. We are extremely proud of all of our staff who have had to swiftly change the way in which they work in order to tackle this crisis and ensure that monitoring and support to vulnerable children continued. This report also contains a review of the financial year 2019/20, when in the final weeks we began to respond and adapt to the pandemic. We expect this to have a significant impact on our costs throughout this year and we are carefully monitoring the financial impact.

Maintaining a close partnership with SMBC who are our commissioners, we demonstrate our financial performance against the contract sum, our medium term financial plan, and how we have managed this against our demand for providing services to the children and young people of Sandwell. We set out what our financial challenges have been and present a summary of our end of year accounts.

We also show the progress we have made on our improvement journey, against all aspects of our improvement plan, and highlight what others have said about us. We present the findings of surveys and feedback from children and families, and the themes of quality assurance activity. Finally, we set out where we have made joint changes to our contractual arrangements with the council.

As we have matured as an organisation, we have developed and strengthened our core functions and built a more effective and efficient service. We remain committed to putting the voice of our children at the heart of our work and to supporting our staff to deliver the most effective social work practice in a safe and nurturing workplace. This year we are particularly proud of our work to strengthen children’s participation through the ‘How can ‘I’ help you’ strategy, the launch of our ‘3x3x3’ practice framework, and our increased focus on staff wellbeing.

We see the annual review as one of three key strategic documents, the others being our Improvement Plan, and our Business Plan. Each year, the annual review is a useful opportunity to take stock, reflect on our journey and allows us to see the huge progress we have made.

As always, we are incredibly proud of the family we have created in the Trust which includes a dedicated team of social workers, administrators, support services staff, social care assistants, personal advisors and managers with a shared goal of improving and delivering excellent services for children and young people. We want to place on record our admiration and thanks for their efforts at such a challenging time.



The Right Honourable Jacqui Smith
Chair of Sandwell Children’s Trust



Frances Craven
Chief Executive of Sandwell Children’s Trust

Executive Summary

Sandwell Children's Trust went live in April 2018 as a new and distinct legal entity commissioned to provide children's social care services in Sandwell on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council; created a result of a statutory direction from the government, and for the period of this intervention the Department for Education assigns a representative to act on behalf of the secretary of state, who has a range of powers in relation to the governance of the Trust.

The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services, and has the aim of providing 'Good' services to our children and families' by 2022 and is governed by a Board of Directors, chaired by the Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith, and is comprised of the Executive Directors, Independent Non-Executive Directors and council-appointed Non-Executive Directors.

Financial Context

The finances provided by SMBC to the Trust within the first year was covered by a Contract Sum that amounted to approximately £58.23m funding from SMBC and contributions from our partners of £5.898m. In the financial year 2019/20 (our second year of operation) the Contract Sum was initially to be £56.9m, as adjustments were made once our adoption services were moved to Adoption @ Heart, the TUPE of staff to the Trust and a reduction in education funding for children's placements.

During our first year of operation (and beyond), the demand for services eclipsed the resources available to the Trust. This meant that there were significant budget pressures that needed to be jointly tackled by the Trust and the Council. The continued

Following lengthy discussions between the Trust and the Council, which included significant financial due diligence, a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and revised contract sum for 2019/20 (applied 'in-year') was agreed on 17th February 2020 (later ratified by Cabinet).

The new contract sum took into account our current demand for staffing and placements, alongside our expenditure throughout the year. The total amount agreed was £63,504,000.

As outlined in the Medium Term Financial our aim is to make financial savings over the next four years (with this year being the first year), and expect to deliver a cumulative breakeven by the end of 2023.

Improvement

In addition to managing our financial position, the Trust came into being to provide better services to the children and families of Sandwell. To do this the Trust, in conjunction with the Council, developed an ambitious Improvement Plan in May 2018; and refreshed the plan in August 2018. The Improvement Plan has eight priorities and is based on the actions and recommendations from Ofsted 2017 Single Inspection, the recommendations made by the DfE appointed Children's Commissioner and feedback from inspectors at every one of our monitoring visits. The Improvement Plan underpins our aims to operate as 'Requires Improvement' by 2020 and 'Good' by 2022.

This year our priority focus has been '**Building on Strengths and Ensuring Impact**'. Over the course of the year we are particularly proud of our work in the following areas:

- Workforce, within the challenging context of the national and local market
- Practice Improvement / Practice Framework
- Tackling Exploitation / Gang Activity

- Continued Strengthened Partnership Working
- Embedding children and young people's 'participation' throughout the organisation

We have continued to strengthen our Quality Assurance infrastructure, maintaining the 'regular' quality assurance service and 'beyond auditing' team, alongside new capacity for practice learning and dedicated support from students and those in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment.

Due to our consistent focus, determination and passion for improving outcomes of children and families, we are now confident that we are delivering better services in all areas of the Trust. We are confident that we have improved to the extent that we had planned.

External Inspections

As an organisation seeking to improve from an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating, we are subject to the Monitoring Visit arrangements on a quarterly basis. This, in conjunction with the regulatory inspections of the Independent Fostering Agency, has meant that we have welcomed inspectors a total of 5 times in twelve months.

Our monitoring visits continue to be invaluable as a barometer of our improvement across the course of the year, and Ofsted have noted significant improvements in some areas – giving us confidence in our evaluation of our progress.

We have had a re-inspection of our Fostering Service, which was a good opportunity to demonstrate the improvements we had made in this area. Ofsted judged this service as Requires Improvement to be Good. This was only six months after inspectors judged us as inadequate and handed us three compliance notices – those compliance notices were lifted over the course of the year.

In conclusion, over the course of the year, we have continued to make improvements across the range of our services in the face of many service challenges. There have been successes to celebrate, but inevitably times where we have needed to dig deep to get where we needed to be. Our progress is due to the hard work and dedication of our staff and partners, all pulling in the same direction to make children and families lives better in Sandwell. We continue to be optimistic in our ambition to be to achieve our aims of Good by 2022.

Introduction

The Annual Review is a contractual obligation of Sandwell Children's Trust in its reporting to the Council and interested parties such as the senior civil servant (while a Statutory Direction is in force). First and foremost, the aim of the review is to look back over the previous 12 months and understand how far we have achieved our specified goals within that year. The review should therefore be the first strategic document of the year, that informs our business plan and our improvement plan.

Schedule 3 of the Service Delivery Contract outlines the matters that are to be reported on as part of the Annual Review. These are addressed in the following sections:

- Section (a)** the Improvement Plan (where applicable);
- Section (b)** the Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (c)** the thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year;
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Section (a) - The Improvement Plan

We developed our first Improvement Plan directly after the report was published of the Single Inspection of November 2017. This plan was signed off and published on 10th May 2018, soon after the Trust came into force, and set out our plan for improvement within our first year and beyond. The improvement plan was refreshed and signed off by the Trust Board and Strategic Partnership Board on 27th August 2019. The Improvement Plan consists of eight priority areas, each overseen by an Executive Director of SCT. These priority areas are:



Our approach to improvement in the second year of Sandwell Children’s Trust has been one of **‘Building on Strengths and Ensuring Impact’**. This has been to:

- Accelerating progress through stable management and a shared vision
- Developing and implementing new working models and begin to demonstrate impact on outcomes for children and families
- Involvement of partners in improvement activities
- Manage risks as changes are made
- Evaluate progress and refine activity
- Ensure that children’s needs are being consistently met
- Develop impact measures for each improvement action to measure and demonstrate progress

The next stage for our improvement is **‘Transforming, Embedding and Adapting’**, which is to begin in October 2020.

In this section, we detail the more significant areas of work we have focussed on during the year, alongside our key milestones and outputs.

Workforce, within the challenging context of the national and local market

As with any improving organisation, a stable workforce is key to ensuring that the improvements we make are sustained. We have recognised this from day 1 of our existence and in order to bring stability to our workforce we have brought together a comprehensive workforce strategy “12 reasons to work for Sandwell Children’s Trust”. We have a stable leadership team at Board, Director, and Head of Service level. Our most recent focus has been to target our approach to recruit permanent Service Managers and Team Managers, as we recognise that stability here will maximise consistency within teams:

1. Converting to permanent: Senior leaders have held discussions with each of the Service Managers and Team Managers exploring the opportunity and detailing the benefits of converting permanent members of staff. Of the twelve, Service Managers, seven are permanent, five are agency and two of the five are converting to permanent. Of the 36 Social Work Team Managers across Operations and Quality, 20 are permanent (56%), 16 are agency (44%), and 5 of the 16 converting to permanent.
2. Refreshed recruitment strategy - reaching further:
An agreed, re-energised job advertisement campaign, alongside a revised approach to the market place utilising both Guardian, Community Care and social media networks including both local and national reach.
3. Agency support: Engaged a proven recruitment partner in our search and selection process, using their network of social workers, team managers, service managers to employ on a permanent basis.

The stability of our qualified social work workforce should be considered within the West-Midlands context, whereby there are around 720 vacancies within the region, of which 640 are covered by agency social workers. The local market for permanent social workers is therefore limited, however we are relentless in our approach to recruiting permanent social workers.

While we launched our workforce strategy well over a year ago (12 reasons to work in Sandwell Children’s Trust), this has somewhat evolved in the following ways:

- Digital media support - the HR team have begun to undertake market testing with local providers to examine how to utilise Social Media in recruiting, using content marketing, professionally recorded videos of Board Members, Directors and any other willing cohort explaining why Sandwell Children’s Trust is a great place to work.
- Jobs Go Public presented a new jobs page, application tracking system and recruitment approval tool to the HR team in November 2019.
- Refreshed LinkedIn, Twitter and Indeed accounts have all been created and utilised during the last few months of 2019 and we are now seeing greater engagement. In addition, a recruitment video was commissioned to support our organic growth and spearhead the Service Manager recruitment campaign.

Together with Workforce Development we have been successful in our bid for £50,000 with Future Social for support in shaping and delivering Sandwell Children’s Trust employee emotional wellbeing strategy. The bid included funding to offer mental health ‘first aid’ training, trialling an onsite counselling drop in service and a coaching and mentoring programme in how we utilise the Schwartz principle in building resilience.

An important aspect of our workforce offer is ensuring that our social workers have manageable caseloads. Our aim is to ensure that social workers have average caseloads no higher than 18 children per social worker, further reduced for ASYEs. The management of our demand is a constant challenge, and dependent upon the interplay between children who need a service, the stability of our workforce alongside effective

throughput. We have been close to achieving our aim over a number of months, with our average caseloads for social workers currently sitting at 20.21.

We know there is more to do regarding our workforce, which is why our strategy in this area is under constant review.

Practice Improvement

We have made significant progress regarding the development and implementation of our Practice Framework and Model within the year; highlights of our work in this area is as follows:

- A comprehensive Practice Framework and Practice Model has been developed, and launched. Increasingly, we are seeing this embed in practice more consistently which is supporting more focussed and better-quality practice.
- We have expanded our innovative Beyond Auditing offer, which now incorporates Practice Facilitators undertaking Practice Learning. The work being undertaken by this team includes 1:1 coaching, mentoring and workshops. Each service has been allocated hours of Practice Learning for individual workers.
- We have undertaken three 'rounds' of Management Impact Workshops, with focus on social work management principles, and the effective delivery of the Practice Framework which support strengths based social work.
- Practice Framework / Practice Model workshops have been undertaken with key areas of the service. The focus of the sessions has been to use the Practice Framework and Practice Model in our day to day role.
- We have a Signs of Safety Co-ordinator and have recently relaunched the training and support programme.
- We are working with the University of Birmingham to produce interactive courses on Relationship Based Practice, where we will be creating 360-degree virtual reality films, immersing social workers in good practice.
- With the support of DfE funding, we have created a Learning Hub, which is a dedicated central point within the Trust for all staff to access opportunities for their learning and development, and career progression. We have developed a comprehensive learning and development offer with courses suitable for the whole range of our staff.

A fundamental component of the Learning Hub is the Social Work Academy, which is set up to deliver the following:

- Student placements from BA and MA courses
- Step up to Social Work
- Firstline / Frontline Programmes
- ASYE academy
- National accreditation through NAAS
- Practice Supervisor Development Programme
- Leadership and Management Programme
- Grow your own programmes - Development of Social Work Apprenticeships / Open University

Tackling Exploitation / Gang Activity

We have developed and launched a new relationship-based approach to tackling exploitation within the last 12 months. The main focus of our new approach takes the lead from national research around wider exploitation moving away from a focus on only child sexual exploitation and to embed and understand contextual safeguarding. We have seen a much-strengthened approach to supporting and safeguarding young people at risk of exploitation. Broadly, our approach has been:

- The creation of the Exploitation Hub, which co-ordinates targeted disruption activity from a wider partnership perspective and robust support plans for individual young people deemed to be at highest risk of exploitation. The hub aims to have strategic partners in attendance who are able to direct a resource across their respective service and are encouraged to 'think inventively' about how their service may support our young people at most risk.
- The merging of Gang and Exploitation meetings and Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meetings, to become Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings, with dedicated co-ordination. This has been managed separately in the past which had resulted in a lack of cohesion. This has enabled a joined-up approach to reduce risks associated with exploitation and has prevented the several overlapping meetings where the same children are discussed in different forums, with different plans being devised in each.
- The creation of the Horizons team, a team of specialists within this field, who are co-allocated and work alongside social workers to directly engage with young people identified at risk of exploitation. This service undertakes return home interviews, direct work with young people and mapping of intelligence through their work with other young people.
- Horizons, MACE and HUB information is now added to children's files on LCS, which is the software used by social workers. This enables transparent working and information sharing, resulting in more effective risk management plans.
- Since the launch of Horizons, the scope has been widened to include 18+ year olds who are Looked After, to enable transitions to be more effectively managed. This has been implemented across MACE and the HUB also.

Alongside this new team and approach, there are closer links between our youth crime work (as a wider partnership) and our social care teams, highlights of this are:

- The Supporting Families Against Youth Crime project, who work with children in transition from years 6 to 7 in both Smethwick and West Bromwich, working closely with the two main secondary schools and associated feeder schools; and delivers a variety of interventions including Universal sessions, mentoring and Targeted Support.
- The Youth Offending Service's good inspection in August 2018, has been given further national recognition at the youth offending awards.
- The Youth Offending Service Arts Council England Silver ArtsMark, for our innovative ways in working with young people, many who have also faced exploitation.

In addition to the launch of the Horizons team:

- All staff within the trust attended a 1 hour awareness raising briefing which explained what exploitation is, what is the impact on children and young people, what services there are to support children and families, and what role every staff member in trust has.

- Horizons have also been delivering exploitation training with foster carers, including connected carers who are said not to wish to access group training with other foster carers. Feedback on this has been positive.
- Horizons are completing wider work within schools – specifically targeting those schools with high exclusion rates and those with increasing issues of exploitation. Thus far work has been completed with Sandwell College and a training package is being devised for them to better equip schools to manage such concerns effectively and without exclusions.
- Horizons attend the Designated Safeguarding Lead meeting to raise awareness of the Horizons offer.
- Each Horizons worker is linked to a COG for advice and support where there are queries relating to exploitation.
- Horizons offer consultation to any professional wishing to discuss concerns of exploitation and where deemed appropriate, will work with children and young people who are medium risk where it is identified a bespoke piece of preventative work will be effective in addition to the practitioners that already engage with the family.

Partnership Working

We are aware of the need to engage with our partners on both a strategic and operational level, as partnership improvement is key to our overall improvement. The following are areas where we have made good progress:

- In April 2019, we saw the launch of Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership which replaces the LSCB and has been recognised by the DFE as a robust partnership model of effective multi-agency safeguarding within Sandwell. The Director of Children’s Services is the chair of this strategic partnership.
- We have maintained an Improvement Board with an experienced chair commencing in January 2020 following the resignation of the previous chair. The focus of the Improvement Board has been to hold partners to account for improvement linked to SCT’s improvement plan, with particular focus on the 17 recommendations from Ofsted’s inspection in 2017. The Board is well attended by key senior managers from our partnership.
- The Director of Children’s Services at SMBC has created a Children’s Strategic Commissioning Partnership, accountable to the Health and Wellbeing Board, recognising the need for close formal governance of the wider commissioning arrangements in Sandwell for children. This meeting includes representatives from Clinical Commissioning Group, Police, Public Health, the voluntary sector, education services, adults services, children’s early help commissioning and the children’s trust. The initial focus of this strategic group has been early years’ commissioning; but in recent months there have been productive conversations about how we can, from a wider perspective, tackle some of the underlying themes that we know about our families, such as the prevalence of alcohol misuse in certain town in Sandwell. The intention is to use our wider resources in the best way for our children and families as early as possible.
- Although expanded upon in the next section, we have completely transformed the way in which we, as a partnership, are tackling the exploitation of our most vulnerable children and young people. In addition, we have created a dedicated exploitation team, based within our ‘exploitation hub’ that straddles the line between our strategic and operational response to exploitation. It is here where senior leaders from across the partnership agree upon targeted geographical approaches to disrupting exploitation activity, and share important intelligence and well as ensuring that high risk individual young people are discussed with robust multi-agency support plans reviewed and strengthened.

- Alongside robust strategic conversations, we have worked hard to develop relationships at all levels within our partnership, which has gone a long way in helping us to work in a more joined-up, efficient and effective way. Examples of this are:
 - Chief Executive and Director participation in ADCS arrangements
 - Head of Service attendance at regional groups associated with their service areas.
 - Chief Executive and Director engagement with the judiciary to improve working relationship within the courts.
 - Strengthening of relationships between Team Managers and those wider professionals who are needed to attend strategy discussions and early help/targeted services.
 - Continued good relationships and use of partners within MASH.
 - Good relationships with partners at Adoption @ Heart
 - Involvement within the Black Country fostering feasibility project.
 - Engagement on national and regional programmes for learning and development.
 - The setting up of the headteacher reference group and health interface group
 - Working with the National College of Leadership

Participation Strategy

In the last 12 months, we have had a significant focus on developing our participation offer through our new strategy “How can ‘I’ help you?”, which was co-designed with young people. Within the strategy there are four sections: ‘Involve’, ‘Inform’, ‘Invest’ and ‘Influence’. These four areas capture all our planned activity around children’s participation. We see young people’s meaningful involvement as crucial in making sure our services are child focussed throughout our organisation and beyond.

Headlines from this important initiative are:

- We have developed the ‘ICONS’ programme, which is an umbrella framework for the work young people do with us to help us improve. The framework recognises some of our young people as consultants who are then equipped to work with us in the following areas:
 - Young auditors (Quality Assurance)
 - Recruitment (interviews and question setting)
 - The training and induction of staff and foster carers
 - The co-design of new services
- Young people co-designing and co-chairing Corporate Parenting Board, whereby half the sessions focus on young person’s engagement, and the other half focussing on ‘business’.
- The provision of multiple forums for young people to engage with the organisation, both regular and one-off special events. Examples of this are:
 - Children in Care (Voices of Sandwell)
 - Care Leavers forum
 - Youth justice forum
 - Housing summit
 - Children and Young People’s practice audit group
- Young people have hosted many of our events, which in addition to the staff conference and staff awards, also include child focussed events such as the Children in Care conference and the LACE awards.

- We co-designed a refreshed children’s rights booklet for young people, and have strengthened our processes in handling children’s complaints, again co-designing a new complaints form and meaningfully involving young people in our service design.
- We have developed a strong local offer for care leavers that is aspirational and seeks to offer true social mobility to our young adults. Although constantly evolving, the offer clearly sets out what we will provide to our young adults upon reaching 18. We are most proud of the work we have done with SMBC housing colleagues in securing priority one banding for housing for all of our young people who are in need of accommodation.
- With the aim of obtaining feedback from a wider group of young people that our ‘most engaged’ young people, we have sent out surveys to targeted groups of young people in order to influence our service delivery.

In line with our eventual aim to be a regional and national leader in this area, we are active members of the national care leavers benchmarking forum, have signed up to the care leavers covenant, and we hosted the West Midlands regional children in care conference to discuss and share best practice across the region. We have also influenced our wider partnership’s participation strategy, who have utilised the format of our strategy for the wider context.

Improvement Board

The improvement Board oversees the progress against the core Ofsted 17 recommendations outlined within our improvement plan. The board has continually overseen this progress across the partnership so that any improvements made in these areas are well understood and sustained. Within this financial year, the board has formally approved progress within the majority of these 17 areas.

Our improvement plan goes beyond these 17 areas, and the chairs of the improvement board have undertaken a range of activities to seek wider assurance.

The below table outlines our wider achievements throughout our second year in Sandwell Children’s Trust.

Key Milestones in SCT’s Improvement Journey 2019/20

Period	Milestones	Outputs
By July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COG social worker redeployed to Care Management and Children in Care, and replaced with senior Targeted Family Support Workers • Enhanced performance reporting in the front door and Targeted Services • Complete management review of Children in Need • DARAC briefing / training • Management impact workshops relating to assessments, planning, oversight and reflective supervision. • Beyond Auditing cycle 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploitation Team recruited. • New, clear expectations set for strategy discussions Trust wide. • Reporting mechanism strengthened to allow increased oversight from COG Team Managers. • New Core Training Offer released • Sandwell Youth Justice Plan for 2019/20
By October 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MARAC attended by one consistent senior staff member • Conference call facility installed within MASH • Horizons team fully staffed and in place. • Introduced 30 day timescales for initial TAF meetings • COG Team Managers now visiting schools in person once per month • Whole service learning event about key changes and developments to practice. • Launch of the learning hub • 100% moderation of quality audits • New Registered Manager for the fostering service • Securing of funding for the Summer Arts college • Submission of bid for the Youth Endowment Fund for additional MST resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MARAC process re-designed and launched, with changes to systems • Recordings for MARAC are now transparent, MARAC activity easily identified • Missing Return Home Interview timeliness and mapping information improved • Refined practice framework and practice model •
By January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference call facility and strategy discussion rooms created in CM and CIC • Scope widened for Horizons, MACE and exploitation HUB to over 18-year old’s known to SCT • Relaunch of the Signs of Safety programme • Training of in-house PAMS assessors • Development of Life Work materials and completion of programme to address backlog for adoption life story books and later life letters • Essex review of Edge of Care • Received a judgement of ‘Requires Improvement’ within the fostering inspection. • Round 3 - Management Oversight Impact Workshops held • Bid for MST additional resource was successful • Submitted ArtsMark application to the Arts Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate scrutiny offered to those children who require CE screening. • Contract of expectations for practice learning. • New Single Assessment form and connected carers viability assessment. • Completion of benchmarking audits for senior managers. • Statement of purpose for Private Fostering completed

Period	Milestones	Outputs
By April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full complement of permanent Heads of Service • Review of NFA outcome within Single Assessments, leading to changes to the system to support future work. • Allocations meetings within SAAT created, to review threshold of cases for allocation. • Beyond Auditing supported an uplift in practice within front door services. • Case load review enabled equitable distribution across COGs. • Care leavers need to know event for Practice Framework • Improved tracking of PLO and Pre-Proceedings • Set up of new MST E team, which is piloting the MST model with 14 year olds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refocusing of Family Solutions Team to more placement support and referral from open social care cases, with clearer boundaries around scope of work. • Became first Youth Offending Service in the country to receive and ArtsMark for efforts in quality arts provision. • Completion of the Youth Justice Board self-assessment, which underpins work for the next 12 months • COVID-19 response applied across the whole Trust, virtual meetings, visits, Pre-Visit Risk Assessments etc.

Section (b) - The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year

When the contract was put into place, Sandwell Children's Trust and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council agreed on a suite of fifteen Key Performance Indicators that would demonstrate improvement. These indicators, which are measured monthly, are outlined below along with agreed targets and tolerances.

Our overall approach to performance in our second year of operation has been to continue to fully understand our performance in key areas and interrogate our data in the right way to know where our strengths and areas of weakness are. This has allowed us to begin to genuinely tackle poor performance and make changes and improvements that are sustainable.

Across the year we have adjusted our performance reporting to respond to particular needs of the service, in February 2020, we refreshed our monthly performance book so that it was more aligned to service areas, and in March 2020 we developed automated dashboards to allow us to respond 'real-time' and understand the performance implications from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the course of the year, ten of the fifteen Key Performance Indicators have improved or been maintained above our target, three have remained broadly the same and two have declined. Particular areas of improvement are:

- The timeliness of our responses at the front door, the completion of assessments and convening of initial child protection conferences
- Near eradication of unallocated cases over 5 days
- Frequency of management oversight and supervision
- Timeliness and responses to missing episodes
- Outcomes of random case file audits

Those that have slightly declined or have stayed the same (but are within the agreed tolerance) are:

- The frequency of visits to children and the frequency at which children's plans are updated
- Average caseload

Those that have declined are:

- Vacancy rate
- Number of children subject of a child protection plan

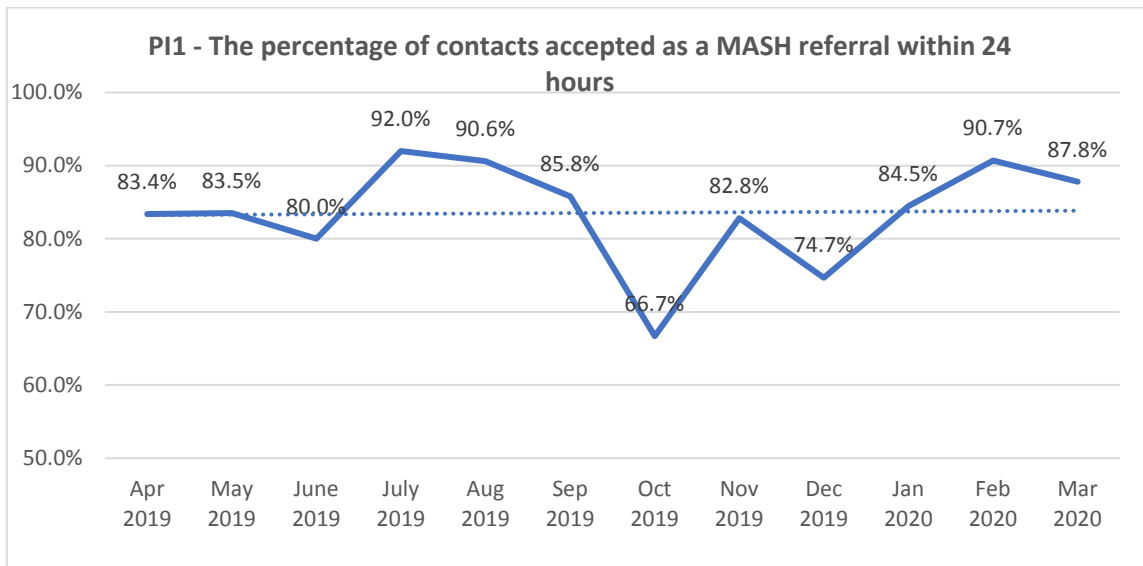
PI1 - The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours

Target: > 75%

Tolerance: > 65%

Failure: < 65%

This measure is important as it shows how efficiently our front door is operating and how quickly we are responding to referrals. The contacts that become a MASH referral are the more complex decisions that need to be made, in circumstances that are the least clear. Measuring this data shows how efficiently we are handling our complex referrals.



There was a clear dip in performance in October 2019 whereby the MASH partners were temporarily given additional responsibilities that impacted upon their capacity to undertake discussions in a timely way. This was a trial that was quickly recognised and addressed at the time. Notwithstanding this dip, performance across the year has been consistently better than our target of 75%.

PI2 - The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population.

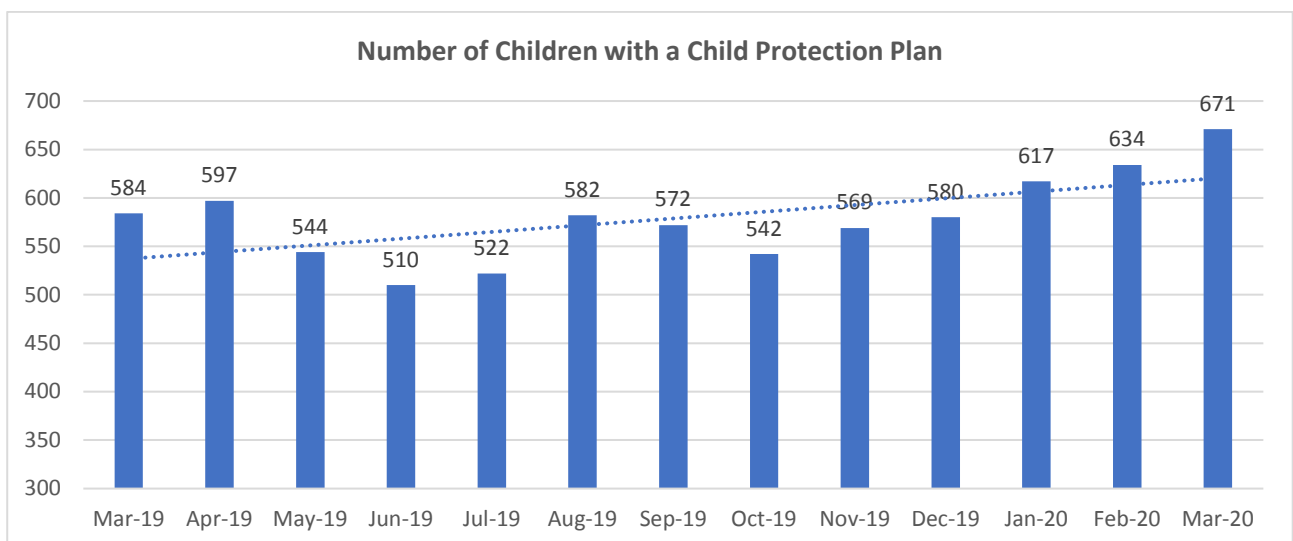
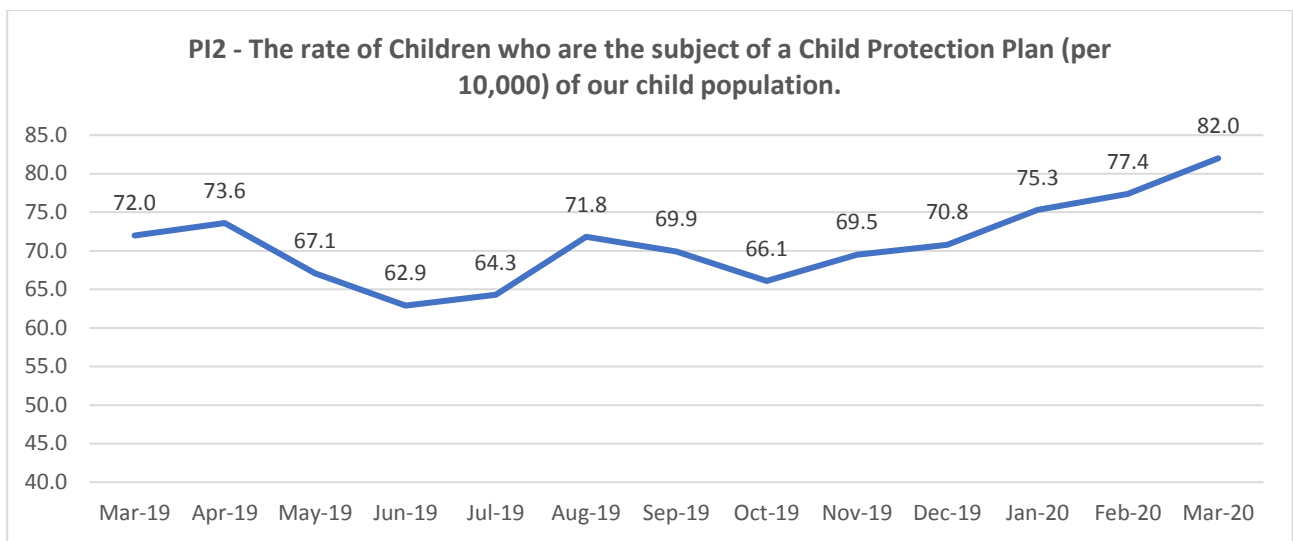
Target: < 65 children per 10,000

Tolerance: < 80 children per 10,000

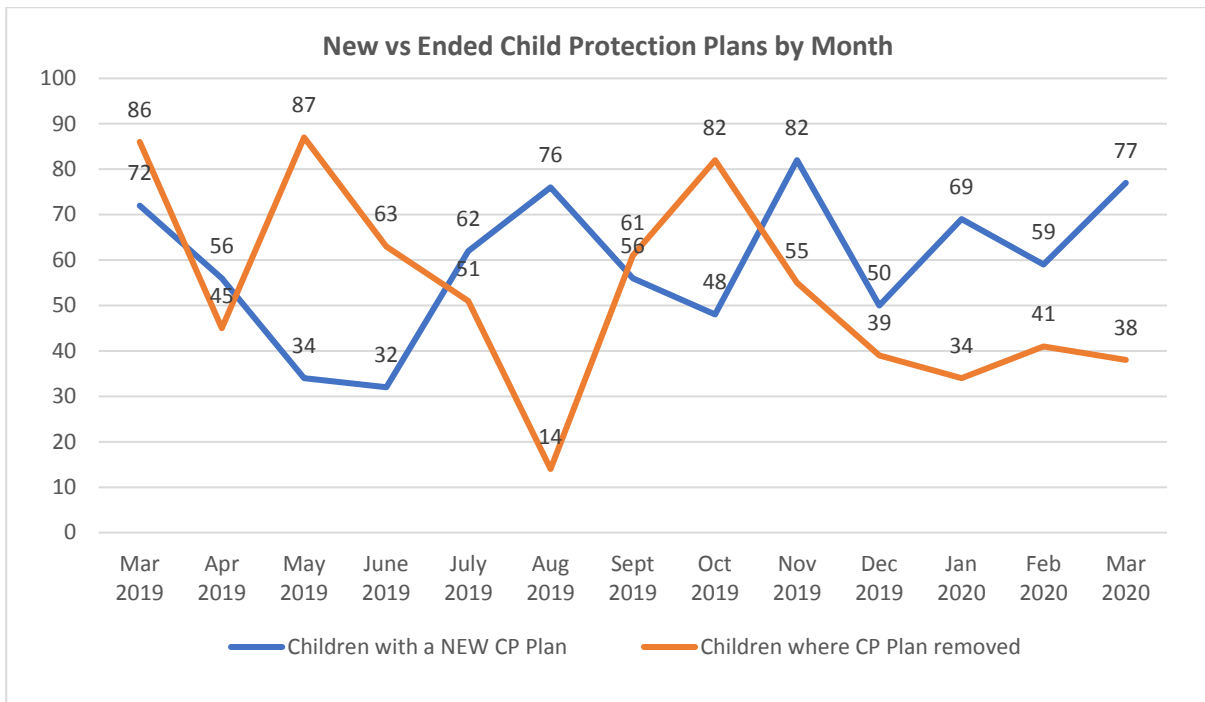
Failure: > 80 children per 10,000

This measure gives us a sense of our demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds for Child Protection. Our statistical neighbour average is 53.9 and the England average is 43.7 (measured at the end of the financial year 2018/19).

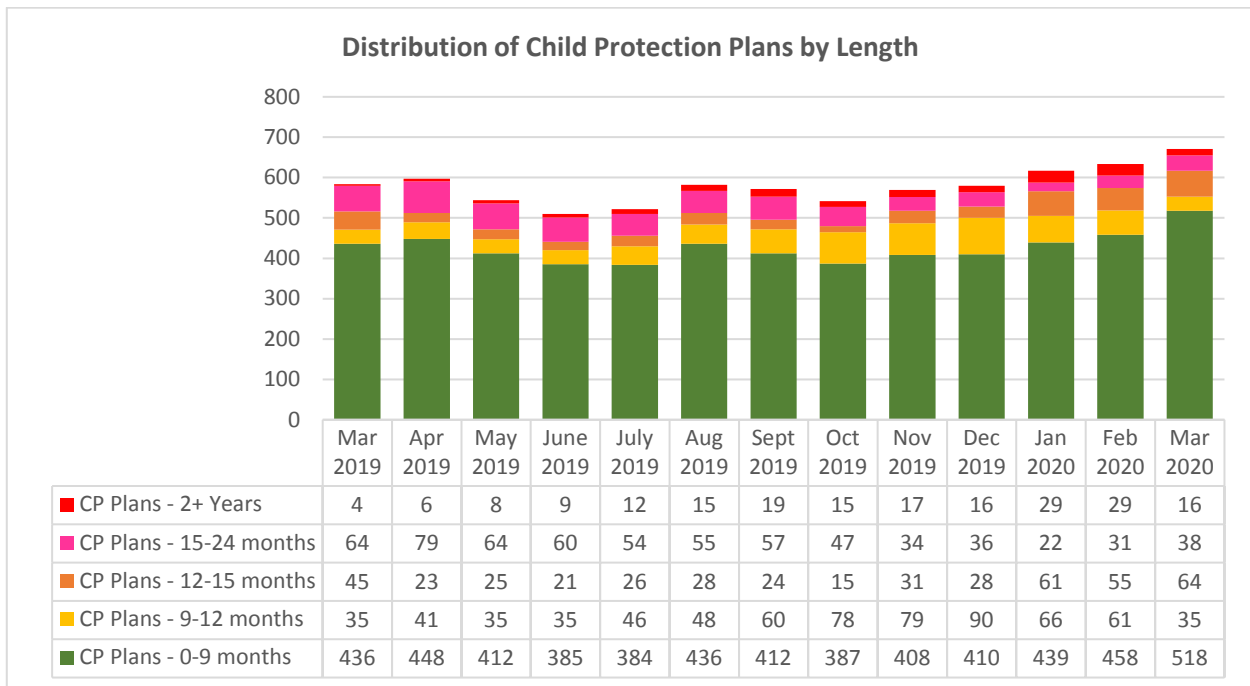
This measure has increased over the course of the year from 72 children per 10,000 of our population (584 children in total) to 82 (671), with dips in June and October 2019. It is noted that when the Trust commenced, there were 798 children with a CP plan, which was 99.93 children per 10,000.



We have recognised that the number of children placed on a Child Protection Plan has increased consistently throughout the last 5 months of the year, highlighted by the graph below, showing entries onto a CP plan higher than exits.



The graph below also demonstrated a marked increase in children who have been the subject of a Child Protection Plan for over 2 years.



As a result of this, concerted efforts have been made to formally review all children who have been the subject of a Child Protection Plan for more than 9 months, and we have put into place more management checks and balances, particularly in relation to ensuring consistency of threshold for holding a CP conference.

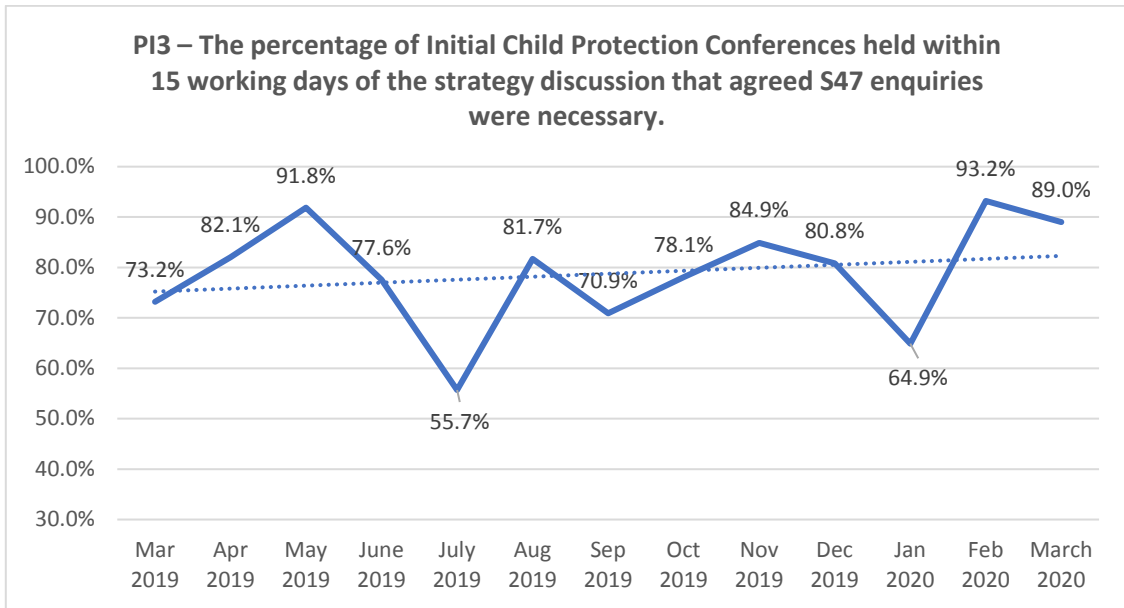
PI3 – The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary.

Target: > 80%

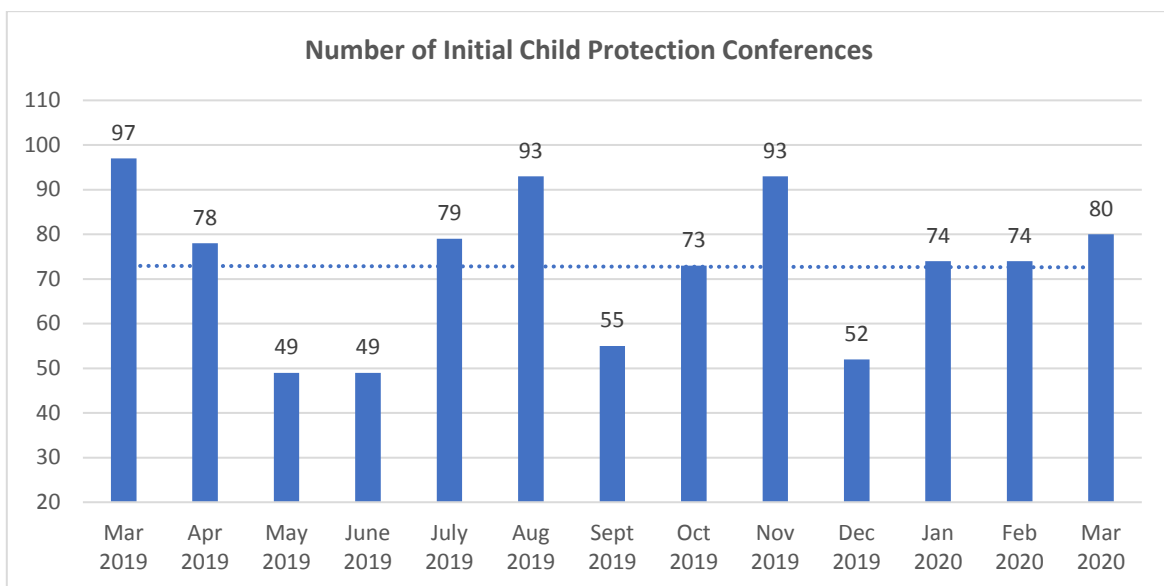
Tolerance: >65%

Failure: < 65%

This measure shows how efficiently we are completing S47 enquiries and organising Initial Child Protection Conferences. It gives us a sense of how we are managing demand in this area and how quickly we can bring together a group of professionals to make decisions for children who are potentially at risk of significant harm.



Variation in performance is high with this measure, since one out of timescale Child Protection Conference with a large family can impact significantly. Below is the number of children whose situation was discussed within an Initial Child Protection Conference.



Although there is an upward trend in performance, there are clear dips in July 2019 and January 2020. This was due to a combination of factors, including:

- An increase in s47 enquires within these months, some not completed within the 5 working days necessary to hold a well-planned conference
- Late requests by social workers or poor preparedness
- Rearranged due to parental unavailability
- Some examples of unforeseen circumstances leading the chair to be unavailable

All of these reasons indicated a need for better organisation, thus a cross-cutting service plan of action was put into place, leading to an immediate improvement.

PI4 - The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days

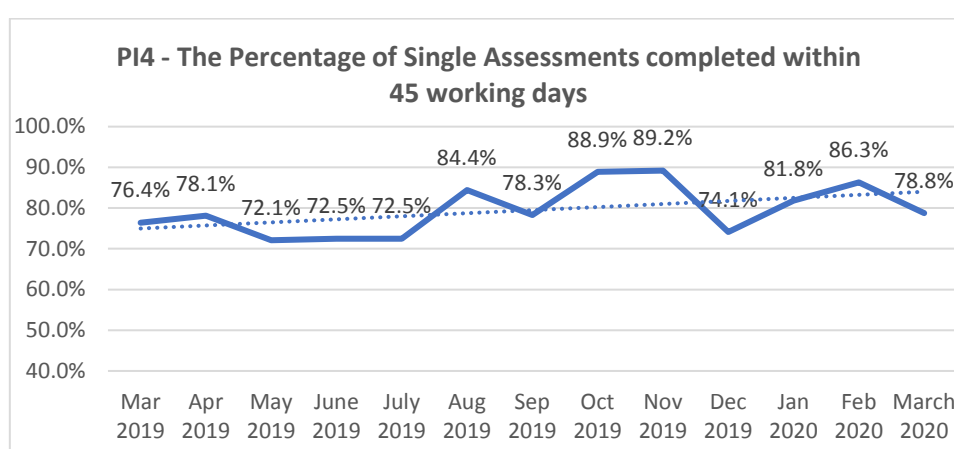
Target: > 85%

Tolerance: >75%

Failure: < 75%

This measure shows how timely our Single Assessments are (in line with the statutory maximum expectation of 45 working days). Single Assessments are mainly completed by Social Workers within the Safeguarding and Assessment Teams (SAAT), but we now undertake more 'update' assessments so that we can review plans in a more informed way, and more in line with children's changing needs.

Quarter	Q2 18-19	Q3 18-19	Q4 18-19	Q1 19-20	Q2 19-20	Q3 19-20	Q4 19-20
Number of Assessments completed	1097	1220	1600	1645	1714	1,542	1,713



As can be seen, the trend across the financial year is an improving one, and within the last six months have been in line or above our comparators, which are:

- West Midland average is 80.6% for Q4 2019/20
- Statistical Neighbour Average is 77.9%
- England Average is 83.1%

This improvement in timeliness has been seen despite significant difficulties with recruitment within the Safeguarding and Assessment Teams, who undertake the majority of assessments. The demand in this area of the service is constantly kept under review. Below is a service, by service breakdown of this indicator:

Team	Q1 2019/20	Q2 2019/20	Q3 2019/20	Q4 2019/20
SAAT	1046/1266 (82.6%)	1043/1255 (83.1%)	971/1135 (85.6%)	1081/1302 (83.0%)
Care Management	147/238 (61.8%)	195/272 (71.7%)	219/253 (86.6%)	280/340 (82.4%)
Children in Care Service	30/165 (18.2%)	27/83 (32.5%)	10/34 (29.4%)	27/37 (73.0%)
Children with Disabilities	44/57 (77.2%)	60/97 (61.9%)	31/39 (79.5%)	19/30 (63.3%)

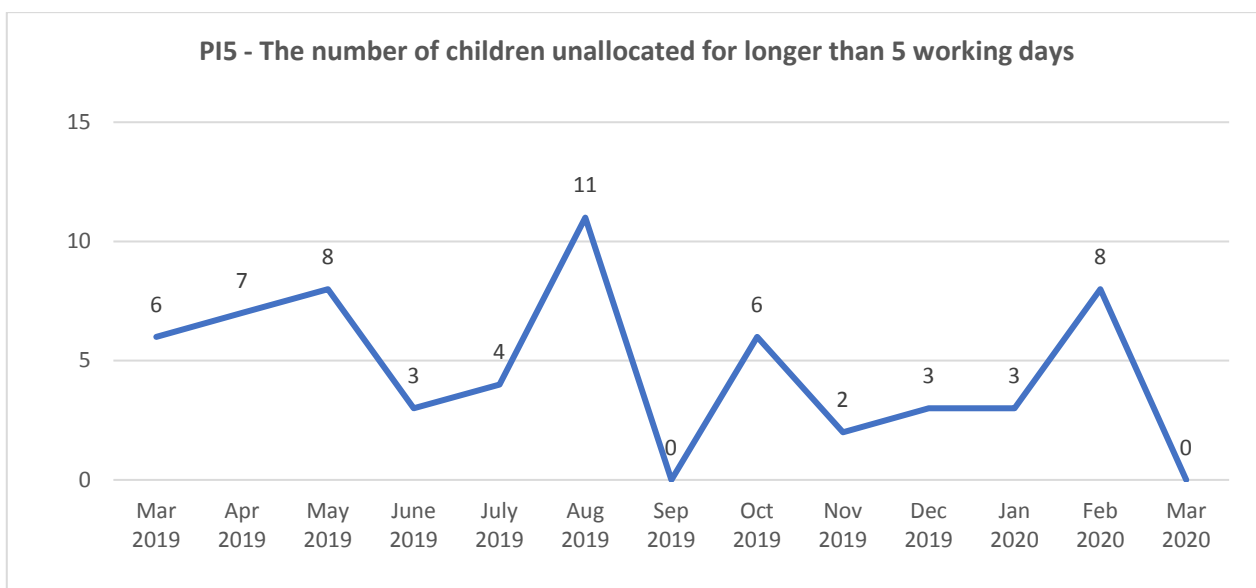
PI5 - The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days

Target: < 10

Tolerance: <30

Failure: >30

This measure helps to demonstrate how well we have oversight on every child's situation, and how well we are handling throughput at the Front Door and other transfer points. Poor performance in this area would mean children do not have a social worker for lengthy periods of time, which could be a dangerous situation. There are circumstances where having children unallocated for a short period of time is reasonable, but this should be kept to a minimum.



As can be seen unallocated cases has consistently been better than our target over the last 12 months (apart from August 2019). Where there have been cases unallocated for over five working days, this has been attributed to staff who had left the service and awaiting reallocation. At no point this year have any of the unallocated cases 'rolled over' to the next month.

The refined processes we have in place for allocations and transfers are working and have been sustained. Daily reporting on this measure enables the trust to have robust oversight and the improvement consultant reviews this list daily to resolve issues with team managers.

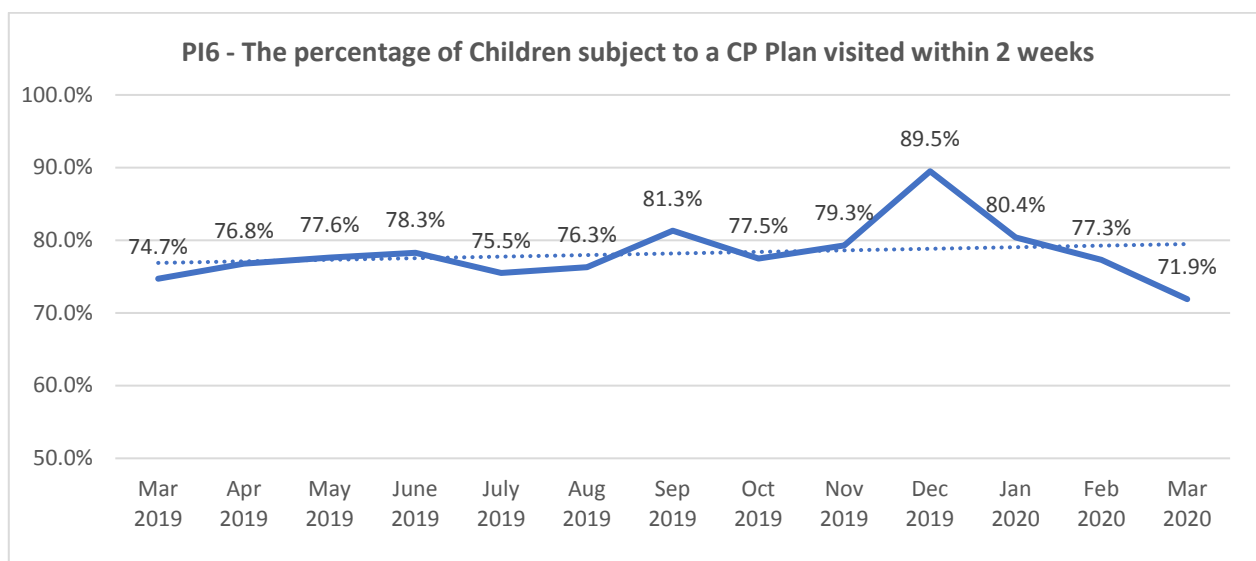
PI6 - The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks

Target: > 80%

Tolerance: >70%

Failure: < 70%

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child Protection. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child Protection Plan at least every 2 weeks. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention and safeguarding.



Performance over the course of the year has improved, but in Quarter 4 it began to dip to 71.9% at the end of the year. There continues to be progress in how many days visits are outside of timescales, and exceptions. For example, in April 2019 the average number of days out of timescale was 10.7 days, and March 2020 this had improved to 7.1 days. Examples of reasons visits have not been completed within expected timescales are:

- Unborn children (who do not meet the 'seen alone' criteria)
- Children who have been taken on holiday or out of the country by parents

This remains an area of continuous focus as the core work of the service is centred around this activity; this has been tackled through a mixture of increased management oversight, performance monitoring and seeking manageable caseloads.

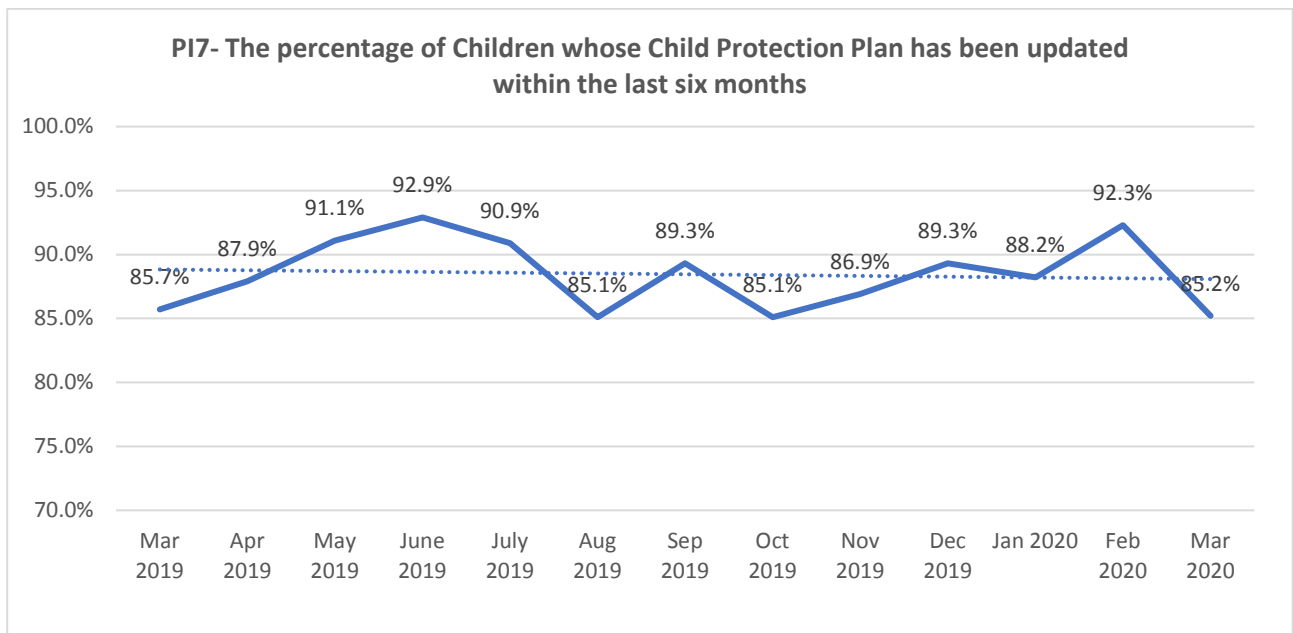
PI7- The percentage of Children whose Child Protection Plan has been updated within the last six months

Target: > 95%

Tolerance: >85%

Failure: < 85%

This indicator shows how often we are reviewing children’s plans and our interventions with families. Good performance in this area would show we are ensuring our interventions are having the desired impact, and making changes where warranted.



Although there is some variation across the year, with peaks of almost 93%, the trend is relatively static at around 88% of plans updated within the previous six months. Better performance coincides with concerted efforts to record Core Group meetings that have already taken place, which suggests that some plans are reviewed without it being reflected on a child’s file (or indeed shared with a family). Activity to improve performance has been to

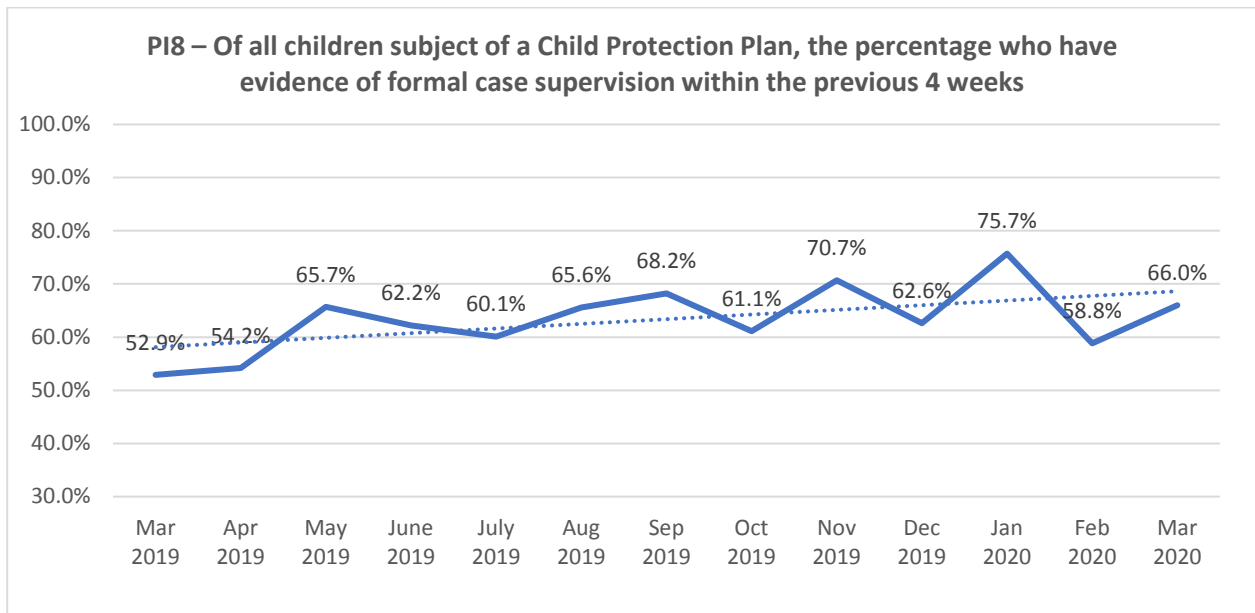
PI8 – Of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the percentage who have evidence of formal case supervision within the previous 4 weeks

Target: > 65%

Tolerance: >50%

Failure: < 50%

This measure helps to demonstrate formal management oversight for this cohort of children. Good performance in this area shows that Team Managers are regularly considering progress in these cases and providing social workers the opportunity for reflection on a case by case basis.



The trend in performance across the year has been an improving one, moving into our target zone six times over the course of the year. However, month by month the performance has been variable. This is a key measure for our Care Management service, which has suffered from changes in managers at all levels, including the Head of Service. With permanent senior managers now in place, and a context of reduced caseload, there has been a consistency of approach within the last 3-6 months. Plans are in place to tackle consistent underperformers.

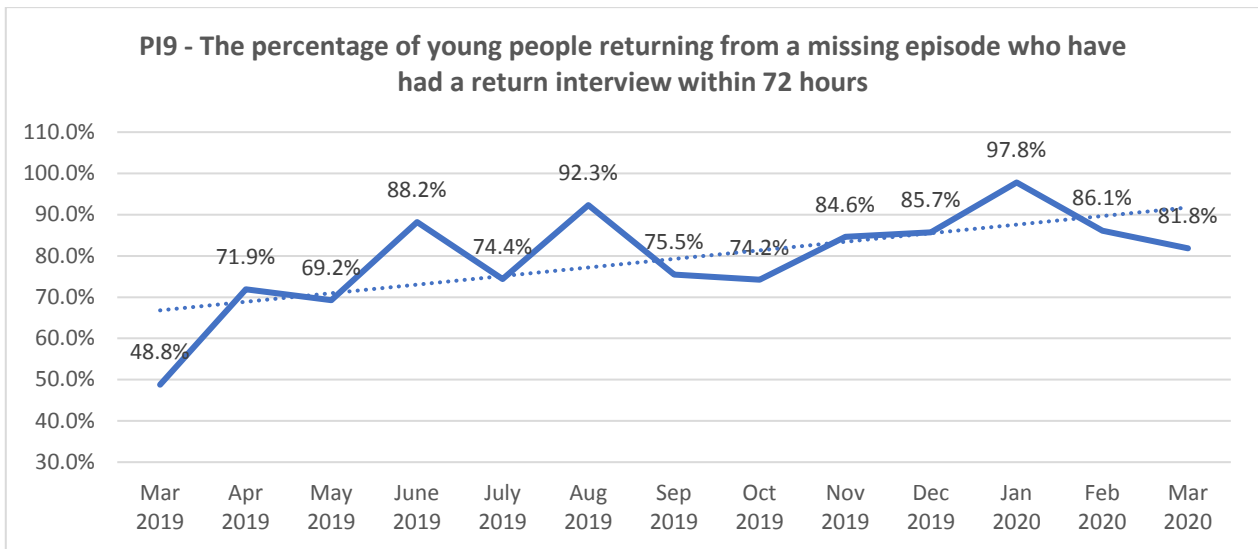
PI9 - The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours

Target: > 70%

Tolerance: > 50%

Failure: < 50%

This measure helps to understand how well we are responding to children at risk of exploitation after they return from being missing. Good performance would mean we are gathering information / intelligence from children at the earliest opportunity that would help us safeguard them better in the future and build more accurate intelligence.



Whilst there is a variable picture across the year, performance is much improved due to the creation of a new Horizons Team, who keep track of all missing and exploited children and young people, undertake return home interviews, and act as a co-worker to support and advise social workers and targeted family support workers. This was previously a commissioned service; bringing this function 'in-house' has given the Trust more control over this service.

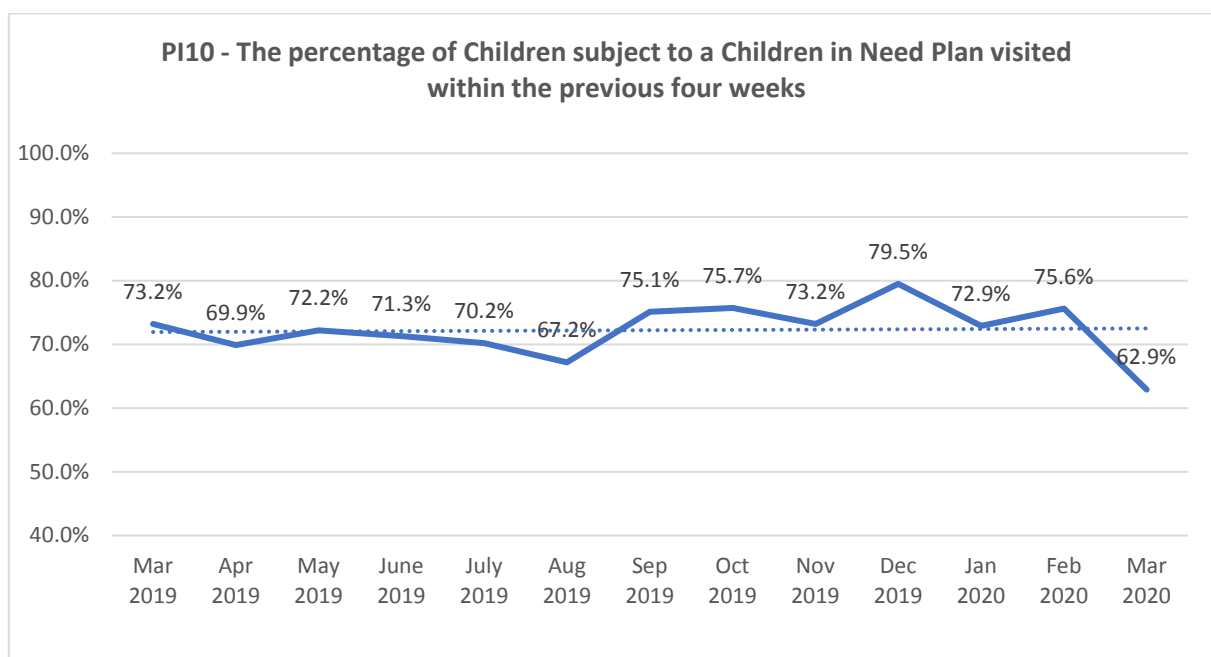
PI10 - The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks

Target: > 73%

Tolerance: > 58%

Failure: < 58%

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child in Need. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child in Need Plan at least every 4 weeks. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention, and prevention of the need for safeguarding.



Throughout the course of the year, performance has been relatively static, although we had made some progress in the second half of the year, where performance was consistently over 70%. The reduction in March 2020 was the initial impact of the COVID-19 crisis, where social workers were adapting and making arrangements for virtual visiting.

Further progress in this area 'in-year' is hidden within the detail - particularly how many days visits are outside of timescales, and exceptions. For example, in April 2019 the average number of days out of timescale was 25.8 days, and March 2020 this had improved to 12.3 days.

As part of the constant review of demand, Senior Managers reviewed Children in Need on several occasions across the year to ensure progression, which led to a number of closures.

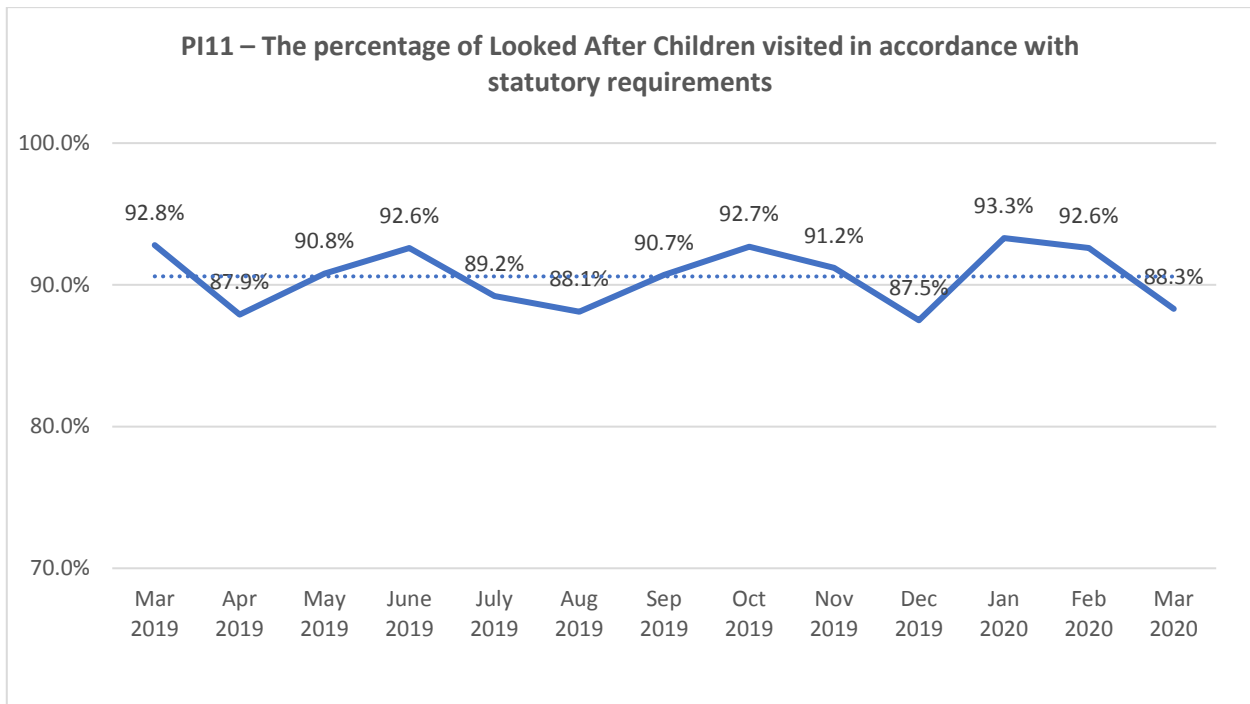
PI11 – The percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements

Target: > 90%

Tolerance: > 80%

Failure: < 80%

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with our Looked After Children. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is defined by statute. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance helps to show we have established relationships with our Looked After Children, know their needs and meet their needs.



Good performance has been maintained over the course of the year, and has been above 90% for eight months of the year. The reduction in March 2020 was the initial impact of the COVID-19 crisis, where social workers were adapting and making arrangements for virtual visiting.

PI12 - The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales

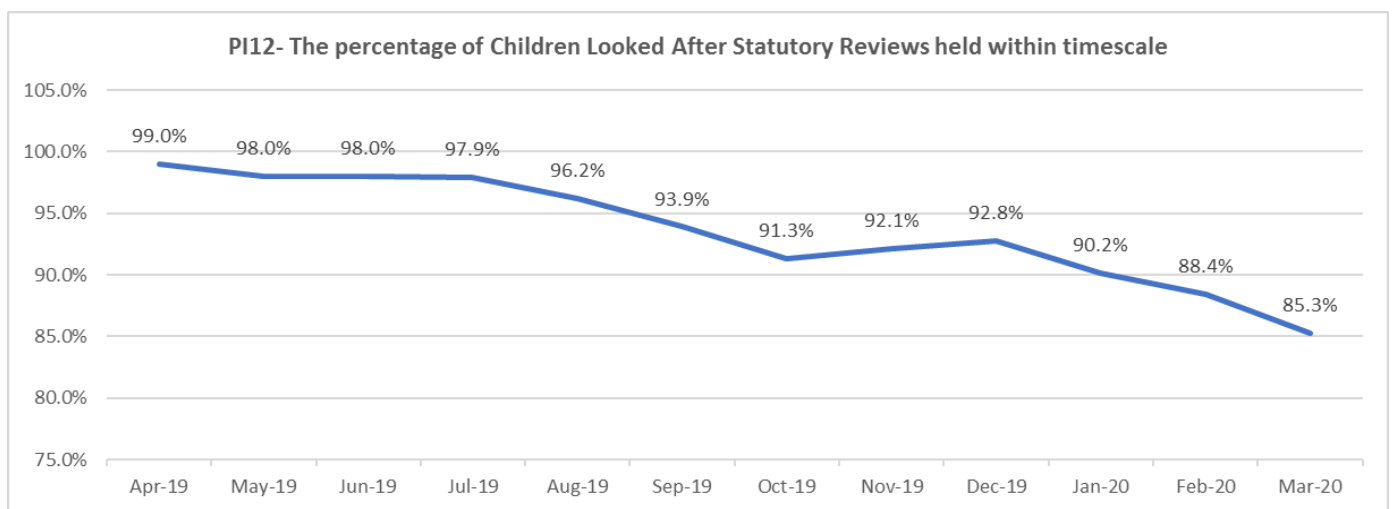
Target: > 80%

Tolerance: > 70%

Failure: < 70%

This measure shows the timeliness of Looked After Children reviews, and contributes to our understanding of how well we monitor the progress of Looked After Children's plans, and ensure that we are doing what we say we will. Good performance in this area will show that we independently review children's plans on a regular basis, at least every 6 months.

This contract measure follows the DfE indicator, whereby if one Looked After Child Review is held outside of timescales within the year, we count that as negative for the rest of that year.



There will always be a downward trend for this indicator as over the course of the year we start with 100% of reviews in timescale, and then when a single review is out of timescale it is then applied every month until the measure starts again in April the following year. The only time when performance can increase, is when we have new children in care, and their reviews are in timescale.

The year-end position of 85.3% is well above our target.

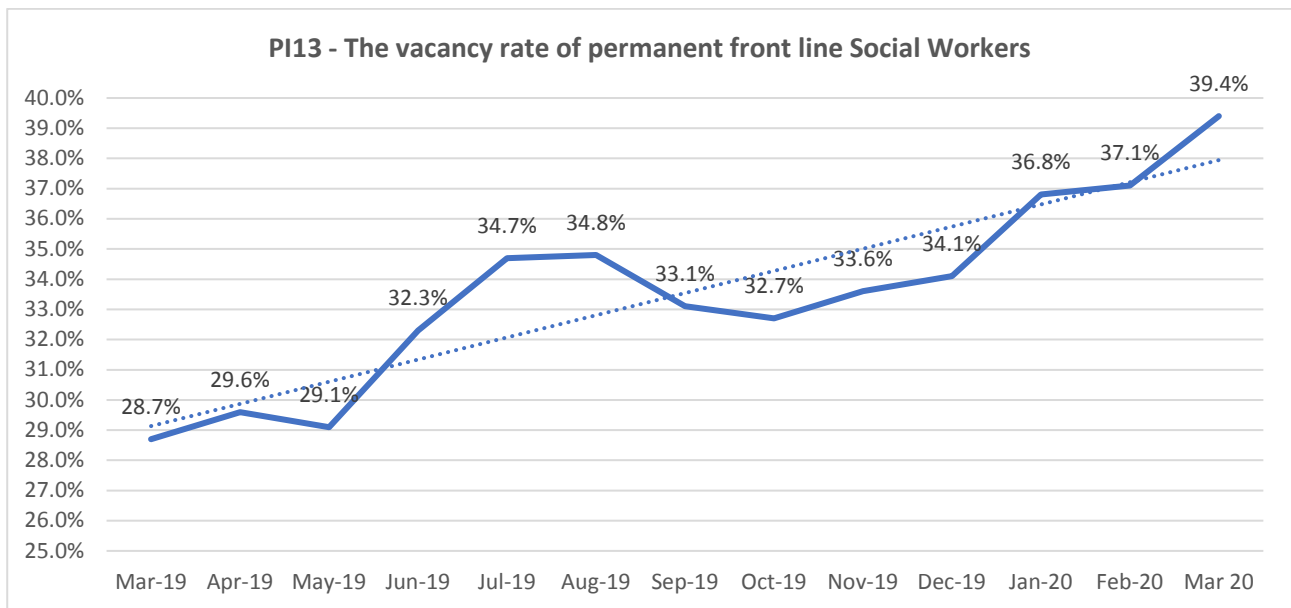
PI13 - The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers

Target: < 32%

Tolerance: < 37%

Failure: > 37%

This measure helps us to determine the stability of our case holding workforce. Whilst agency social workers are essential for an organisation to quickly meet fluctuations in demand, a stable, permanent workforce is also critical for long term improvement.



This year the new establishment figure is 222.5 due to the increase of 7 FTE social workers within the fostering service. The trend of permanent vacancies has increased significantly throughout the year, as at 31 March 2020, the Trust had 204.94 social workers which is 15.06 below establishment, and 87.56 permanent vacancies (amounting to 39.4%).

Although 70 posts were filled by agency staff, over half have been with the Trust for over 6 months and nearly 20% have been with the Trust for over a year.

Recruiting on a permanent basis in the social worker market place is notoriously difficult. A lack of candidates with what is deemed sufficient experience together with capped pay rates in a crowded geographical area where our competitors are seemingly able to 'cherry pick' their candidates combined with a lack of pipeline into the sector adds to the complexity and challenge to attract 'good enough' social workers to want to work at Sandwell Childrens Trust.

Our recruitment and retention approach is constantly under review, and is one of our highest priorities, broad actions we are taking are:

- More efficient recruitment processes to make it easier for potential new applicants to interview quickly.
- Activity for wider national advertisement
- Relationships with multiple recruiters are maintained, including those with international links.
- Focused strategic agency to permanent conversion events.

- Taking advantage of the 'Social Work Together' programme, to bring social workers back into the profession.
- We have increased permanence within our senior leadership and management.
- We have increased our Social Care Assistants and Personal Advisors to support with the daily SW tasks.
- Caseloads have reduced to the second lowest in the last 12 months.
- We are in the progress of making changes to the processes around Senior SW Progression to make it streamlined.
- We have a good ASYE support offer which is delivered through a dedicated learning and development team, which is being strengthened to move into a social work academy with more of an emphasis on continued learning for ASYE's.
- Our Learning and Development Offer is comprehensive and considers the needs of social workers alongside their non-social worker colleagues.
- We have a management and leadership programme in place to strengthen all levels of management, and to ensure continuous professional development.

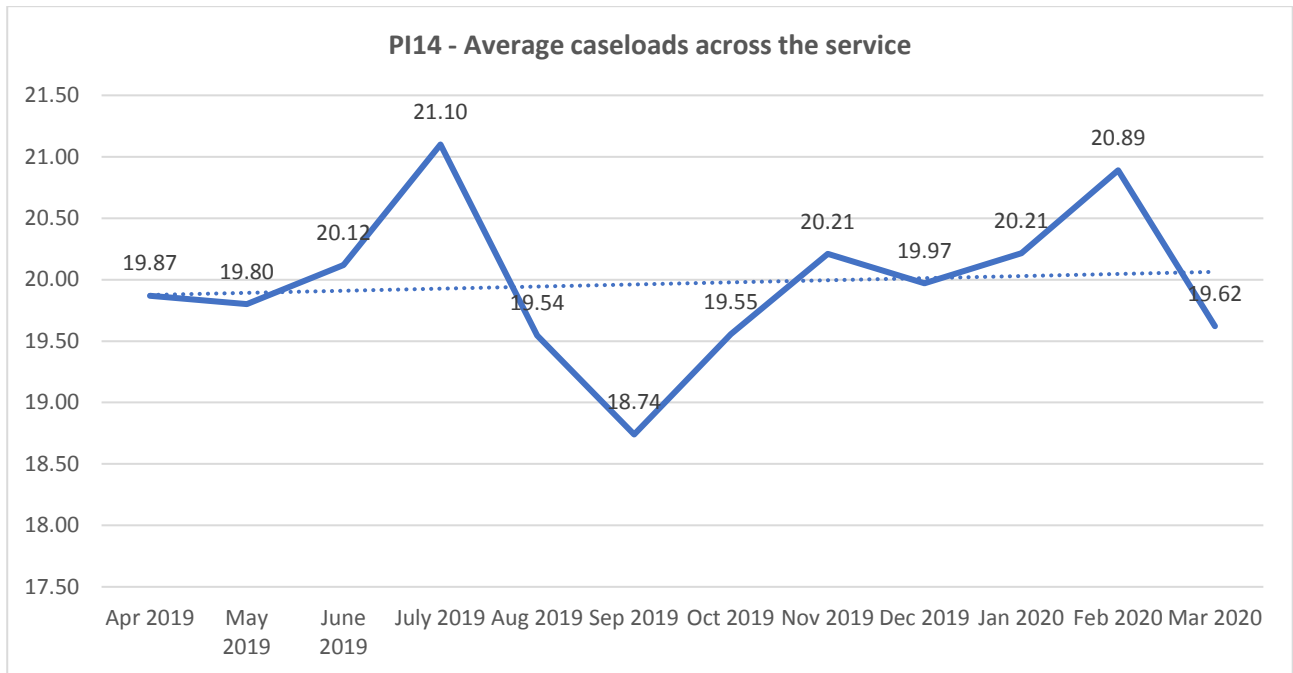
PI14 - Average caseloads across the service

Target: < 18.5

Tolerance: <23%

Failure: > 23%

This measure helps us to understand the changing demand within our organisation so that we can target our recruitment and retention activities, and adjust our establishment.



Demand considerations are broken down in the previous section. Nevertheless, the graph above demonstrates the variation across the year, starting and finishing at a similar point (19.87 in April 2019 to 19.62 in March 2020), but with a low of 18.74 and a high of 21.1 cases per worker.

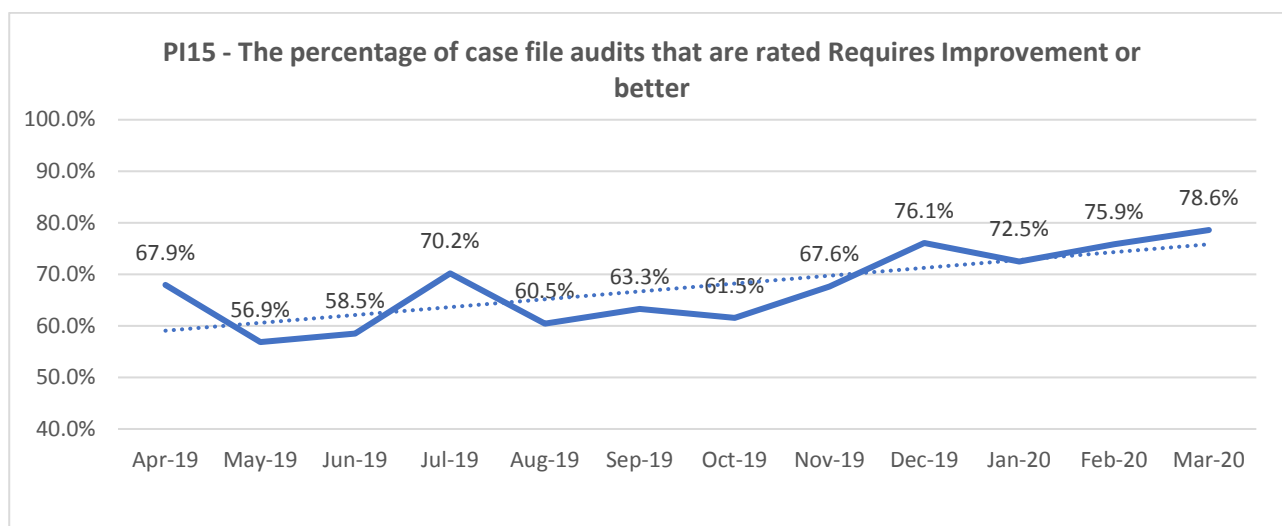
PI15 - The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better

Target: > 55%

Tolerance: > 40%

Failure: < 40%

This is a very important indicator as it shows the progress of practice improvement across audited case files. Good performance is an indication that out assessments, plans and interventions with children and families are improving.



There is a trend of improvement in this measure across the year from 67.9% in April 2019 to 78.6% in March 2020. Compared to last year's average of 60.2%, this improvement is marked. It is clear that based upon the overall judgements of these audits that our practice is firmly at least 'Requires Improvement', which has been our aim at this stage in our improvement journey.

Overall

This year we have seen significant improvement in the vast majority of these performance areas, which alongside our improvements in practice is heartening. Staff and managers have worked hard to maintain good performance and understand that compliance against national and local targets is one way of demonstrating consistency in our offer to children and families. From a wider perspective, the following is a summary of other areas of key performance within the year:

- Around 24.4% of our referrals were re-referrals. This figure has remained consistent during the 12 months. Sandwell's re-referral figure remains in line with all three comparators.
- The Percentage of children with a CIN plan for more than 9+ months (excluding Care leavers, NRPF -no recourse to public funds) decreased across the year (from 28.1% to 17.6%)
- The number of children in care with 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months has decreased across the year, although as a percentage of the total CIC cohort this has remained the same (as we have reduced the number of children in care).

- Across the course of the year, 70% or more of our Looked After Children between the ages of 5 and 16 have had a Personal Education Plan updated within the previous term. In the summer term of 2019 this figure was 86.5%.
- The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted is 480 days – better than all of our comparators.
- The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family was 241 days – lower than our statistical neighbours (257 days).
- On average, 55% of Care leavers were engaged in Employment, Education and Training, 5% higher than our comparators.

Areas that require more focus are:

- The percentage of S47 enquiries completed within 5 working days is variable across the year, averaging 65.4%. We would want this to be consistently above 70%.
- The average length of concluded care proceedings peaked at 55.5 weeks in August 2019, and although it returned to 35.9 weeks by the end of the year, this is still above the 26-week national target.
- On average, 86.7% of Children in Care have an updated Care Plan within the previous six months, which is slightly below our own target of 90%.
- 25.8% of children adopted in the year waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, which is lower than all comparators.
- Across the year there were 7 mainstream foster carer approvals with 17 mainstream de-registrations, which was a net deficit of 10 carers.

Raw performance does not tell the whole story, but it provides an insight into where we can look further for assurance. Staff attitude to performance and compliance is positive.

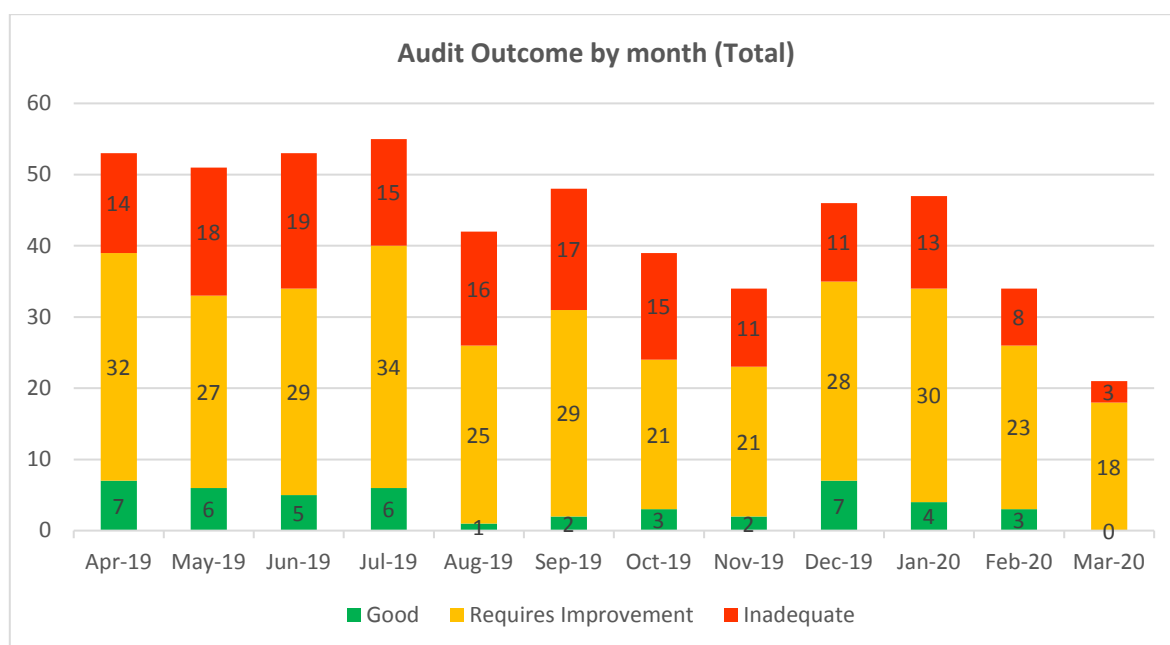
Section (c) - The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year

Quality Assurance and Auditing

Alongside knowing ourselves from a performance perspective, we continue to work to ensure we are interrogating the quality of our own practice. We utilise performance intelligence to develop lines of enquiry, and deploy resource to test these out through dip sampling and direct work with service areas. Learning from auditing and the resultant activity to ensure practice improvement are key to making sure the work we do is as good as it can be now and in the future.

We have a contractual obligation to audit 90 random case files every three months (which is 360 every year).

In 2019/20, 527 Audits were completed, which gives a coverage of around 15% of our total cases. Over the course of 2018/19 the percentage of cases rated as Requires Improvement or Better has been variable, but has improved. On average, 68% of cases have been rated RI or better, which is an improvement from 60% last year.



Themes across all case file audits have been:

Note about COVID 19 pandemic: Whilst this presents as a significant challenge for personal safety of both staff and clients, our services to children and families have been largely maintained.

Front Door and responses to referrals:

- Audits consistently tell us that children who are being referred to the Trust for safeguarding and support are usually receiving the right service at the right time due to robustness of our front door response in terms of timeliness and accuracy of threshold decision making.
- Audits have consistently identified safeguarding in the front door as an area of strength.
- Audits have found that most assessments need to be strengthened in order to be consistently good.

- Audits have consistently informed us that our assessments and plans often do not reflect an understanding of the cultural needs and diversity of children and their families in relation to the concerns that have been raised.
- Audits have also identified that if more meaningful direct work is completed with children, information from partner agencies appropriately is triangulated supported by more meaningful chronology and voice of child, this supports a much richer understanding of a child's lived experience supporting better identification of risk and vulnerability which informs the plan.
- Through the support of the Horizons Team, we are now better evidencing relationship-based approaches to form relationships with children so that in time, they are able to form trusting relationships with workers, and feel more able to share their wishes, feelings, experiences and concerns.
- Exploitation risk assessments being completed by the Horizons team are of a better quality, and timely interventions from the team has led to several young people being well supported and thereby their risks reduced significantly.

Care Management

- Auditing has consistently identified that assessments, plans and reviews required improvements. There is a need to complete more meaningful direct work to understand the lived experience of children, and intervene to make a difference to children's lives.
- However, there were some good examples of single assessments and parenting assessments being completed by care management in quarter 4.
- Audits identify that Care Management need to build strong working relationship with families and complete in-depth assessments, especially around issues of neglect, DV, contextual safeguarding (Gangs, county lines, CSE etc), and parental substance misuse
- Audit findings identify that another area of concern was participation from CAMHS in children's assessments and planning.
- Audits have highlighted that whilst CIN and LAC planning require an overall improvement, our CP planning requires most attention in terms of timeliness and quality.
- The quality of case supervision afforded to social workers (and recorded) could be significantly improved in many teams within this service, although the positive impact of management oversight workshops could be seen throughout the year.

Children in Care Service

- Visits to children in care is an area of strength helped by consistency in social workers for majority of their cases. As a result, there is a clear correlation between more frequent visits and better quality of information sharing between the child and social worker is much more meaningful and effective.
- Audits identify that we understand and know what life is like for our children in care. However, we need to ensure we maintain the same quality and consistency of our case recording which is variable in its quality.
- There are some good examples of direct work with children and young people, but this requires a more consistent approach across the service.
- We are aspirational for our children in many cases, particularly Personal Advisors within the Leaving Care service.
- The Children in Care and Leaving Care service also need to complete regular assessments to understand the continuing needs of our looked after children.
- Pathway assessments are not routinely completed close to a YPs sixteenth birthday, and do not always seek to include their views, and any need for transition planning.

- Audits have highlighted that whilst relevant partners are now increasingly identified as part of plans and review processes, meaningful partnership focussed on achieving outcomes for children and young people needs to be strengthened.
- Audits have highlighted that more work is required in the area of permanency planning, life story work and ambition in care planning.

Fostering Service

- Audits demonstrate good progress across the year from a very low base.
- Timeliness of assessments is improving and increased management oversight during assessing period is visible on file.
- The quality of assessments continues to require development; whilst there are some good elements noted within audit activity, the quality should be consistent.
- Those cases in IRM have been progressed and case files evidence update and outcome.
- Virtual panel arrangements have been made to ensure service continues to be delivered. Observation of panel evidenced some good elements of reflection and decision making.
- Mid-point assessment reviews do not take place consistently enough.
- Further work on management oversight at the point of allocation of assessments, with projected dates is required.

Safeguarding Unit (IRO and Conference Chairs)

- Audits across the year have found inconsistency in the frequency and quality of IRO visits to children, and ensuring the visit is linked to the child's placement and their plan.
- However, when there is IRO/CC contact and input, there is evidence to demonstrate their efforts that are being made to understand the lives of children and solicit their participation in their plans.
- Audits also find that there is a need to improve not only children's participation in their conferences and reviews, but also the overall quality of the plans, with plans needing to be child centred and demonstrate our ambition for our children.
- Audits also identify that plans are not always relevant, child centred and address the root causes of problems, and can focus on presenting concerns.

Targeted Services

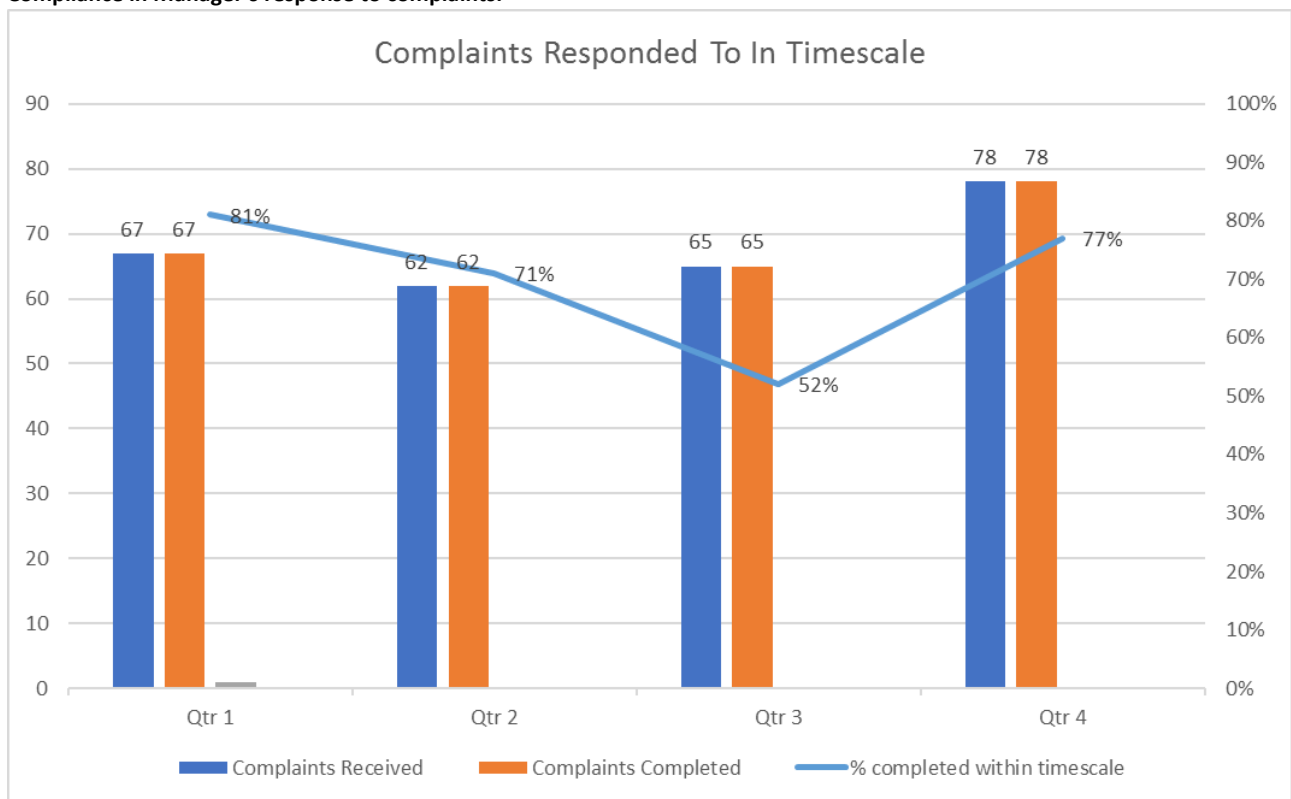
- Audit findings demonstrate that children and families have a good working relationship with their workers, and their views and wishes are largely captured effectively and in a timely manner.
- Audits have identified that workers invest time in understanding the lived experience of children using a variety of direct work initiatives.
- The processes and arrangements for stepping down to Targeted Service could be strengthened in a number of cases that were audited.
- Many cases that were referred into social care could have been dealt with earlier through a more robust TAF plan and a strong lead professional.
- Audits show that Targeted Services are making efforts to strengthen their supervisions to include reflective discussions with a view to supporting children effectively.
- The quality of assessments and threshold application at the time of transfer of cases to TS is judged to be largely in the Good or RI category, although assessments and plans could be further strengthened by the involvement of fathers.
- Whilst firmly within the RI / Good space, audits have identified that the quality of plans and reviews can be lifted further by ensuring robust multi agency participation and input to the children's plans.

YOS

- Audit findings demonstrate that children and families have a good working relationship with their workers, and their views and wishes are largely captured effectively and in a timely manner.
- YOS is delivering services to a high standard, and managers are able to reflect on further improvements that they can make to improve outcomes for young people.
- Supervision and management oversight is an area of strength, which also provides confidence in the service. Workers are committed and invest time and effort to ensure young people are well supported using a network of support services.
- Audits completed in the YOS service have consistently demonstrated strong performance in the quality of assessment and intervention being provided to children and families known to the service. The audits also identify ways to lift practice and support to young people in more creative ways, which ensures that the audit is used as a learning audit and a window back into practice.

Customer Feedback / Learning from Complaints

Compliance in Manager's response to complaints.



The current annual performance (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020) of all complaints answered within timescales is 71% compared to the performance of the previous year, which was 56%. This is positive especially as the past year has seen a real focus on strengthening business processes to improve compliance whilst simultaneously implementing a whole change in the way we operate as a function. In the summer of 2019 we introduced a new process for responding to complaints from children and young people. Senior Managers offer to meet with children and young people who make a complaint. The Principal Social Worker also writes to the child/young person to acknowledge their complaint, provides them with the name of the manager leading on their complaint and the timescales for when they should expect to be contacted. As part of this process the Participation Team undertake closing the loop activity with the young person.

We also put in place a mechanism to capture and log informal feedback made by children and young people. The process is managed by the complaints team, with the Participation Team undertaking closing the loop activity.

In late summer we introduced a mediation process for those complainants who remain unsatisfied with the response to their stage one complaint. Between summer and 31 March 2020, we received 18 requests to progress to a stage 2 complaint; 11 of the 18 were successfully resolved through mediation, two progressed to a stage 2 complaint and five are currently in progress. There is further work to do to tighten this process, this is included within our improvement plan.

Our programme of work has also included designing and delivering a training programme for managers, IROs and CP Chairs, in collaboration with the Children's Society, to raise awareness of the new processes we had put in place as well as training on how to respond effectively to complaints, including those made by children. The training also had a focus on the quality of complaints responses. The training provided an opportunity to consult with managers and use their feedback and ideas to help shape our service as we continue making improvements. The first cohort of training was delivered to approximately 45 managers.

We were reviewed by our improvement partner, Doncaster Children's Services Trust (DCST) in November 2019, to review the complaints function. The review reinforced that the improvements we identified as necessary to take the service forward are the right ones. DCST also recognised that the team had accomplished a lot in a short period of time.

We have started to track the actions from complaints responses, to ensure that we are closing the loop on complaints. There is further work to do within this area to ensure it is robust and this is detailed within our action plan.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we have revised our processes for responding to complaints, making it easier for managers to continue to respond in a timely way and ensuring complainants receive a response. The complaints team and the participation team have worked closely to ensure that during Covid-19 children and young people know how to contact us if they have feedback or wish to complain. We continue to ensure children's feedback and complaints are actioned appropriately, and that closing the loop work is undertaken.

We started consultation with young people through both the Voices of Sandwell forum and Care Leavers forum, to engage with them and seek their thoughts and ideas about how we can improve and meet the needs of children and young people in Sandwell. The young people fed back that they were happy with our approach to dealing with their complaints and have agreed to work with us to develop literature and potentially a video for young people who may wish to make a complaint.

To improve the quality of our complaint responses we have undertaken an audit of all responses completed since October 2019. The findings of the audit, including any identified learning, will be shared with the service and the learning taken forward to improve the quality of our complaints responses. This will also feed into the training.

The complaints service is working closely with the Quality Assurance Service to embed the learning from complaints and drive forward the practice improvements arising from complaints. There are several ways we are looking to do this:

- Though contributing to learning & development's training needs analysis and informing the organisation's learning offer;
- Through consistently sharing learning from complaints and compliments across the service;
- Delivering the second round of complaints and compliments training to managers;
- Through being involved in sessions with our Student Unit and our ASYE Academy.

We have also made significant improvements in our approach to celebrating and learning from compliments. In early 2020 we went live with monthly Coffee and Cake sessions, led by the Chief Executive with colleagues who had received a compliment. During Covid-19 we have continued these sessions virtually.

Surveys

Employee Engagement Survey

This year's staff survey ran between 24 January and 16 February 2020, and was focussed upon the '12 Reasons to work in Sandwell'.

The response rate was as follows:

Directorate	Responses	No. of Staff	% Response	2018
Operations	161	443	36%	34%
Resources	67	135	50%	34%
QAS	65	72	90%	68%
Strat & Trans				100%
Trust Wide	293	650	45%	42%

What is working well:

- Staff are aware of our long-term goals and feel connected to our purpose
- Respondents understand how the work they do contributes to our objectives, and they have a real sense of personal achievement
- Our senior leaders are visible
- Line managers are supportive and recognise a job well done
- Staff feel able to 'speak up' in team meetings
- Supervision takes place monthly

What needs to improve:

- Lack of consistency in support and opportunity
- Not always *knowing* who managers are
- Perception of different opportunities for different roles
- Feeling in some parts of the Trust that the commitment to 15 days Learning is unrealistic
- Issues with ICT and accommodation
- Uncomfortable about talking about physical and mental health and wellbeing
- We have not maximised the benefits of the 12 Reasons

Our response

We have always recognised that it is critical for both our sustained improvement, and our stability as an organisation to do what we can to maximise the number of permanent, good quality staff we have. For these reasons, in addition to responding to the staff survey, we hold the '12 Reasons' task and finish group, led by the Chair of the Trust. This group has developed a clear plan of action/ activity summarised below:

- Developing a comprehensive dataset for recruitment and retention
- Taking advantage of a range of marketing campaigns and recruitment avenues
- Ensuring hassle-free agency to permanent transition

- Capitalising on student placements and recruitment through this avenue
- Maximise avenues for genuine intelligence gathering and analysis
- Ensure that supervision is offered to all staff and supportive
- Ensure that Team Meetings are purposeful, more valuable and available
- Ensuring that appraisals not only take place but also encourages and tracks professional development
- Capitalise on the opportunity brought about by the pandemic in working flexibly
- Ensuring a comprehensive practice learning offer and training are available, with CPD pathways, leadership programmes, progressions etc.
- Create an advanced practitioner role
- Implement the wellbeing strategy

Children's Surveys – Terminology Survey

Voices of Sandwell (our Children in Care forum) were asked their views on the use of terminology and abbreviations with professionals (such as LAC or CIC). They developed a survey for young people, which was disseminated to a selection of our children, 75 fully completed surveys received. Respondents age range was from 3 - 21 years old.

From this a dictionary of 10 preferred words / phrases have been developed, and shared across the Trust and partners so that terminology used can be changed. The only phrase voted to be kept the same was 'Care Leaver'. The 10 word / phrases are:

Previously used by professionals	Preferred by young people
LAC	Looked After Children
CIC	Children in Care
LAC Review	Young People's Review
Contact	Family time
Foster Carer	Carer or Parent
Placement	Home
Respite	Sleepover
Siblings	Brother or Sister
Designated Teacher	Teacher
Care Plan	(Your Name) Future Plan or (Your Name) Journey

Section (d) - The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections

As an organisation seeking to improve from an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating, we are subject to the Monitoring Visit arrangements on a quarterly basis. This, in conjunction with the regulatory inspections of the Independent Fostering Agency, has meant that we have welcomed Ofsted inspectors a total of 5 times in the last twelve months.

Our monitoring visits have been useful to us as a barometer of our improvement across the course of the year, and have used this feedback to adjust our improvement plan in August 2019.

The table below outlines the outcome of Ofsted's Visits and Inspections in 2018/19:

Table 11 – Outcome of Ofsted Inspection and Monitoring Visits

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
Monitoring Visits	16-04-2019 12-06-2019 16-10-2019 11-02-2020	No Judgements Given for Monitoring Visits
Independent Fostering Agency Inspection	25-11-2019	Overall experiences and progress of service users – Requires Improvement How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - Requires Improvement The effectiveness of leaders and managers – Requires Improvement

Whilst the monitoring visits do not give judgements, following each visit SCT and SMBC receive a letter from the lead inspector outlining their findings and progress we have made. These can be found by following the hyperlinks above.

Children's Social Care

On 16th April 2019, Ofsted's monitoring visit was focussed upon the progress for children subject to care proceedings and children in care. The inspectors noted that we are an organisation that knows ourselves, and we are able to monitor a vast amount of our activity, identifying that *"Senior leaders in the Trust have developed a greater understanding of frontline practice because of their focus on areas of service delivery, interrogation of performance information and audits."* and *"Senior managers and leaders continue to develop their understanding of practice through quality assurance processes and direct involvement in services."*

They also acknowledged the work we were doing to tackle the significant increase in Children in Care, our maintenance of the improvement programme and the positive impact of the new court team. Furthermore, they noted:

"The social workers talked to all spoke positively about working for Sandwell Children's Trust. All reported that they receive good support from their managers."

and

“Social work staff talk positively about the children who they work with. Almost all know children’s histories, what they are good at and what they have achieved. The voices and experiences of children are beginning to be reflected in some case recording and through the completion of direct work.”

However, they also observed the following:

- Many children have not had the benefit of an updated single assessment.
- The quality and timeliness of children’s care plans are inconsistent.
- Not all arrangements for children to be cared for by relatives have been approved formally.

On 16th October 2019, inspectors reviewed the progress made for services for children who are the subject of child protection and child in need plans. Positive aspects to this visit were:

“Senior leaders in the trust increasingly understand the quality of frontline social work practice due to their regular focus on performance information and audits. The quality and consistency of audits are improving, because there is a greater emphasis on understanding the impact of social workers’ involvement in children’s lives.”

“Social workers know their children well and recognise the importance of developing positive relationships. They are able to describe in detail their work with children and families. Children’s experiences are explicitly highlighted in case recording, and there is evidence of various tools being used for completing direct work.”

“Most assessments of children with CIN or CP plans are completed within timescales and demonstrate some aspects of good quality. Children are seen regularly, and a variety of methods are used to gather their wishes and feelings, including those of children who are non-verbal. Family histories and information from partners are used well to understand children’s needs. Analysis is detailed and uses a social work practice framework effectively to understand risks. This was particularly evident when examining pre-birth assessments, which were of a good standard.”

However, there was clearly further work to be done:

“Assessments are often too focused on incidents rather than being a holistic assessment of need. Most assessments demonstrate a lack of professional curiosity and an over optimism that parents or carers will change their behaviour. Children’s plans are not good enough. They are overly complicated and written in a way which is difficult for families to understand. Families are therefore not always clear about what needs to change.”

“The quality of plans and planning is not consistently good. Those that are effective are clearly laid out and include achievable actions and objectives. They include specific timescales and named people who are responsible for completing identified tasks. Plans are multi-agency, with partners attending meetings to review progress. Families and professionals have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in order to improve the experiences of children.”

“In the majority of cases, written plans are overly complicated, repetitive and use professional language that families could find difficult to understand. Many actions are non-specific and do not address the potential risks to children. Plans lack timescales and do not include named people to hold accountable. There are also delays in updating plans.”

On 11th February 2020, inspectors visited the Leaving Care service. Their feedback was “Since the last inspection, there has been a number of developments, some of which are very recent, that have improved social work practice and have had a positive impact for care leavers. These include: the Beyond Auditing team working with personal advisers to improve the quality of assessments and pathway plans; the

increased number of training flats and additional personal advisers to support young people to develop life skills; the electronic health passport application, which allows young people to access their health histories; support to young people at university or studying abroad and the inaugural care leavers' awards ceremony."

Inspectors noted positivity amongst staff, a developing relationship between care leavers and the corporate parenting board. Young people feel listened to and have influenced service delivery. They also reflected positively the local offer for careleavers, and were impressed by the relationship personal advisers had with their young people, and the support they provide.

Areas for further improvement included not involving staff within learning audits, that pathway planning is too rigid for young people, and assessments are too detailed and lack analysis.

Fostering service (IFA)

As an outcome of the Independent Fostering Agency inspection in February 2019, we received three regulatory compliance notices under section 22A of the Care Standards Act 2000 that we were required to rectify by 10th June 2019 when Ofsted will visit us again to review progress. The compliance notices outline expectations related to:

8. — (1) The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to
 - (a) the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and
 - (b) the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.

11. The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times.

12. — (1) The fostering service must prepare and implement a written policy which:
 - (a) is intended to safeguard children placed with fostering parents from abuse or neglect, and
 - (b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.

Following the Monitoring Visit on 12th June 2019, Ofsted noted the significant progress we had made in these areas, and 'lifted' two out of the three compliance notices. We therefore received a new compliance notice that outlines:

"Inspectors found a new procedure for assessing connected persons was created in April 2019 and has been in operation since 21 May 2019. It is in the very early stages of use and is not yet facilitating rigorous and timely assessments of connected persons.

At the February 2019 inspection, 12 children were living in 10 unregulated placements. There are now more children living in more unregulated placements.

There has been an increase since February 2019 to 13 children living in 11 households. Formal decisions have been made with regard to some of the original ten unregulated placements. For example, arrangements have been made to secure permanence for seven children previously living in five of these unregulated placements. However, since the last inspection, there are new cases

that have increased the number. The management team have a clearer understanding of the reasons for delays in the assessment process. For example, there have been recent delays of up to six weeks in the handover of assessment responsibility between the children's and fostering teams. The registered person is now working in partnership with the agency's fostering panel advisor to ensure that consideration of connected persons assessments at panel runs more smoothly. However, poor quality or incomplete assessments still result in unnecessary delays in recommendations and decisions to approve.

This means that children still wait too long for decisions about their permanent family life."

The fostering service was re-inspected from 25th November 2019 – 30th November 2019 whereby inspectors considered the expectations set out within the compliance notices, and the wider requirements / recommendations set out in the inspection report of February 2019.

The outcome of the inspection was published in January 2020 and it sets out vast improvements within the service, and the remaining compliance notice was lifted. The overall outcome of the inspection was 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. The summary within the report highlighted:

"Support to foster carers during assessment and once approved is gradually improving. This work needs to continue to embed this newly implemented practice. All prospective and approved foster carers now have an allocated supervising social worker and the majority are receiving supervisions in line with the agency's policy. Work is now starting to strengthen the quality and consistency of this support to foster carers. As a result, foster carers are increasingly positive about the support that they receive.

The quality and timeliness of assessments of connected persons and foster carers has improved but is still variable. Better arrangements for joint visits between children's social workers and fostering social workers have reduced the delay in initiating connected person's assessments. There was a dip in the timeliness of these assessments over the summer because of managerial turnover. However, since September 2019 new managers have focused on identifying and monitoring the impact of drift and delay in assessments that have exceeded the usual legal limits. Data about the timeliness of mainstream foster carer assessments is not yet fully reliable as new systems are not yet sufficiently embedded.

Foster carers are not consistently able to read and comment on their reports prior to panel or their annual reviews. The panel chair and independent reviewing officers are aware of this shortfall and are working with managers to address it. Consequently, foster carers do not have the ability to respond especially when assessments are not in their favour.

Managers have developed a new programme of core training (and training relevant to the terms of foster carers approval). Foster carers who are not yet trained are gradually accessing this training or are scheduled to attend. Bespoke Skills to Foster training is now being run specifically for connected persons. This means that children and young people are cared for by a growing number of foster carers who have received the training that they need to meet the children and young people's needs. The majority of foster carers annual reviews are taking place within the 12 month timescale. These are also used to monitor foster carer's attendance at training.

Children and young people are well matched to their foster carers. There is now a written record of matching considerations. As a result, placement stability is good and unplanned endings are reducing.

Children and young people have good experiences of living with their foster carers. Children spoken to during the inspection, and comments in foster carers reviews, show positive, sustained relationships between children and young people and their carers. Foster carers work closely in partnership with other agencies to ensure that children access a range of health services, educational opportunities and leisure activities.

The virtual schools team has a strategic overview of children's educational progress and also keeps a detailed eye on individual children. Children are achieving and attaining in their education. Next year, their progress is likely to exceed the national average for other children looked after. The number of children not in education, employment or training has reduced by half to 12% and achievement at GCSE stage increases.

Better cooperation between the agency and child health services is ensuring that children and young people are referred early for health assessments. The number of children with up to date medicals now exceeds the national average at 89% (up from 85% at the last inspection)."

Section (e) - The Trust's performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year

Financial Context

The finances provided to the Trust consists of funding from SMBC (the Contract Sum) and contributions from third parties.

Following lengthy discussions between the Trust and the Council, which included significant financial due diligence, a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and a final contract sum for 2019/20 (applied 'in-year') was agreed on 17th February 2020 (later ratified by Cabinet).

The new contract sum took into account our current demand for staffing and placements, alongside our expenditure throughout the year. The total amount agreed was £63,536,000 which included:

- A significant uplift of the contract sum by £5,000,000
- Inflation, pay award and incremental uplift
- Increased employer contribution to superannuation
- Full funding of Connected Carer's skill fee (in order to ensure parity of pay for foster carers)

In addition to the contract sum, we also received 'third party' income of £9.256m, which consisted of

- CCG health contribution
- Education funding for placements
- DfE innovation grant
- DfE improvement grant
- Troubled Families claims

Medium Term Financial Plan

The Medium Term Financial Plan is a three-year strategy with the ability to review on an annual basis in line with the review of our business plans.

The key aspects of the Medium Term Financial Plan are:

- Introducing more efficient ways of working
- Ensuring that we manage the demand of our work as efficiently as possible
- Ensuring we get best value for money for the services in which we commission
- Ensuring we take advantage of invest-to-save initiatives
- Delivery of savings aligned to our improvement journey

The work outlined within this plan can be broken down to specific cost-saving areas, such as the cost of children's placements, reducing the number of placements we need to utilise, ensuring that our service by service demand aligns with our establishment, and making sure the work we do is necessary – reducing drift and delay.

Year-end position

Income totalling £72,792,240 was received for 2019/20, and expenditure was £77,123,871, meaning the Trust has showed a £4,331,631 provisional deficit, which was c.£1.331m 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 staffing costs (agency premium), and high demand for services to be provided for Looked After Children.

The below table highlights the provisional full-year outturn for 2019/20.

Provisional full-year outturn	2020
	£
Income	72,792,240
Administrative expenses	(77,123,871)
Operating deficit	(4,331,631)
Deficit before taxation	(4,331,631)
Tax on deficit	0
Deficit (Loss) for the Financial year	(4,331,631)

Looked After Children Overview

SCT faces two different kinds of financial pressures from Children in Care. The volume of Children in Care is one cost driver and the actual cost of care (efficiency) is the second. Increased numbers of Children in Care will increase costs even in 'low cost' placements with the requirement for extra staff time and financial support for connected carers. The actual cost of placements can vary significantly between residential and being placed at home. The full analysis of children in care is contained in the next section of this report. However, we acknowledge that placement costs remain the Trust's highest expenditure. Increases in the number of Children in Care or the number of young people in expensive placements will continually place pressure on the Trust's financial position. As the number of Children in Care peaked in July 2019, but had reduced by the end of the financial year, our projected deficit in this area reduced.

Concluding Remarks

The Trust continues to focus on the delivery of cost effective services for the young people and families of Sandwell. It is focused ensuring that the right structures exist to facilitate improvement and that young people receive the care that is appropriate to their level of need. The Directors of the Trust are energetically pursuing the procurement of value for money services and also the elimination of unnecessary costs within the Trust's establishment. This will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure remedial actions continue to be delivered.

Section (f) - Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year

The national challenges for qualified social workers who are willing to work in statutory services is well known, and the West Midlands region (and Sandwell Borough) is not immune to these difficulties. Our aim is to provide the best services to children and families, but to do so in as efficient way as possible; it is therefore important to understand our service demand within this context,

Understanding demand within the Trust is complex and multi-faceted, with many variables and assumptions. We have set out our financial performance in the previous section, and continue to work towards our Medium Term Financial Plan to address the known deficits.

Whilst the landscape of demand is multi-faceted, it is useful to break down our demand in three areas:

1. How many referrals we receive from our partners, the public and children and families themselves.
2. How many children and families we are working with (and therefore how many staff we need)
3. How many placements do we need for children to live, both in the short term and in the long term

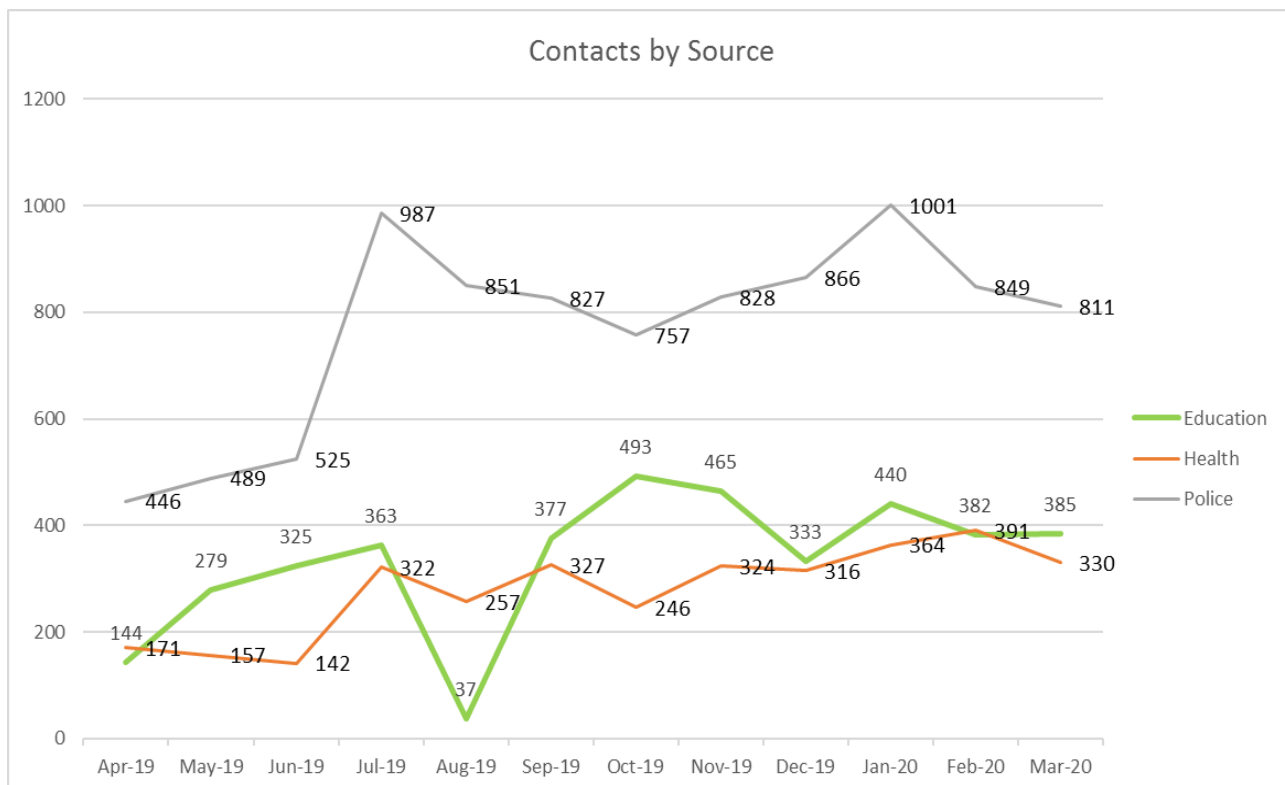
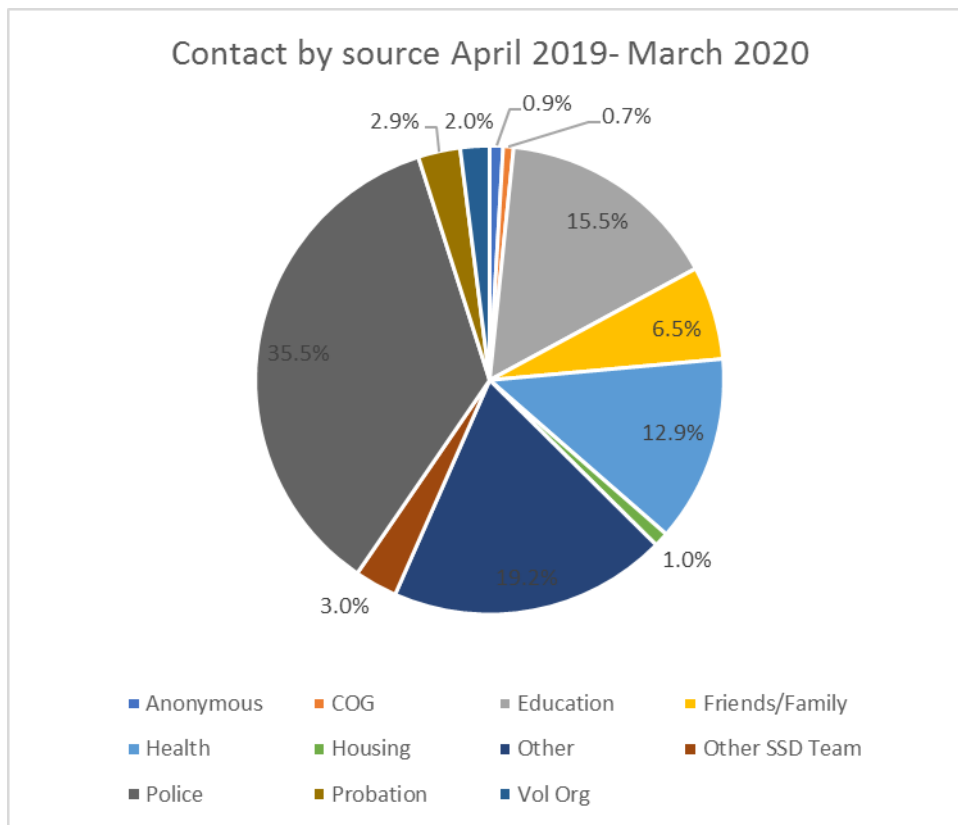
We have worked hard within the last two years to ensure we have a constant understanding of our demand and make realistic predictions for how these variables change so we are able to use our resources in the best way possible.

Our contacts / referrals

The more contacts we receive from our partners, the public or directly from families, the more resource we need to screen to determine whether they meet our threshold for intervention. Whilst we do not want to dissuade anyone from contacting us, particularly members of the public and families, we do need to strike the right balance with partners as to what constitutes appropriate referrals. As such, we maintain close strategic and operational relationships with partners to ensure a shared understanding of the threshold for access to our services. We received 26,023 referrals during the year, of which 9,237 (35.5%) were from Police, 3,347 (12.9%) from Health and 4,023 from Education (15.5%).

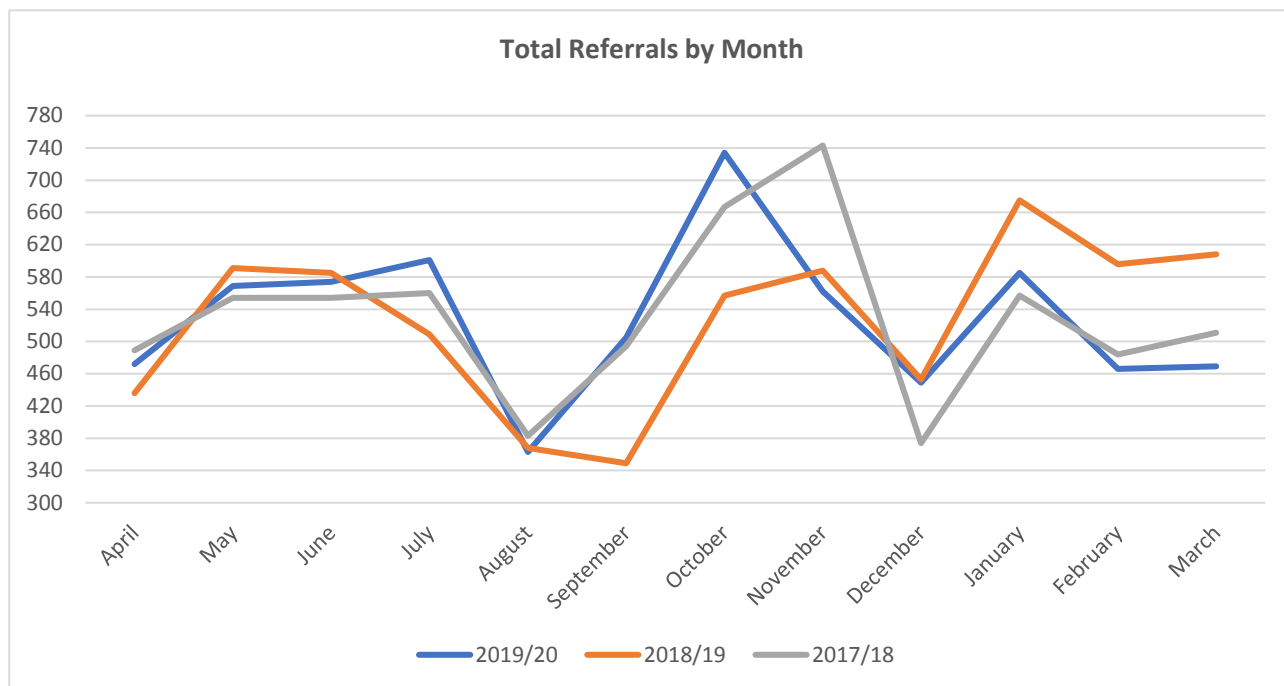
Total Contacts for 2019-20 by source

Contact Source	Total for 2019-20	% of total
Anonymous	239	0.9%
COG	187	0.7%
Education	4023	15.5%
Friends/Family	1681	6.5%
Health	3347	12.9%
Housing	260	1.0%
Other	4996	19.2%
Other SSD Team	770	3.0%
Police	9237	35.5%
Probation	757	2.9%
Vol Org	526	2.0%
Total	26023	100.0%



Over the course of the year, 82.3% of contacts that were accepted as referrals were within the prescribed 24 hours. This response is a slight improvement from the previous year (75.4%), which shows that we are responding quicker when we believe a child is in need of a service or in need of protection.

The number of referrals we accept serves as an indicator for how many children and families we are likely to work with over the longer term. We accepted a total of 6,349 referrals across the year, which was similar to the previous year (6,364). Therefore 24.3% of all contacts received progressed to referral.

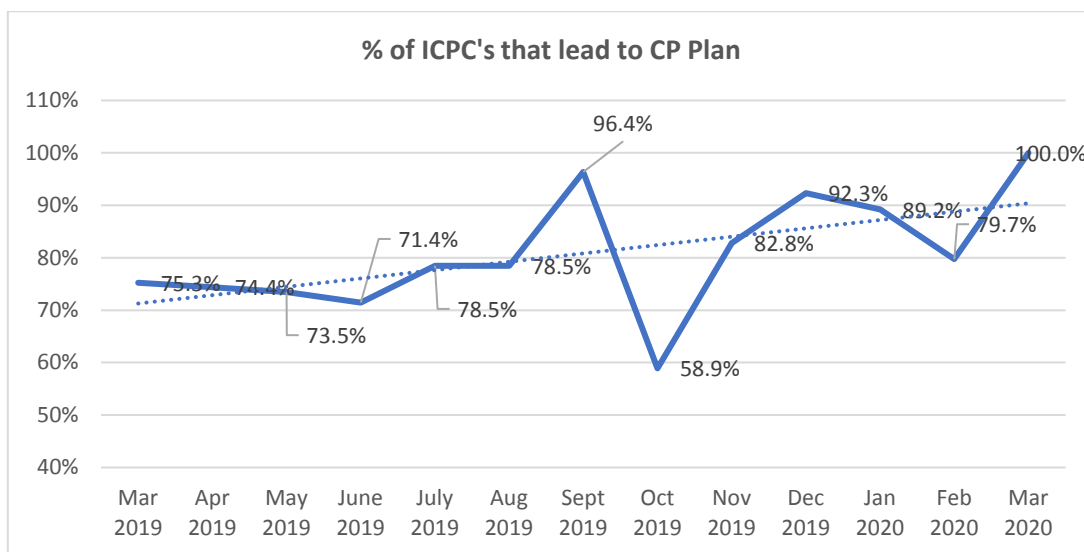
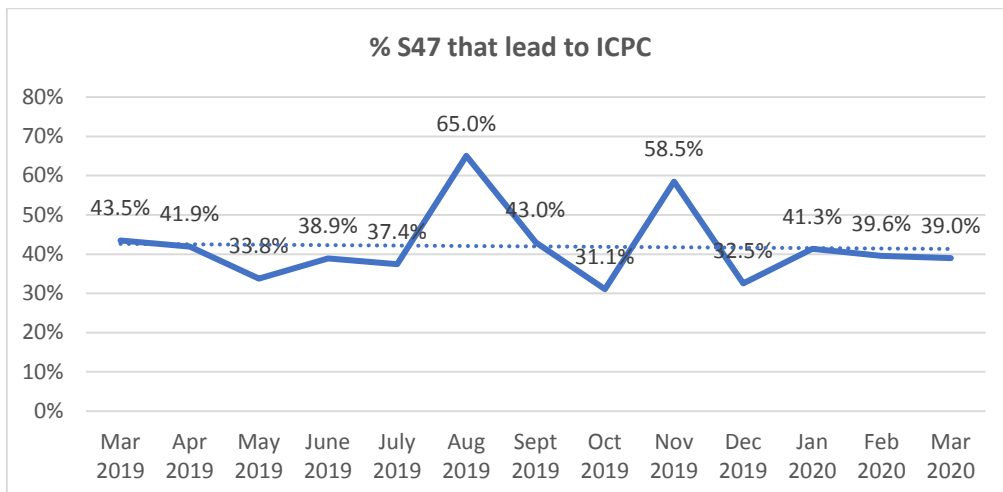


On average, our referral rate has remained very similar, in 2019/20 this was 781.57 per 10,000 children and in 2018/19 was 777 per 10,000 children. This continues to be higher than our statistical neighbours (721 in 2018/19). Notwithstanding the usual seasonal peaks (in the run up to and after school holidays), there has been a very slight downward trend across the course of the year, indicating a degree of increased partnership confidence in managing risk at an earlier stage.

We have seen an increase of re-referrals (where we were involved with the family less than 12 months prior), in 2018/19 the re-referral rate was 24.1% and this year the rate was 25%. This is now 2.8% higher than our statistical neighbour comparators for 2018/19.

The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has reduced this year to 253.60 (from 287 the previous year), which brings SCT closer to our Statistical Neighbour average rate of 219. In addition, the rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has reduced to 103.94 this year (from 115.50 in the previous year), bringing us closer to our Statistical Neighbour average rate of 83.5. Although this shows we are more confident and purposeful when we are faced with deciding whether to proceed with S47 enquiries and holding Child Protection Conferences, it also demonstrates there is further work to be done to be more efficient. We will need to continue to ensure that we only take the decision to intervene in families lives in this way when there is an absolute need.

Linked to the above, we also measure the conversion rate of S47 enquiries leading to Child Protection Conferences and the rate to which conferences lead to a Child Protection Plan.



The trend of S47 enquiries leading to ICPC's is fairly static this year, at around 40-45%, meaning that over half of enquiries either do not lead to sufficient enough concern to hold a CP conference, or lead to immediate action being taken to protect a child. The trend of ICPC's leading to a Child Protection Plan has been upward, which can be a good sign when coupled with a reduction in conferences taking place. However, as stated earlier our rate of ICPC's remains higher than our comparators. This led to an increase of Child Protection Plans in the final quarter of the year. Thus, continued work is ongoing to ensure the appropriateness of decision making in these areas.

Overall, this shows that we have continued to receive referrals and undertaken S47 enquiries / Child Protection Conferences at a rate higher than our comparators. However, when considered within the context of our improvement journey, and alongside the dip sampling of assessments, S47's and ICPC's the above analysis provides evidence that we are acting more confidently and consistently when applying thresholds for our services, and working in a more timely fashion.

Our children in Sandwell Children's Trust

As of 31st March 2020, we had 807 children with a Child in Need Plan, 671 children with a Child Protection Plan and 874 Children in Care. In both the areas of Child Protection and Children in Care, we have more children on average than our statistical neighbours:

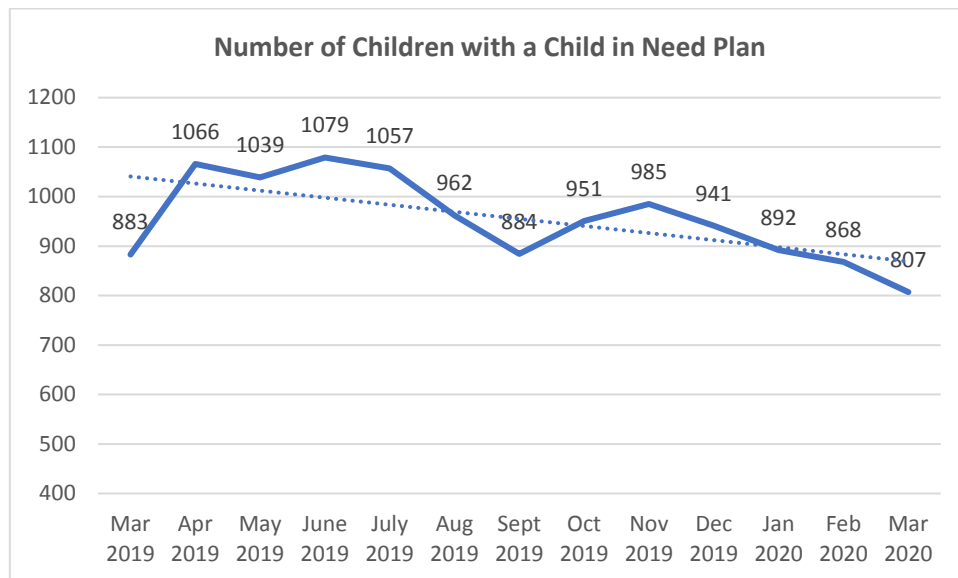
Table X – Comparison with Statistical Neighbours (CP / CIC)

	Sandwell (31st March 2020)	Statistical Neighbour Average 2018/19	England Average 2018/19
Assessments undertaken	753 per 10,000	673 per 10,000	593 per 10,000
Children with a Child Protection Plan	82 per 10,000	53.9 per 10,000	43.7 per 10,000
Children in Care	106.7 per 10,000	92 per 10,000	64 per 10,000
Children with a Child in Need Plan	98.5 per 10,000	No comparators	

This continues to highlight our challenge in ensuring improvement whilst working with significantly more children and families than our neighbours, within a fragile marketplace for social workers within the region and nationally.

Children in Need

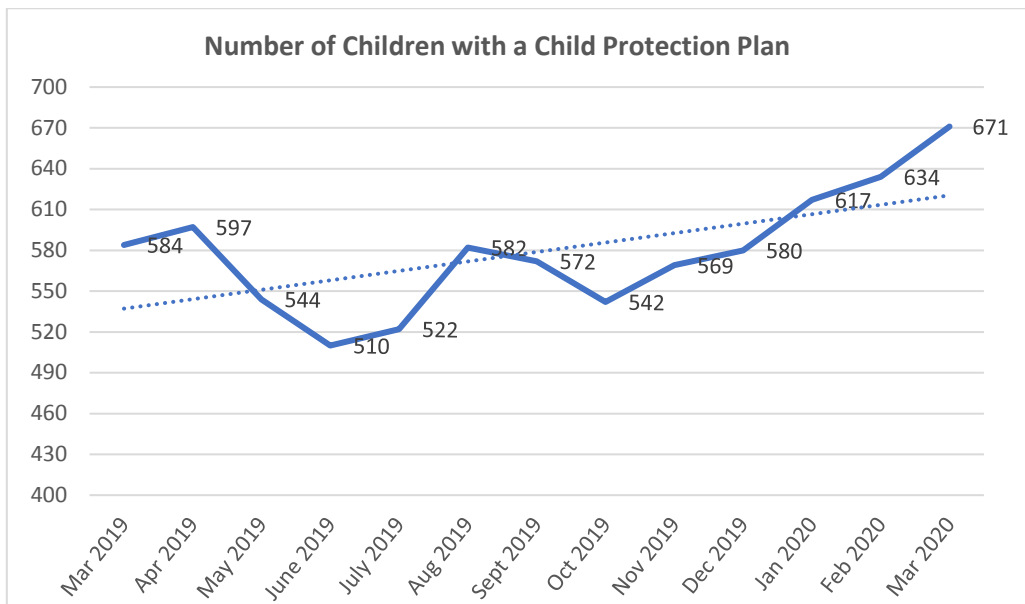
The graph below shows that we began the year with 1066 children in need, with a downward trend across the year, ending with 807. Interventions with families through a Child in Need Plan are intensive, purposeful and kept under constant review as it is very easy for plans to drift. We held management review of these children in April, July and November 2019, and hold ‘CIN Panel’ on a monthly basis to review progress against those whose plan has been open for 9 months or more.



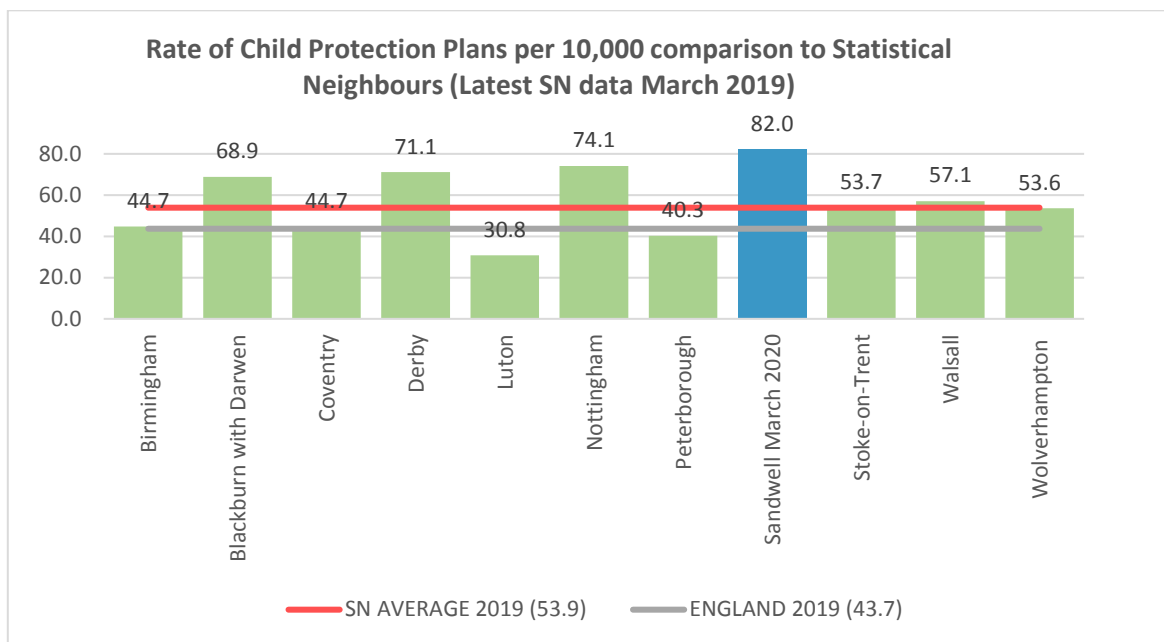
The majority of these children are held within the Care Management service, although some older children are provided services through the Children in Care service under a Child in Need Plan.

Children with a Child Protection Plan

We began the year with 584 children who were subject of a Child Protection Plan, and across the course of the year this increased to 671, with a significant increase in Quarters 3 and 4.



The end of year rate of children with a Child Protection Plan was 82 per 10,000 children, this is shown against our comparators:

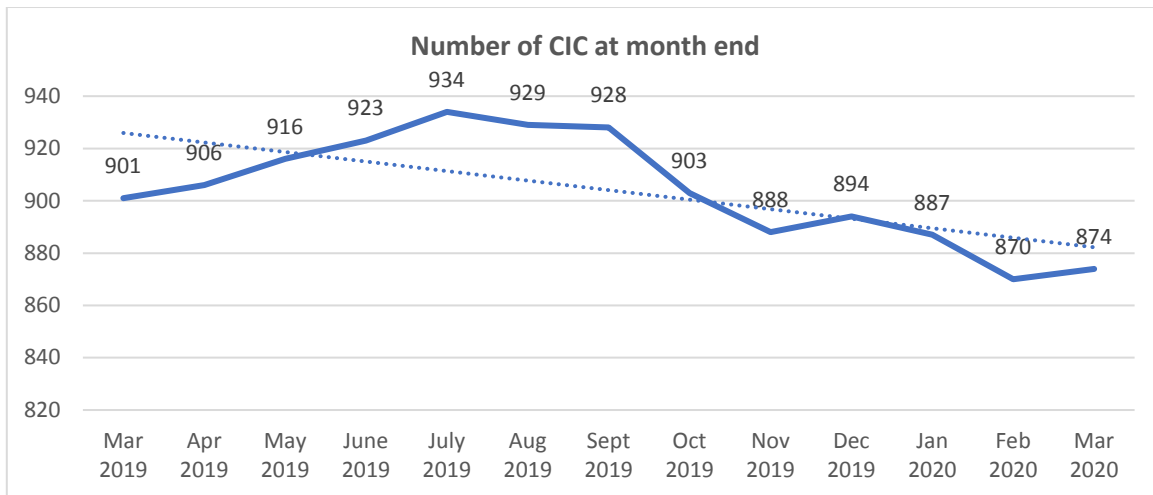


This six-month increase of children led a Trust plan of action to be put into place to ensure children were appropriately subject of a Child Protection Plan. In brief, this included:

- Increase in the frequency and scope of Child Protection challenge panel.
- Management review of children who had a CP plan for 12+ months.
- Ensuring an increased CP chair footprint for these children to assure themselves of progress.
- Increased management oversight when booking a Child Protection Conference.
- Co-location of conference chairs and managers within the Safeguarding and Assessment Teams space.

Children in Care

We began the year with 901 children in care and saw an increase in the first half of the year (peaking at 936 in mid July 2019). Following this peak, the number reduced to 874 at the end of the year, which has been achieved through a range of activity, such as improved decision making at the point of entry to care, and more timely progression of children’s plans. This will be expanded upon later in this report.



It is important to understand that whilst the end of year position of 874 Children in Care is reported, it was noted at the time that a further 10 children had left care, but tasks were in progress that required completion before the child was recorded as ceasing care. This is normal for our case management system.

Demand for Staff

It is important to acknowledge that Sandwell Children's Trust employs nearly 600 staff, of which around half are social workers. If not for the range of specialist and support staff within the Trust, social workers would not have the foundation and infrastructure to work effectively with children and their families. Nevertheless, our focus continues to be to ensure we have a stable 'case holding' workforce, as it is the consistency and skill of this workforce that will bring about the improved outcomes we expect for our children and families.

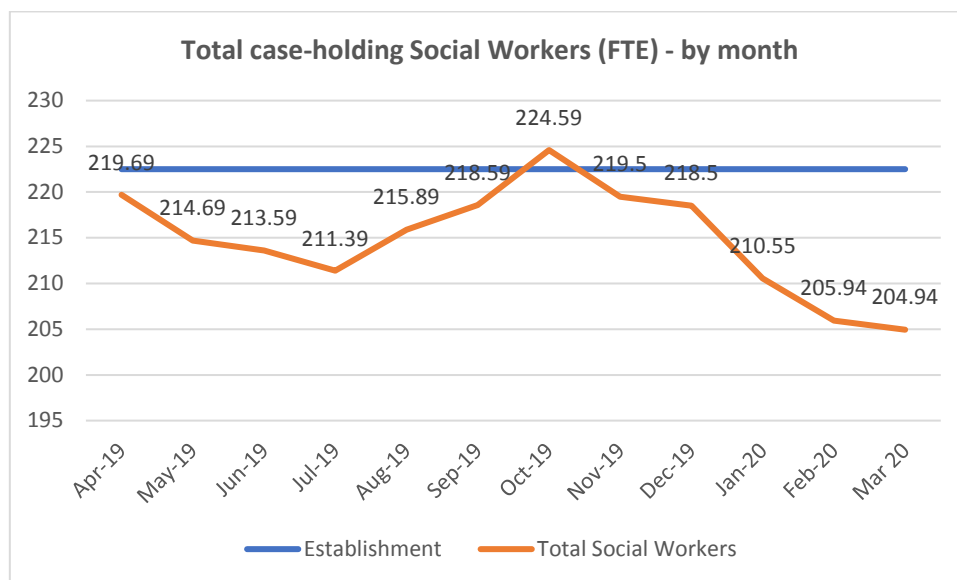
There are a range of models we can use to determine how many social workers we need to work with our families, some more complex than others. However, we continue to have a very simple calculation for this, which is:

1. For social workers working with Children in Need and those with a Child Protection Plan (within the care management service), an average of 18 children.
2. For social workers working with long term Children in Care (within the Children in Care Service), an average of 15 children.
3. For Social Workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE), there is a reduction of 20% within these average caseloads.

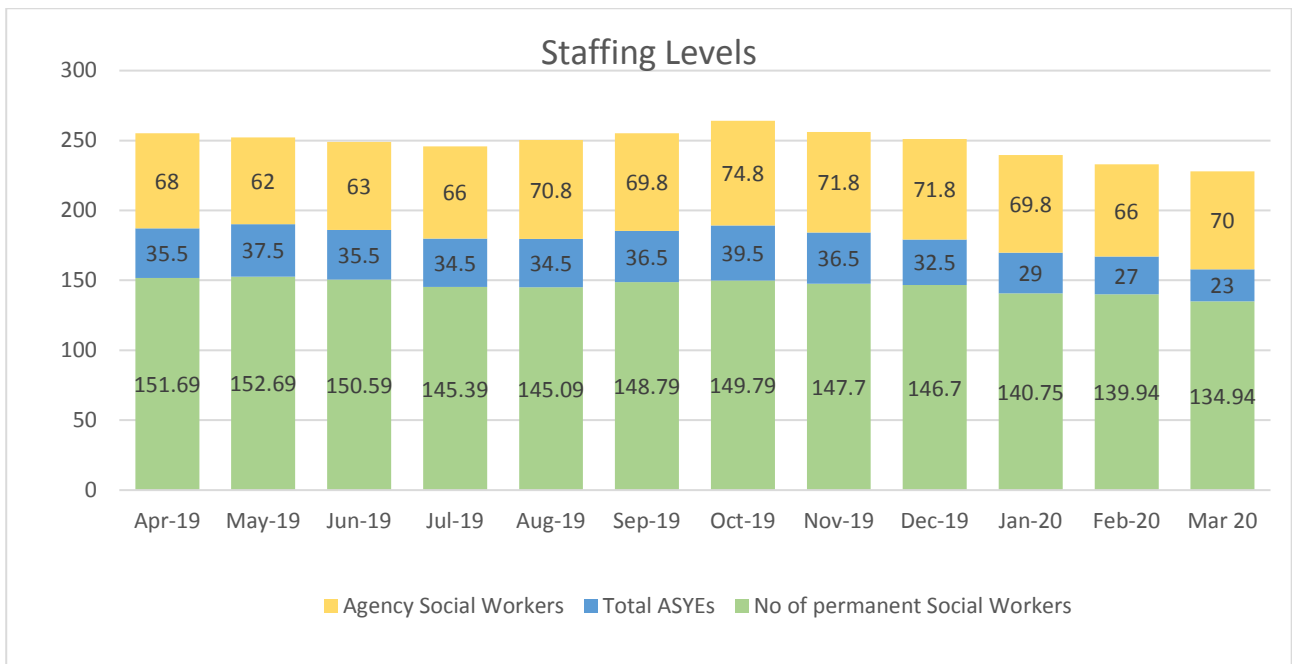
These figures are based upon work undertaken by the Children's Commissioner Malcom Newsam prior to the Trust going live.

Case-holding Social Workers

We have an agreed establishment of 222.5 Full Time Equivalent social workers, based upon our current demand, and considerations within the Medium Term Financial Plan. The actual number of social workers we have had in post (FTE) is outlined in the graph below.

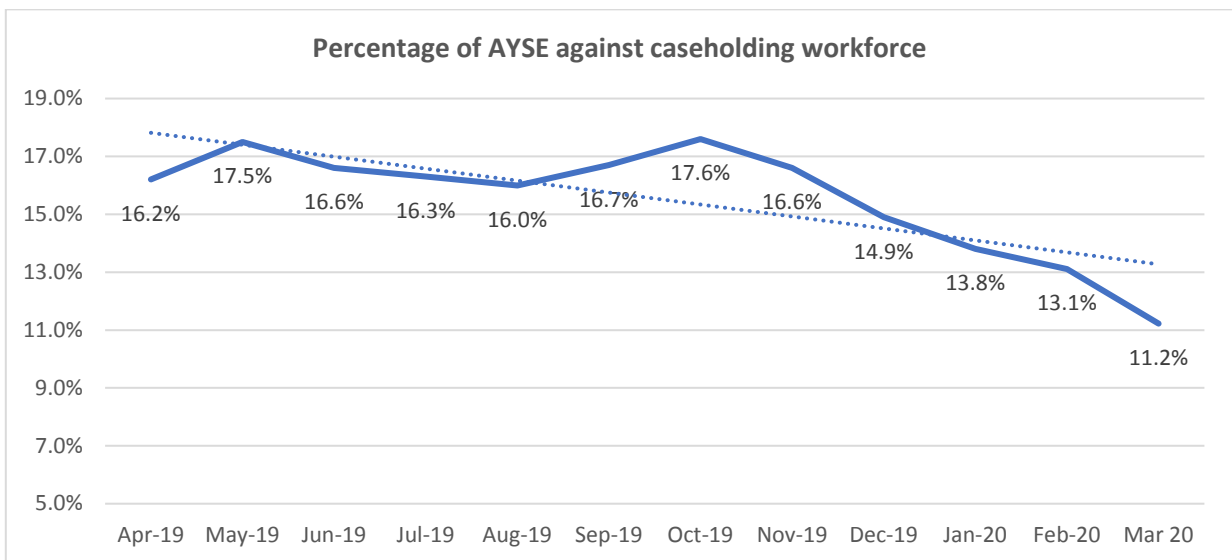


This is made up of permanent social workers, agency social workers and those within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE's). A month by month breakdown is below:



Social Workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE)

The Trust, along with all children’s services nationally, has a reliance on newly qualified social workers in their first year of employment (ASYE). During this year, social workers are required to complete a range of training, practice based learning, observations and a portfolio under the supervision of an experienced social worker. The benefits of maintaining a significant cohort of newly qualified social workers are clear, as it enables us to keep a steady flow of social workers into our organisation, contributing to a stable workforce. However, there have been challenges associated with managing this group of staff, in our first year, which has included the ability to provide appropriate support and supervision and protecting caseloads. We have recognised this and obtained funding from the DfE for 2019/20 to further support this.



Clearly, the more newly qualified social workers we have, the more pressure there is on our experienced workforce, not only in relation the support they need to provide, but also the proportion of cases allocated to them. Therefore, our aim is to never have more than 20% of our case holding workforce within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment. This year the percentage of our social workers within their ASYE has reduced due to more focus on progressing their portfolios – this now properly reflects our cohort.

Percentage of newly qualified social workers (ASYE) against total case holding social workers

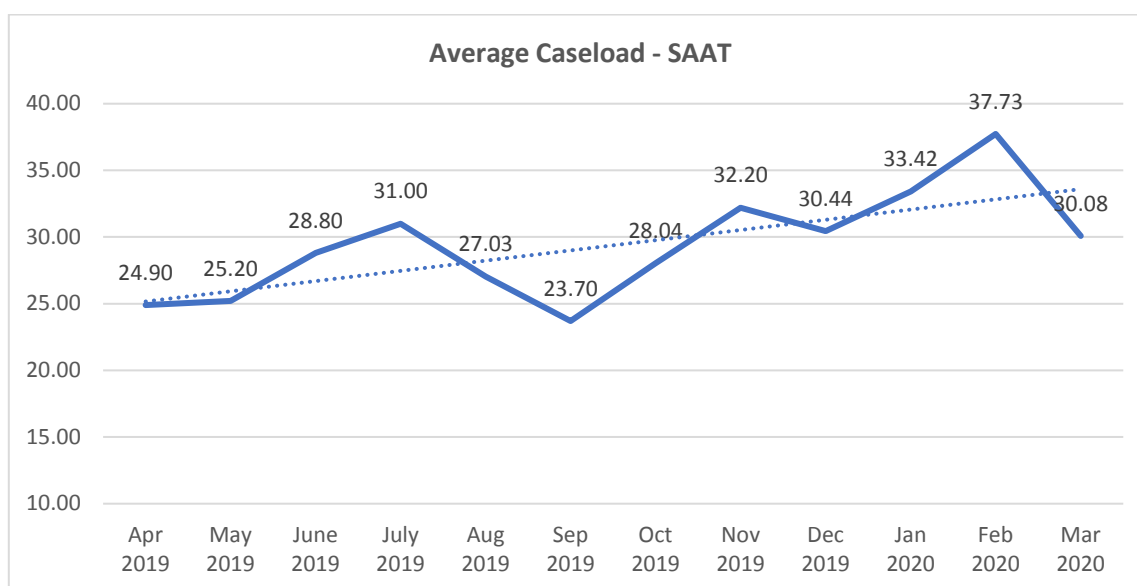
	Apr 2019	May 2019	Jun 2019	Jul 2019	Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Total Social Workers	219.69	214.69	213.59	211.39	215.89	218.59	224.59	219.5	218.5	210.55	205.94	204.94
Total ASYEs	35.5	37.5	35.5	34.5	34.5	36.5	39.5	36.5	32.5	29	27	23
% Total ASYEs	16.2%	17.5%	16.6%	16.3%	16.0%	16.7%	17.6%	16.6%	14.9%	13.8%	13.1%	11.2%

The number of ASYE cases has reduced over the course of the year from 35.5 in April 2019 to 23 in March 2020 this has coincided with number of total social workers in the organisation reducing from 219.69 to 204.94.

Safeguarding and Assessment Service (Assessments of Children and Families)

The Safeguarding and Assessment Team are responsible for undertaking assessments that arise from new referrals. This work is short-term and should not exceed 45 working days, aiming to meet the intervention needs of the family within the 45-day timescale where possible. In the event that further work is required, SAAT may identify longer term needs and transfer the families to Care Management, or where necessary, to Children in Care; or alternatively may step down families to Targeted Early Help in instances where further support work is required.

Due to the nature of this work, teams have a 'duty cycle' that impacts on their caseload on five-weekly basis, i.e. week 1 (duty week) is higher than week 5. This sees a fluctuation in average caseload over the cycle, and social workers are able to work with a larger number of children at any one time than their counterparts in other areas of the service.



Average Caseload SAAT

	Apr 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Number Cases SAAT	818	802	886	925	719	701	914	948	901	889	898	746
Total Caseholders SAAT FTE	32.80	31.80	30.80	29.80	26.60	29.60	32.60	29.60	29.60	26.60	23.80	24.80

Average Caseload SAAT	24.90	25.20	28.80	31.00	27.03	23.70	28.04	32.20	30.44	33.42	37.73	30.08
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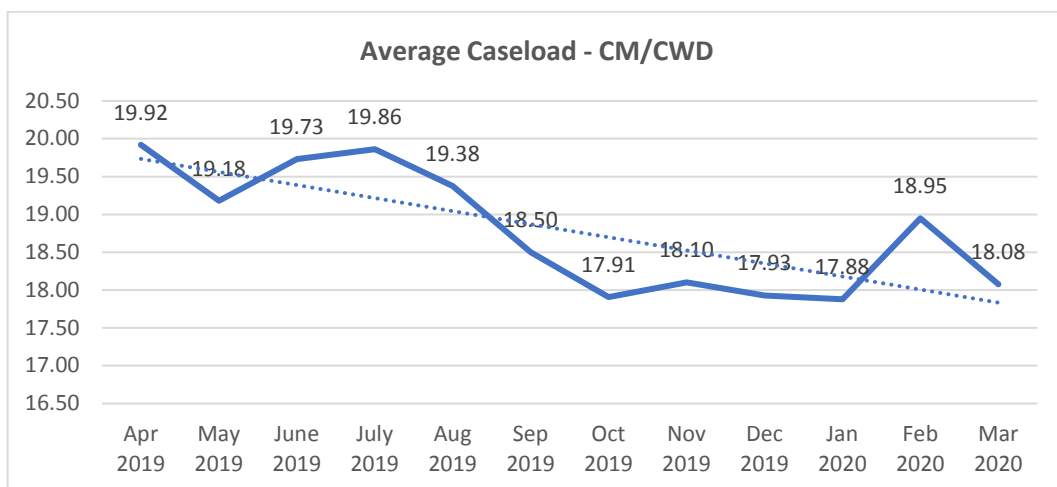
The average number of cases within the SAAT service has increased across the year from 24.9 to 30.8 with a particular spike in January and February 2020. At this time, the service struggled with staffing, both with people leaving, but also with the need to tackle poor performing agency staff. As a result, there was a backlog of assessments near or out of timescales that were being addressed at the same time as handling new referrals. This had been addressed by the end of the year.

Medium and Longer-Term Intervention (Care Management and Looked After Children)

Most of our casework take place within these two services, whether children are subject of Child in Need Plans, Child Protection Plans or Children in Care.

We have a target of 18 children per social worker in the Care Management Service in line with the recommendations from the Commissioner in 2017. We began the year with an average caseload of 19.92 children. The impact of our work to reduce caseload in this area over the course of the year is evident, with a low of 17.88 children per social worker in January 2020 this has increased slightly to 18.08 at the end March 2020. This does not consider the complexity of the work within this service area, which is widely acknowledged.

It is important to note that within Care Management there is a significant cohort of social workers in their ASYE, their ability to hold a 'full' caseload is limited, which puts additional pressure on experienced workers. This means that the average caseload in the graph below does not tell the whole story for experienced staff, over the course of the financial year.



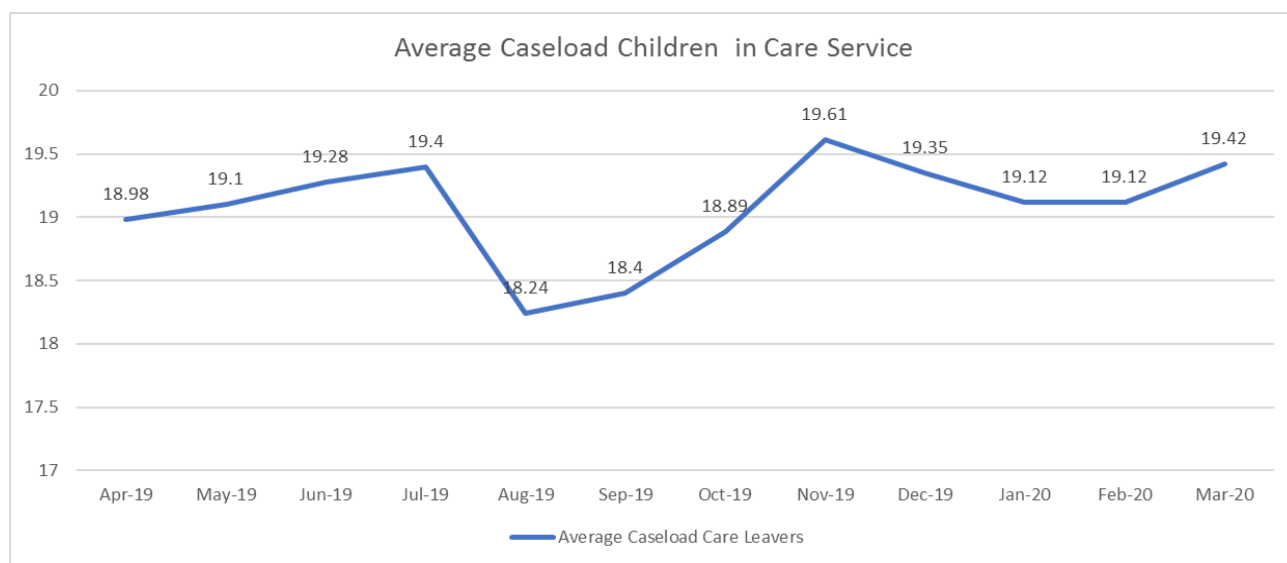
Average Caseload Care Management and Children with Disabilities Service

	Apr 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Number Cases CM/CWD	1994	1920	1914	1903	1895	1789	1805	1840	1826	1803	1782	1754
Total Case holders CM/CWD FTE	100.1	100.1	97.0	95.8	97.8	96.8	100.8	101.8	101.8	100.9	94.0	97.0
Average Caseload CM/CWD	19.9	19.2	19.7	19.9	19.4	18.5	17.9	18.1	17.9	17.9	18.9	18.1

The work undertaken by the Children in Care service is to ensure that children who are to remain in the care of Sandwell Children’s Trust are protected from significant harm, live as fulfilled a life as possible, achieve their potential and become independent members of society. These children need stability in their arrangements and benefit from good relationships with their social workers, carers and key professionals.

To provide enough time for these relationships to develop, we have a target of 15 cases per worker in the Children in Care service, which is in line with the recommendations from the Commissioner in 2017. Last year we redistributed four qualified social workers from Targeted Services to the Children in Care Team in order to bolster staffing in this area.

We began the year with approximately 17.6 children per social worker, this has increased to 19.42 as of March 2020, which is significantly above our aspirational target of 15. This has meant that we have had less time than we would have wished to work with our children in care, and has an impact on quality of our interventions. More work is to be done in this area.

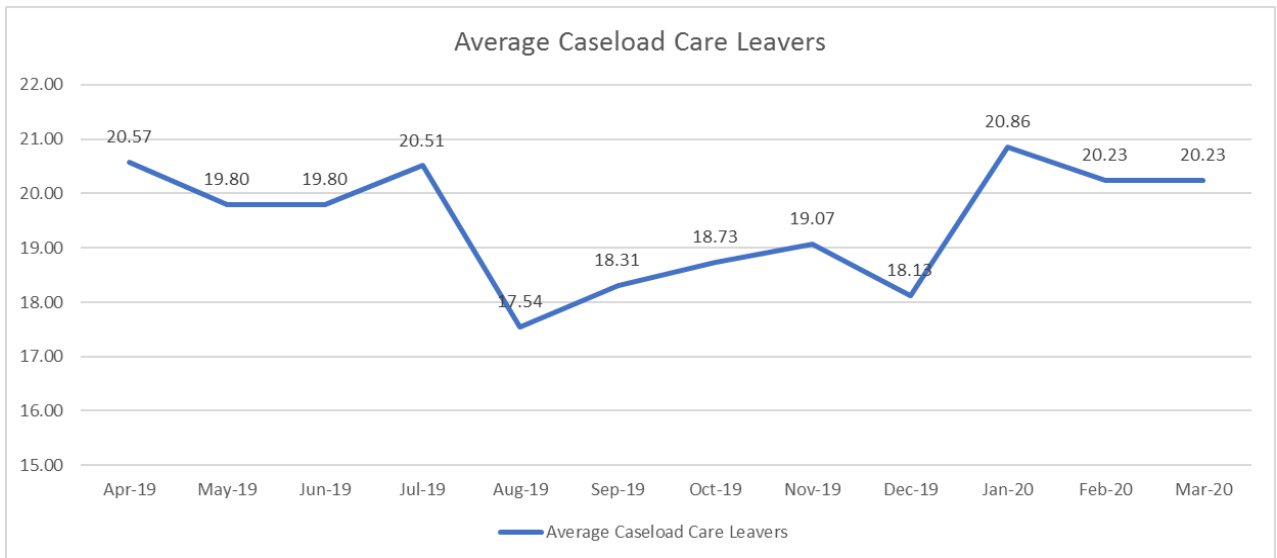


Average Caseload Children in Care Service

	Apr 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Number Cases (Children in Care)	664	667	675	678	675	681	680	667	658	631	631	631
Total Case holders (Children in Care) FTE	35.00	35.00	35.00	35.00	37.00	37.00	36.00	29.60	34.00	33.00	33.00	32.50
Average Caseload (Children in Care)	18.98	19.1	19.28	19.40	18.24	18.40	18.89	19.61	19.35	19.12	19.12	19.42

Care Leavers

Our care leavers service provides a service to young people 18 or over who are still in care. This cohort has stabilised over the course of the year in April 2019 the average young people per worker was 21.60 this has reduced slightly to 20.23 as of March 2020. Prior to April 2018, a change in legislation meant that we have a statutory responsibility to support care leavers until they are 25 years of age, which will mean a steady increase in the number of young people in these teams over the next few years.

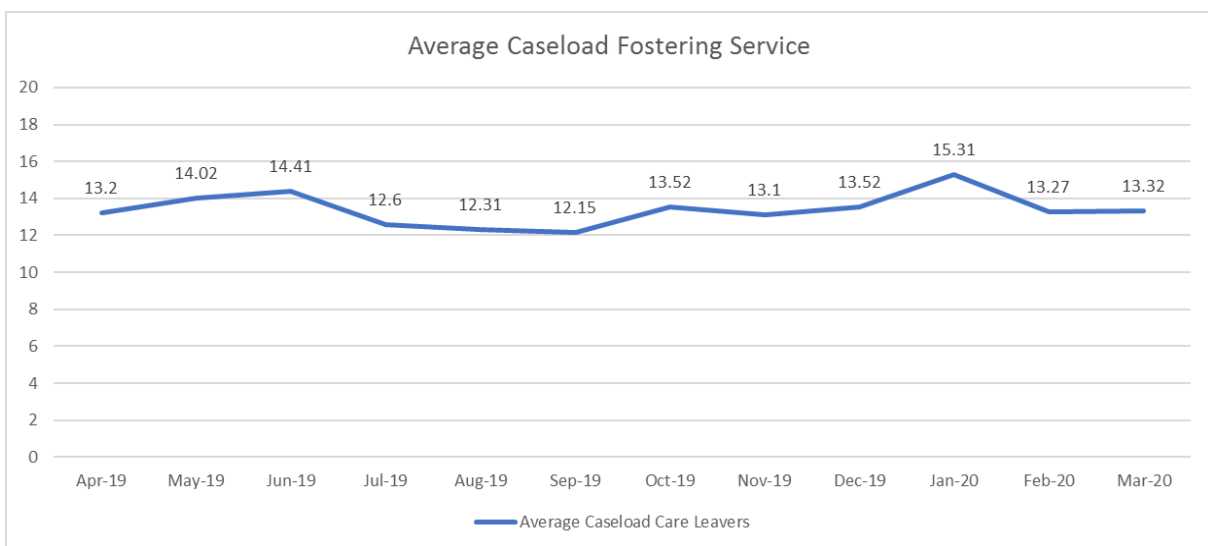


Average Caseload Care Leavers Teams

	Apr 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Number of Children - Care Leavers	181	194	194	201	207	216	221	225	232	267	259	259
Total case holders Care Leavers FTE (inc. PAs)	8.8	9.8	9.8	9.8	11.8	11.8	11.8	11.8	12.8	12.8	12.8	12.8
Average Caseload Care Leavers	20.57	19.80	19.80	20.51	17.54	18.31	18.73	19.07	18.13	20.86	20.23	20.23

The Fostering Service

The new staffing establishment for the Fostering Service was put into place at the start of this year, and is based on modelling of 16.5 fostering households per Supervising Social Worker, and circa 6 assessments at any one time for an assessing social worker. This is based on recent benchmarking with local and national comparators.



Average Caseload Fostering Teams

	Apr 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	Aug 2019	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Number Cases Fostering Service	283	286	265	257	272	277	281	273	269	274	264	265
Total Caseholders Fostering FTE	21.39	20.39	18.39	20.39	22.09	22.79	20.79	20.90	19.90	17.90	19.90	19.90
Average Caseload Fostering	13.20	14.02	14.41	12.60	12.31	12.15	13.52	13.10	13.52	15.31	13.27	13.32

Demand for Foster Placements for Children in Care (Internal and External)

A priority for SCT within the last two years has been to understand and model, where we can, the number of foster care placements we need as there are clear links between children's placement and financial modelling (outlined in Section (a)).

In order to manage the demand for placements, the Chief Executive chairs a regular meeting to progress matters regarding our strategic approach to Children in Care. The Children in Care Strategic Group is a long-term programme of work with 3 workstreams, each led by a Director. Progress in this area requires a sustained focus on our goals, and it takes time to see the benefits.

The aims of this group are:

Managing the current demand of Looked After Children:

- We have worked to resolve bottlenecks at key points in a child's journey to ensure that children's plans are appropriate. This has included discharging a cohort of children from care who were placed with parents under a Care Order, and progressing very settled children who are placed with connected or mainstream carers who could be discharged through Special Guardianship.
- We have put in place arrangements for closer management oversight of all children entering care and are working to support as many children to remain in their family where it is safe to do so at an earlier stage.
- We continue to work closely with the judiciary and CAFCASS as part of the Family Justice Board to promote their confidence in our Special Guardianship plans, and maintain the progress of raising our credibility in this arena.
- We have a revised Special Guardianship (payments to carers) policy that will allow us to make better use of Special Guardianship as a permanence option, thus reducing continued statutory intervention in children's lives and social work resource in delivering statutory services where resource not required).
- We have two established court teams within the Care Management service.
- Through work undertaken to implement the Practice Framework, there is a clear focus for social workers to robustly plan for permanence as early as possible.

Invest to Save:

- We have an established medium term financial strategy that seeks to invest in initiatives that offer opportunities to make savings at the same time as better meeting the needs of our children and young people. Examples of this are:
 - Family Drug and Alcohol Court
 - 'In-house' training flats to promote independence

- We have produced a range of data that allows us to understand our Children in Care cohort and redesign our current ‘Edge of Care’ services. A review from our improvement partners in Essex gave us the confidence that our plans for Edge of Care services were on the right track.

Growing the Market:

- We led on the re-procurement of external placements provision through a framework on behalf of several west midlands authorities – which provide us with more influence when making bespoke arrangements for our children
- We have targeted those children who could be moved from high cost residential placements to family placements over the long term – which we believe will ultimately make significant savings while increasing a child’s opportunity to thrive in a family setting
- The development of a marketing strategy for foster carer recruitment, which includes targeted marketing (i.e. social media) and local marketing. DfE funding has been obtained for a marketing professional in this area.
- We are investing in fostering recruitment to ensure we maximise the number of ‘internal’ foster carers, to ensure best value for money.

The number of Children in Care who need a placement is the biggest contributor to our resource deficit outlined in Section (a). First and foremost, we need to ensure that all our children in care are in the right placement for them, and wherever possible we must be getting best value for money from these placements.

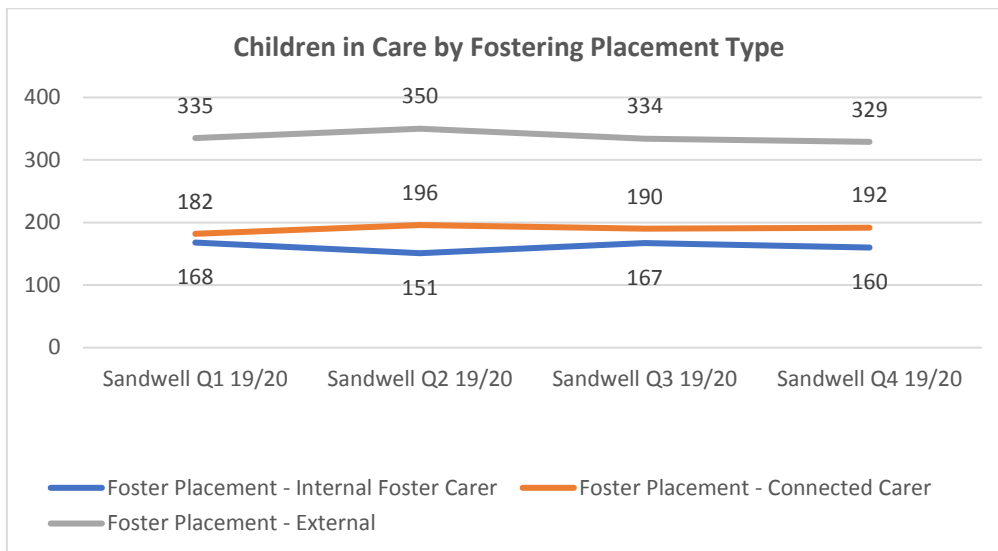
The table below shows where our Children in Care have been placed since 1st April 2019, focused on those settings that have the highest resource implications.

Table 7 – Children in Care by accommodation type

Type of Accommodation	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	Q3 19/20	Q4 19/20
Foster Placement - Internal Foster Carer	168	151	167	160
Foster Placement - Connected Carer	182	196	190	192
Foster Placement - External	335	350	334	329
Placed with Parents	84	81	74	79
Residential Homes - External	49	49	48	51
Secure Accommodation	10	3	3	2
Independent Living	60	56	49	36
Placed for Adoption	28	26	22	20
Family Centre or Mother and Baby unit	5	3	1	1
Other Placements	0	4	5	5
NHS/Health Trust or other Establishment Providing Medical or Nursing Care	0	1	1	1
Total	921	920	894	876

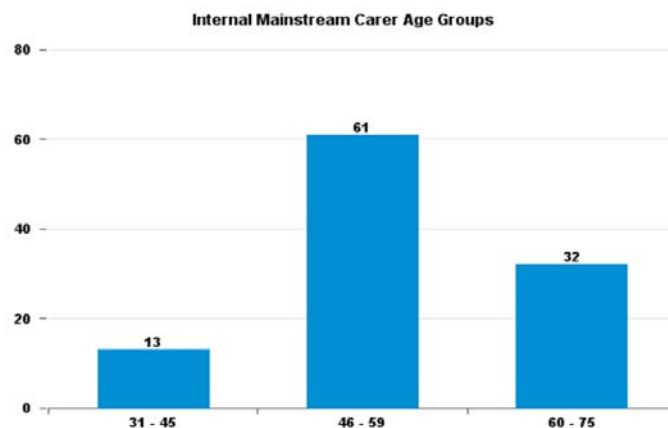
Approved Foster Carers

As a Trust, we are registered as an Independent Fostering Agency. However, we are no different from a Local Authority fostering service in that we provide support for both mainstream and connected carers, alongside commissioning agency foster care placements.



As at 31 March 2020, we had 160 children placed with internal foster carers, which is an overall decrease of 8 over the financial year. 329 children were placed with external agency foster carers, which was a decrease of 6 over the financial year. Finally, our use of connected carers has increased by 10.

The graph below outlines that 32 out of 106 (30.2%) mainstream foster carers (who were approved on 31 March 2020) are aged over 60, and are therefore more likely to retire within the next five years. This, alongside a reduction of children’s placements with internal foster carers represents a sufficiency challenge for us.



Many local authorities set themselves targets for a certain number of new foster carers (and therefore new placements) every year. It is clear that we would benefit from as many good quality internal foster carer placements as we can obtain, and have secured additional investment from the DfE to strengthen our marketing strategy.

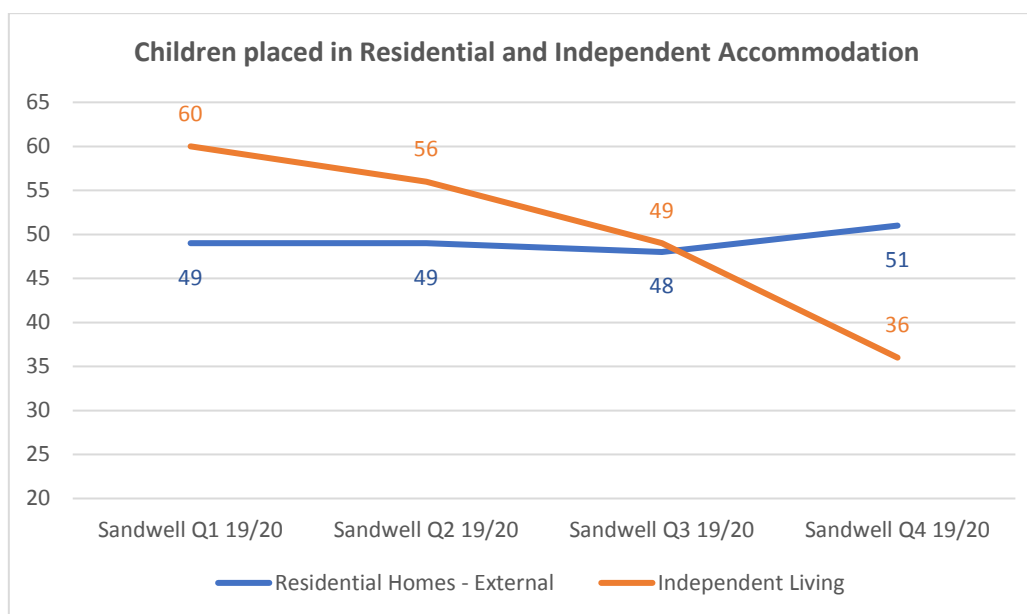
Residential Placements

We do not operate any residential children’s homes and are therefore whenever we need to place a child outside of a family setting we do this through a commissioned agency. External residential placements represent our highest cost placements, and are a clear area for ensuring we are making the best use of resources. Whilst there will always be a need to accommodate children with complex needs, often there are more appropriate ‘family settings’ for these children, which we have explored.

A further pressure for us is independent accommodation for older Children in Care and Care Leavers, which often is supported and comes at a significant cost.

Table 9 – Children in Care by accommodation type (residential and independent)

Type of Accommodation	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	Q3 19/20	Q4 19/20
Residential Homes - External	49	49	48	51
Secure Accommodation	10	3	3	2
Independent Living	60	56	49	36
Family Centre or Mother and Baby unit	5	3	1	1



Targeted work to effectively and appropriately handle demand that already exists within the Trust

In response to our understanding of the demand, and alongside a myriad of activity to be as efficient as possible, we have invested in specialist staff to ‘free’ capacity from certain teams, and also to directly support in safely ‘exiting’ children from care. The work undertaken by this temporary peripatetic team has been:

- The closure of Child in Need cases that have been identified as appropriate, effectively freeing up capacity within the Care Management Service to progress children’s plans.
- Discharging Care Orders relating to children placed with parents, where this can be achieved safely. The team has targeted a small cohort of children, and prepared evidence for the courts to consider the merits of discharge. This team successfully discharged 32 children from our care in total by the year end.
- 20 children have been discharged from our care with no order necessary. Of note is the speed the court has considered some of these cases – seven children were discharged from our care after a single hearing, which demonstrates the confidence and appropriateness the court and Cafcass had in our applications.

- The team are currently focussing on exploring Special Guardianship as a permanence option. As of 31st March 2020, we secured 8 placements for our children in care, 6 of whom we had a Care Order and 2 who were Section 20 accommodated. There are clear benefits to promoting Special Guardianship for children, not least to minimise social work intervention where it is not necessary. To do this we have reviewed our Special Guardianship payment policy so that it works to maximise efficiency and is an attractive offer to current connected carers, which will be our next cohort to target.
- Finally, the team are currently undertaking active work with 27 children who could be placed under Special Guardianship and have now begun to systematically review children where the Placement Order needs to be rescinded.

The Children in Care service has undertaken a systematic review of all children in care to formalise their permanence plans, and determine those who can be targeted by the peripatetic team for discharge from our care. This is in conjunction with our Family Solutions Team, who have the capacity to provide intensive support during reunification. The teams now attend the permanence panel so that children can be identified for Special Guardianship or reunification as soon as possible.

Section (g) - The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year

There were no formal action plans or rectification plans in the Contract year 2019/20.

Section (h) - Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure

Changes to Service Delivery Contract

There were no changes to the Service Delivery Contract during this financial year.

Changes to Support Services Agreements

On 21st May 2019, the Strategic Partnership Board agreed that the following changes would be made to the Support Services Agreement:

- To continue and extend the support services provided through the Finance (Treasury Management) and HR (Administration) agreements for a further year (covering the financial year 2019/20).
- To correct an error within the Finance (Treasury Management) relating to Gender Pay Gap reporting.

Other significant changes

On 12th November 2019, it was agreed that the council appointed Non-Executive Directors would be Neil Cox, Interim Director Prevention and Protection, and Councillor Peter Allen.

Section (i) - Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year

There are no proposed changes to the Services Specification, Financial Mechanism or the Performance Indicators in the next contract year.

Section (j) - The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19

There are no comments to be made about the contractual governance, (change controls).

Section (k) - Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

There are no additional matters in this report that have been agreed by both parties.