

## **Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

**Tuesday 25 July, 2017 at 5.00pm  
Committee Room 2  
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

### **Agenda**

(Open to Public and Press)

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Members to declare:-
  - (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
  - (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.
3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April, 2017 as a correct record.
4. Directors presentation.
5. Work programme planning.
6. Children's Trust Update

**J Britton**  
**Chief Executive**  
Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
Oldbury

**Distribution:**

Councillor J Underhill (Chair),  
Councillor S Phillips (Vice-Chair), Councillor C White (Vice-Chair),  
Councillors Allen, Ashman, Y Davies, Hickey, L Horton, Preece, Rouf,  
Shaeen

**Co-opted Members:-**

Rev P French (Church of England Diocese representative)  
Vacant (Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative)  
Vacant (Primary School Governor representative)  
Vacant (Secondary School Governor representative)

**Agenda prepared by Deb Breedon  
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**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

**Apologies**

To receive any apologies from members.

## **Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

### **Declarations of Interest**

Members to declare:-

- (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.

**Minutes of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

**24<sup>th</sup> April, 2017 at 5.00 pm**  
**at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Underhill (Chair);  
Councillors Allen, Ashman, Hickey, Phillips,  
Preece, Taylor and White.

**Apologies:** Councillor, EM Giles and Reverend P French (Co-opted member).

**In Attendance:** Vince Clark, Director - Children and Families;  
Tracy Collins, Group Head Looked After Children;  
Jim Leivers, Interim Director- Children's Services.

10/17 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

11/17 **Fostering Services**

The Interim Director – Children's Services highlighted the importance of scrutiny focus on children's services and the need to prioritise improvements to fostering services.

The Board was advised that demands on fostering services were rising and the number of young people coming into care was increasing weekly. The stress on resources and shortage of in-house foster carers meant that too many young people were in placements with either private fostering services or outside the Sandwell area.

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The Board was advised that current issues were the result of the thresholds for children's social work set in previous years based on professional advice. The thresholds were not what OFSTED inspectors had expected to see in Sandwell which traditionally had a high deprivation factor. The pressures on services had reflected in staff morale and performance and resulted in consecutive inadequate OFSTED inspection outcomes.

The current position was a result of Secretary of State intervention to transfer Children's Services into a Children's Trust. Work on the Children's Social Care Trust was underway and it was expected to be operational in the autumn 2017; the Trust was different to other charitable Trusts in that it would be owned by Sandwell Council.

The Interim Director – Children's Services highlighted that there would be several areas for scrutiny to focus on during 2017-18 to get the building blocks in place for children's service improvements, including children in care, child protection, children in need and relationships with schools.

The Board received a presentation from the Group Head Looked After Children which covered the following areas for discussion by the Board:

- fostering service composition;
- expenditure on fostering activity 2016/17;
- fostering activity;
- recruitment activity;
- offer to foster carers;
- how do we compare;
- where our children are placed with internal carers;
- what do we need to do.

The Board discussed the previous decision to outsource fostering assessments and the need to now bring the assessments back in-house to improve efficiency and better integration of services. The Director of Children and Families highlighted that in-house service would need to be better supported with regular training for and supervision of assessment staff. The Board was advised that the resources allocated for external assessment would be re-directed for training and support of in-house staff.

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The Group Head, Looked After Children, advised the Board that the fostering budget for 2016-17 had been slightly underutilised and assured them that the full budget would be used in 2017-18 to increase numbers of in-house foster carers in Sandwell.

In response to questions, the Group Head clarified the difference between foster carers and connected persons foster carers, and advised that connected persons would normally be an extended family member but could also be a godparent or godparents. She further explained that the connected person's foster carers would be trained and that the Council was approaching them to become mainstream foster carers, to foster children that were not part of the foster carer's extended family.

The Group Head advised that there had been 15 foster carer resignations in 2016-17 for a variety of reasons, such as change of personal circumstances, ill health or that foster caring was not what they had expected. She confirmed that there was a need to get a better understanding why people had left foster caring and to determine what worked and what did not work. Regular meetings with foster carers had taken place to talk through issues and look at ways forward. The Group Head indicated that the best promotion amongst potential foster carers was word of mouth from existing foster carers.

The Board was advised that the cost of a foster placement in-house was £23,000 and that the agency cost was £40,000; the Board highlighted the need to recruit more foster carers in house and welcomed that 8 mainstream fostering assessments were underway and 3 foster carer couples had been booked onto skills to foster training.

The Board was advised that the training had to follow the relevant steps of getting references, attending courses and finding a placement; each case had a different set of circumstances and there would be some flexibility depending on the individual case.

The Board was advised that incentives for foster carers had been considered by comparing it to good practice in other local authorities. The Interim Director - Children's Services indicated that Sandwell Council had to be in the market to be an employer of choice and to do so the Council had to be more flexible and more competitive.

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In relation to where children were placed across the six towns and the equality of opportunity for foster carers, the Board highlighted the need for the fostering offer to reflect the diversity of communities of Sandwell. The Director - Children's Services advised the Board that this had been identified and that the Council aimed to invest in the diversity and the geography of the area to ensure the fostering, adoption and care leaver's offers. He clarified that more resources had to be allocated to meet this aim and to recruit more foster carers and social workers. The Director - Children and Families highlighted the need to pull together a more detailed plan to recruit from a wider range of communities in Sandwell and agreed it was about the community links and community groups.

The Vice Chair emphasised the need for recruitment to focus on the communities in Sandwell, to go into Churches and mosques and talk to the people who knew the diversity and deprivation in localities and where there were potential connected persons foster carers or foster carers that may need support and information to come forward.

A case was highlighted by a member where a single Muslim woman had felt unsupported by the social worker and unaccepted by the community when trying to become a foster parent and that the six towns had a wide mix of ethnicity and diversity. It was suggested that officers further reduce target areas for the fostering campaign to focus on specific communities with in each of the six towns.

The Group Head Looked after Children outlined the next steps in the presentation with a focus on recruitment, connections, geographical information and the need to focus on types of foster carers. She advised that there was also a need to encourage an initiative 'Foster to adopt', to develop the offer for the emergency carer's pool and to focus on retention of foster carers who had recently retired from full time foster caring.

The Board was advised that the motivator for becoming a foster carer was not usually money related often the person may want to give something back to society, make a difference and give a child stability. The Board was informed of a three-year placement strategy for young people in transition from the care system and felt this was a positive experience.

The Board emphasised the need for more in-house foster carers to be recruited and was advised that the aim of Children's Services

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was to appoint 30 foster carers per annum, year on year to build a consistent foster carers offer.

The Chair thanked officers and the Board for a very informative and open discussion. She welcomed the proposed campaign to recruit foster carers and asked for further consideration of the councillors' role in relation to promoting foster care and the recruitment of foster carers in communities.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that the Director of Children and Families provide fostering updates as a regular item to each meeting of the 2017-18 Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board;
- (2) that the Director of Children and Families include councillors in the campaign to promote and recruit foster carers to reach out to local communities.

12/17

### **Children's Social Care Trust Update**

The Interim Director – Children's Services and Director of Children and Families provided an update to the Board. The Director Children and Families advised that the new management team was progressing actions identified with a focus on improving social worker practice standards on the ground.

The Board was advised that the Chair of the Trust position had been advertised but as this was a Secretary of State appointment it would not be completed until after the General Election on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The target date for the Sandwell Social Care Trust to commence was 2 October 2017, however the date was now likely to be delayed.

The Board was advised that there were plans to refurbish Council accommodation for the Trust and that this was likely to be ready at the end of October 2017.

The Board was advised that Children's Commissioner was pleased with the progress.

The Director of Children and Families gave an update in terms of practice improvement. He advised that there needed to be a

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reduction in the number of caseloads allocated and following a bench marking exercise with other authorities 18 cases per social worker had been identified. There was recognition that in some parts of the service more would be needed and in others less. He advised that work was progressing with Group Heads in terms of raising standards of support, supervision and team management and that the senior management would set the framework to give time and space for the social workers to undertake their duties satisfactorily.

The Board was advised that once the framework was in place there was an expectation that the quality of work and performance would improve and that audits and quality assurance would be monitored and address any actions highlighted to put processes and checks back in place.

The Director - Children and Families confirmed that the service had been universally poor, however, realistically it would take two to three years to re-build the service and imbed improvements.

The Board was advised that the working environment had improved since members had visited Children's Services offices on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016 as part of the scrutiny work stream of recruitment and retention of social workers. The Director - Children and Families invited the Board to revisit children's services offices and meet with social workers.

In response to questions, the Board was advised that managers had not satisfactorily carried out supervision or auditing of social worker caseloads. They were re-assured that senior officers were working with social workers and managers to consider the issues, learn and close the loops.

The Chair thanked officers for a clear account of the matters relating to the Sandwell Social Care Trust and requested an update report to the next meeting.

### **Resolved**

- (1) that the Interim Director - Children's Services be requested to provide an update on the Children's Trust to the next meeting of the Board;

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- (2) that the Director - Children and Families arrange a visit for members of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board to visit children's services offices and meet with social workers.

13/17

### **Updates from the Chair and Vice-Chair**

#### **Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers**

The Vice-Chair advised that the recommendations of the work stream group had been drafted and agreed to circulate background papers and summary of findings to the Director of Children's Service, The Director - Children and Families and Group Head of Looked after Children.

(Meeting ended 6:26pm)

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**Agenda Item 4**

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

**25 July 2017**

**Directors' Presentation of Key Issues and Priorities.**

The Board will receive a presentation from the Service Directors and Service Managers relating to the key issues and priorities for services that fall within the remit of the Children's Service and Education Scrutiny Board.

The presentation will inform work programme planning for this Board for 2017-18.

**Darren Carter**  
**Executive Director – Resources**

Contact Officer

Deb Breedon  
Scrutiny Officer  
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**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

**25<sup>th</sup> July, 2017**

**Work Programme 2017/2018**

**1. Summary Statement**

- 1.1 The Board is asked to consider its work programme for 2017/2018 and the establishment of any working groups as a vehicle to deliver the work programme.
- 1.2 Setting a work programme is an important stage in the scrutiny process. A well-planned work programme should focus on issues where scrutiny can add value, support the Council's 2030 Vision and enhance the services that the Council delivers.
- 1.3 Following a review of the Council's governance structure, at its meeting on 16 May, 2017 the Council established four scrutiny boards and a scrutiny management board - Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board - to deliver Sandwell's scrutiny function. The diagram at Appendix 1 sets out the structure. The Council appointed two vice-chairs to each scrutiny board, who will take the lead on a topic from within their respective Board's terms of reference, reporting back to the Board the findings of that work.
- 1.4 The Terms of Reference of this Board is attached as Appendix 2.
- 1.5 Officers from Democratic Services have been co-ordinating the gathering of suggested topics for the five scrutiny boards' work programmes for 2017/2018. This process has included:-
  - contacting all councillors seeking their suggestions;
  - contacting directors for suggestions;
  - seeking suggestions from staff via the Council's weekly communication email;
- 1.6 As well as reflecting the Council's 2030 Vision, work programmes should reflect local need and priorities. Scrutiny welcomes and values suggestions for its work programmes from the public. Suggestions were therefore also sought from the public via the Council's social

media platforms and newsletters. Around 60 suggestions were received.

- 1.7 Appendix 3 sets out the suggestions received from all sources relating to this Board's terms of reference, it includes any items requested by the previous Boards and any incomplete reviews from 2016/2017 that are now within the remit of this Board.
- 1.8 Appendix 4 provides the prioritisation tool, which the Board should utilise in determining its work programme.
- 1.9 The Strategic Risk Register can be viewed [here](#), which the Board may wish to refer to in developing its work programme. A revised risk register will be available in August 2017.
- 1.10 The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board has responsibility for approval of work programmes to ensure that there is efficient use of resources and that potential for duplication of effort is reduced.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Board considers the suggestions received from members, partners and the public and, using the Scrutiny Prioritisation Tool, determines its draft work programme for 2017/2018.
- 2.2 That the Board gives consideration to the establishment of working groups to support its two vice-chairs on delivery of their key areas of responsibility.
- 2.3 That the Board submits its draft work programme for 2017/2018 to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for approval.

**Darren Carter**  
**Executive Director-Resources**

Contact Officer

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Scrutiny Officer  
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### **3. Strategic Resource Implications**

- 3.1 The Scrutiny function is directly supported by Scrutiny Officers within the Council's Governance service, with technical expertise and evidence on specific matters provided by officers within the various directorates of the authority.
- 3.2 The strategic resource implications of the topics selected for scrutiny will be identified and reported to members on a case by case basis.

### **4. Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 4.1 Local Government Act 2000 states that Councils operating executive arrangements must also make provision for the appointment of overview and scrutiny committees.
- 4.2 Further powers relating to overview and scrutiny are set out in the Police and Justice Act 2006, the Localism Act 2011, the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

### **5. Implications for the Sandwell Vision 2030**

- 5.1 A series of ambitions for Sandwell were developed around key themes identified by Cabinet. The Sandwell 2030 Vision and 10 ambitions provide a new vision for Sandwell and subsequently a new Performance Management Framework that replaced the Council's scorecard.
- 5.2 Following consultation and engagement with the public and partners around developing the new vision for Sandwell, the Council approved the Sandwell Vision 2030 at its meeting on 18 July, 2017. The vision and the ten ambitions drives both the Council's own business and budget planning process and drives wider partnership activity in Sandwell.
- 5.3 The Council's vision focuses on creating a resilient borough in terms of both Sandwell's people and the place and ambition to:
  - 1. Raise aspirations and resilience
  - 2. Healthier for longer and safer
  - 3. Young people to have skills for the future
  - 4. Raising the quality of schools
  - 5. Lowering crime and ASB
  - 6. Excellent public transport to the region and beyond
  - 7. Major new housing along transport routes and employment sites
  - 8. Create environments in the six towns where people chooses to live

9. Hosting industries of the future
10. National reputation for getting things done

5.4 The ambitions have been factored into work programme planning for 2017-18 and each report will identify the ambition that is relevant to the topic of the report.

## **6. Background Details**

6.1 Scrutiny is a Member-led function. It is vital that scrutiny members take responsibility for both drawing up and managing their own work programme. The work programme is a working document and should be flexible to respond to new or urgent issues change and members can add, remove, and defer items as necessary. A Work Programme will provide a clear picture to the public and partners of planned scrutiny activity for the year.

6.2 An effective scrutiny work programme should reflect a balance of activities:-

- holding the executive to account
- holding partners to account
- policy review and development
- performance management
- public and community engagement

6.3 Work programmes should be based on sound criteria with a clear rationale for each item. The Scrutiny Team has developed that attached Prioritisation Tool to support the Board through the work programming process. The tool has proven to be a sound method for developing a robust work programme and has been requested and shared with neighbouring authorities.

6.4 In addition to the prioritisation tool a template has been developed to focus each item on the work programme to be signed off by the Chair of the Board. The 'Item Brief' template will identify the following:-

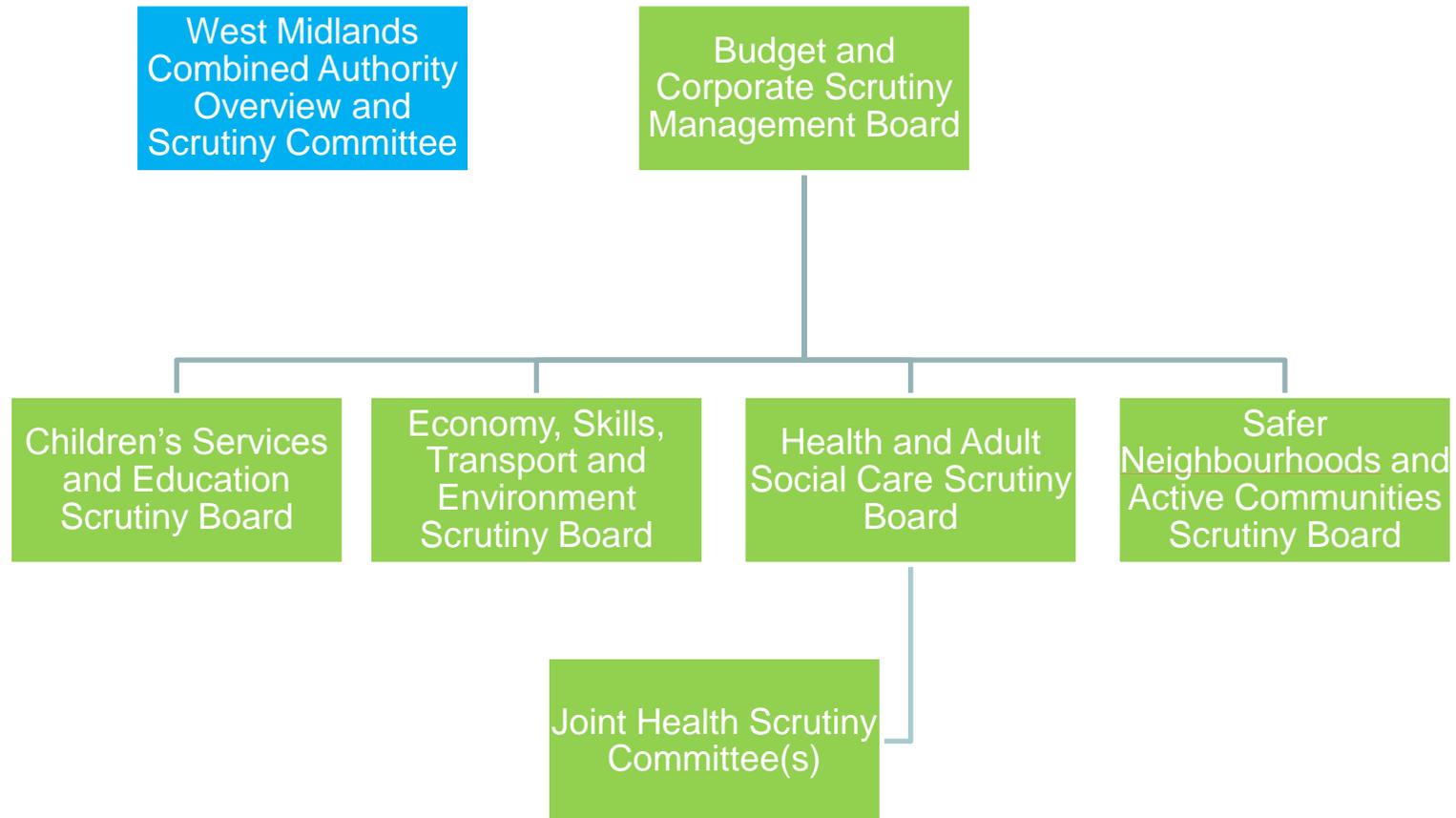
- the reason for and purpose of the item;
- the intended outcome(s);
- links to the Council Vision;
- any specific lines of enquiry requested;
- the lead Director.

6.5 In-depth reviews identified for inclusion in the work programme will be subject to the completion and agreement of a 'Scoping Document'. This document is used to set parameters for the review, identify work tasks and to ensure the work remains focussed and on track. The Scoping Document will identify the following:-

- the reason for and purpose of the item;
- the intended outcome(s);
- links to the Council Vision;
- any specific lines of enquiry requested;
- the lead Director and key officers;
- existing data sources relevant to the topic;
- review work programme (reports, visits, workshops, focus groups etc.)

It should be noted that Scoping Documents are living documents and will be revisited throughout the life of the review to ensure it remains relevant, focussed and possible to deliver.

## Appendix 1



## Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

### Terms of Reference

As set out in the Scrutiny Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution to scrutinise recommendations, consider referrals under the Call for Action process, and contribute to decision making and policy development through pre-decision scrutiny processes in relation to the following matters:-

- (a) all of the functions of the Council as an authority under the Education Acts, School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and all other relevant legislation in force from time to time (i.e. pre-school, statutory and post 16 education);
- (b) any other education related services for children and young people;
- (c) services for children, young people and families;
- (d) any trust or partnership which involves the care of local children and young people;
- (e) local safeguarding arrangements for children and young people including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Safeguarding Children Board;
- (f) corporate parenting, including services and support to care leavers;
- (g) early years services;
- (h) Targeted Youth Support.

The following issues were put forward as part of the public consultation on scrutiny work programmes and the Board is advised to utilise the prioritisation tool attached at appendix 4 to determine which issue it would like to place on its Work Programme for 2017/2018.

School Place Sufficiency (2)

Failing Academies

SEND – update on partnership work to support improvements required for SEND

Local Area Review

Place Planning – Annual update on sufficiency of school places

Numbers in parentheses indicate multiple suggestions received on those topics.

During 2016/17, the following topics relating to the terms of reference for the Children's Services Scrutiny Board were referred for potential inclusion in the 2017/18 work programme:

PRU Pupil referral - Education White Paper;

Fostering Services monitoring;

School Place Planning December 2017;

Commissioning and Monitoring of Serious Case Review;

Strategies for Improved Careers guidance;

Childhood Obesity Update February 2018;

Children's Trust Update;

Monitoring progress - Care Leavers Review;

Children's Safeguarding report.

**For consideration of 2017/2018 Scrutiny Work Programme**



**Agenda Item 6**

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board**

**25 July 2017**

**Children's Trust Update**

The Board will receive an update from the Interim Director Children's Services on the Children's Trust in Sandwell.

**Darren Carter**  
**Executive Director – Resources**

Contact Officer

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