


**REPORT TO  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY  
BOARD**

**12 November 2018**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children's Trust – Six Monthly Update Report
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Simon Hackett - Cabinet Member for Children's Services
<b>Director:</b>	Frances Craven – Chief Executive Sandwell Children's Trust Tara Malik – Director of Strategy, Sandwell Children's Trust
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Frances Craven – Chief Executive Sandwell Children's Trust 0121 569 8205 Tara Malik – Director of Strategy, Sandwell Children's Trust 0121 569 3653

**DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. Note the content of the Report and the overall update on the first six months of the Trust; and
2. Note the performance of Sandwell Children's Trust, attached at Appendix 2 – Trust Performance Monitoring Report.

## **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overall update on the performance of the Trust in the first six months since the services successfully transferred to Sandwell Children's Trust on the 1 April 2018.

## **2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION**

- 2.1 Sandwell Children's Trust serves the purpose of improving the lives of children and young people by:

- Listening, learning and caring
- Being ambitious and confident
- Encouraging innovation
- Acting with openness and transparency

- 2.2 Sandwell Children's Trust purpose supports the Sandwell 2030 vision around caring and being ambitious for vulnerable children and their families.

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 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 the Council. The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services.
- 3.2 The Trust Board governs the business of Sandwell Children's Trust and is made up of a Chair, Executive Directors and Non-Executive Directors. Two of the Trust's Non-Executive Directors are appointed by Sandwell MBC. The Trust Board members are as follows:
- Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith (Chair)
  - Frances Craven (Chief Executive Director)
  - Dan Mortiboys (Executive Director)
  - Steven Gauntley (Executive Director)
  - Linda Sanders (Non-Executive Director)
  - Stephen Rimmer (Non-Executive Director)
  - Vineeta Manchanda (Non-Executive Director)
  - Cllr Paul Sandars (SMBC Non-Executive Director)
  - Stuart Lackenby (SMBC Non-Executive Director)

Tara Malik is the Company Secretary.

## 4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 To support the Trust's start on its improvement journey, the Department for Education procured the services of Doncaster Children's Services Trust. This included 'on the ground' support for staff as well as the provision of a Chair for the newly set up Improvement Board. In brief, the Improvement Board has been set up as a Strategic Board that oversees Improvement Plans and activity across the Sandwell Partnership. The current chair for this Board is Paul Moffat, who is the Chief Executive of Doncaster Children's Services Trust.
- 4.2 In the first month of operation, the Trust in conjunction with the Council developed an ambitious Improvement Plan that was signed off at the Improvement Board and submitted to Ofsted on the 10 May 2018. The Improvement Plan has eight priorities and is based on the actions and recommendations from Ofsted 2017 Single Inspection Framework (SIF) alongside the recommendations made by the DfE appointed Children's Commissioner. The Improvement Plan underpins the journey to 'Requires Improvement' by 2020 and 'Good' by 2022. A summary of progress is set out in following paragraphs (paragraph 4.4 to 4.11.)
- 4.3 Robust project management arrangements have been put in place overseen by the Trust Chief Executive, Frances Craven.
- 4.4 Since the establishment of the Trust, the leadership team with support from the Council and partners have focussed on creating a new culture which is child centred and at the same time introduces a very clear focus on performance, quality and accountability. The challenges the Trust faces are significant; whilst the Trust has increased the pace of improvement it does not underestimate the scale of change required. In the first few months the Trust's focus has primarily been on stabilising and supporting the workforce.

### **Improvement Plan – Summary of Progress**

- 4.5 **Priority 1 – Leadership:** Having strong leadership is pivotal in shaping and improving services for children and families and is the catalyst to transforming and delivering high quality services for children and young people

### ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- The Trust leadership team are all permanent appointments with the newly recruited Director of Operations taking up post in December 2018. The team are very experienced and within a short period of time understand and know the services well;

- Senior leaders and Trust Board members recognise the importance of being visible and accessible to all staff across all eleven sites. The leadership regularly ‘walk the floor’; hold monthly service based visits as part of the Trust Board days; have held many staff sessions and more recently a staff conference. The Trust Chief Executive has introduced an ‘In the loop’ newsletter, a weekly blog and has an open-door policy which is encouraging a culture of openness, better communication and connection at all levels to the front line;
- Steps were taken very soon after go-live to strengthen the operational management of the service with the introduction of six temporary Operational Managers located in the Front Door and Care Management Services;
- The Trust has completed a review of the leadership and management structure, which will be implemented in November 2018. The new management structure aims to increase management capacity to ensure there are appropriate spans of control, strengthen management grip and drive improvement.

4.6 **Priority 2 – Workforce:** Having a highly committed, child focussed workforce is essential in creating an environment where social work can flourish. These values alongside a shared goal of improvement are vital to our improvement journey.

### ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- The Trust continues focus on recruitment and retention of social workers;
- The Trust Board put in place a short-life working group to prioritise the development of a new workforce strategy and model for reviewing demand to ensure staff have manageable caseloads. As a result, the Trust successfully launched the Sandwell Offer – the “12 reasons to work at Sandwell” - to staff in July 2018. The 12 reasons were well received, and there is now a focus on ensuring the delivery of all elements of the offer particularly the learning and development opportunities;
- Recognising the instability in the workforce, in particular within the Care Management service, the Trust has introduced a time limited market supplement in a considered way to retain staff and recruit to a high number of vacancies. The impact of this has been positive and whilst the situation remains fragile, the service has seen greater stability in workforce numbers;
- The Trust has put in place a training and development Core Offer detailing learning and development activities for all staff in the Trust, including a career and professional development framework;
- Four Team Managers from the Trust have recently started the national Firstline programme;

- As a result of sustained focus on recruitment and retention, in September 2018, the Trust had 205 social workers in post against an establishment of 220. This is a significant increase over the 155 in post in August 2016. In addition, the Trust has made real progress in ensuring the stability of the workforce with the proportion of temporary staff dropping from 35.7% in August 2017 to 27.2% in September 2018.
- Alongside this, focused work has taken place to ensure casework is progressed in a timely way which has resulted in caseloads reducing from an average of 20 per worker (April 2018) to 18.8 across the service (September 2018). This represents good progress.

4.7 **Priority 3 – Practice:** The quality of practice is fundamental in improving the lives of children and their families in Sandwell. Good practice is fostered by strong leadership which develops a confident and competent workforce who place children at the centre of their work.

### ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- The focus on improvement of practice remains central to the work of the Trust. The new Quality Assurance Framework is becoming embedded and the impact of Beyond Auditing work can now be seen. This work is targeted to particular teams, where audits have identified a need for improved practice. The results of audits are translated directly into work with and alongside frontline workers to focus on the best standards of practice;
- The Trust has clear minimum practice standards and the performance governance system is understood by all staff;
- Staff are now responding to the weekly performance meetings and the higher expectations being placed on them;
- The Trust has also recently developed Performance Dashboards which enable more ‘real time’ analysis of performance with daily reporting of critical performance metrics;
- Daily performance reporting started in March 2018 and continues to be a crucial tool for understanding day to day activity;
- Practice guidance and standards have been launched in order to strengthen practice across the service. Expectations in relation to key practice areas have been communicated to all staff across the service in the form of briefing sessions, practice updates briefings and through the learning and development programme. Further practice is scrutinised via robust audit activity as part of the performance framework which was praised by Ofsted in the recent monitoring inspection;
- The Practitioners Improvement Board supports to drive improvements in practice and compliance by dip sampling practice to ensure that social workers are ensuring that minimum practice standards are being implemented and maintained;

- In order to help staff understand and manage the ambitious Improvement Plan, 12 week plans have been introduced. These also help preparation for future monitoring visits and implementation of recommendations from previous visits;
- Building on the training programme by Doncaster, the Trust is holding Team Manager workshops to strengthen areas of practice. The overall intention is to ensure Team Managers have the skills and knowledge to recognise and bring about good practice. This will be the key to improvement across the breadth of the Trust;
- A more thorough and robust mapping exercise is underway to identify gaps in process, policy and practice guidance. This will inform our long term approach to improvement.

4.8 **Priority 4 – Children Looked After, Care Leavers, Permanence:** This is a fundamental priority of our plan because as ‘Corporate Parents’ we have a duty to make sure that that decisions about our children and young people becoming looked after are based on robust social work practice supported by a rigorous framework which facilitate safe, stable permanent placements which support and drive positive, sustainable outcomes where our children thrive and achieve.

### ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- This remains a critical area and the Trust is continuing to address tracking arrangements for permanency, managing the demand within the LAC population and a focus on strengthening the foundations within fostering and adoption;
- The Trust has introduced clear and concise process maps for entry into care and has established the Director’s Resource and Decision-Making Panel. The purpose of the Panel is to provide direction and clear decision making in relation to legal planning meetings, issuing of proceedings and all admissions to care. These developments provide social workers with structure and processes in this area of practice. The impact of this was recognised in the Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter (September 2018) where they stated that “Correct decisions are made when children become looked after”;
- The Trust has put in place a 12 week action plan with a renewed focus on addressing the pre-proceedings, permanency planning and the legacy issues around a backlog of life story work and later life letters. An experienced Senior Social Worker has been seconded in this area to provide additional capacity to ensure that tracking of Adoption Cases is accurate and robust; there is an accurate baseline of who requires a Lifestory Book and Later Life Letter; support the drive to improve the quality of Child Permanence Reports and assist in the timeliness of Adoption Plans;
- Work is underway to ensure that children and young people that no longer need to be looked after have a safe and more timely exit from

care. The Director of Resources in conjunction with the current Interim Director of Operations are leading a piece of work to look at 'reunifying' children with their parents/family.

- 4.9 **Priority 5 – Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Missing and Trafficked:** Exploitation destroys lives and affects all our communities; and is recognised nationally as one of the most important challenges facing local agencies today. It has a serious long term and lasting impact on every aspect of a child's life including their health, physical and emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, personal safety, relationships and future life opportunities.

#### ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- The Trust has undertaken a review of the Front Door service which builds upon the work undertaken by the Improvement Advisor (Doncaster Children's Services Trust). This includes a review of the structure and function of CSE and Exploitation within the organisation. A 12-week action plan is in place and is being led by the Director of Quality and Performance;
  - Work has taken place to refresh the strategic and operational groups; this remains a focus for the wider partnership;
  - The Trust recognises that improving children's social care can only be achieved through effective partnerships. The Trust has already presented the top 10 risky cases to partners at the September Improvement Board. As a result of the Trust's approach, a working group has been established with partners to agree the "Top Ten" most vulnerable children before the next board meeting on 6 November 2018 and report their findings. Partners have been tasked with looking to agree a common understanding about threshold criteria which are used to identify those children and young people who are most vulnerable. This will result in renewed protocols about how partners work together with these most vulnerable children;
  - A review of the Service Level Agreement with Barnardo's to drive improved performance has commenced;
  - The Beyond Auditing Team are in the process of delivering training to key staff regarding the identification and work associated with CSE, and wider exploitation.
- 4.10 **Priority 6 – Performance and Quality Assurance:** The children and young people of Sandwell deserve the best quality support and interventions possible. The focus is to deliver high quality services which reduce risk and vulnerability. Our Quality and Assurance systems and frameworks creates a structure for improvement which enables a shift in culture to drive passion for high quality practice.

## ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- The Trust has implemented a new Quality Assurance framework alongside the introduction of a Beyond Auditing team;
- The Beyond Auditing team are working across the service and using intelligence from performance information to drive quality team by team. Ofsted in their recent visit identified improvements in Social Worker Supervision records being well recorded, setting out the child's circumstances alongside what is working well. Additionally, Ofsted noted improvements in social work visits which demonstrate purposeful, direct work with children where tools and activities are used to gain children's views about their current circumstances, life at home and their wishes for the future. However, the Trust recognises that quality of practice is still too variable;
- Minimum Practice Standards for key areas of practice were implemented across the service in May 2018;
- A more rigorous analysis of performance information and audits have helped to identify areas of practice which need to be developed. Workshops are being delivered targeting themes found from the audit findings of the Beyond Auditing team;
- Weekly performance meeting chaired by the Director of Quality Assurance and Performance have seen improvements in some performance measures and targets areas of concern by focussing both on compliance and quality.
- Live dashboards have been implemented across the Trust which has facilitated a more forensic and 'real time' analysis of performance by managers which has supported performance deficits being understood and addressed in a more timely manner.

4.11 **Priority 7 – Partnerships:** Strong and effective partnerships are critical when transforming and improving children's services. Shared visions and values alongside a joined-up approach to tackling issues is fundamental if partnership approaches are to succeed.

## ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- Alongside the new Director of Children Services, the Trust has renewed the focus on effective partnership arrangements;
- The Improvement Board is up and running with attendance from partners, with increased buy in to the process. There has been a focus on joint working on specific areas such as Early Help; the nature and quality of referrals into the Front Door from schools; and the top ten most vulnerable children and young people;
- The Trust Chief Executive has committed to working with a number of Head Teachers to look at what support schools need when undertaking the lead professional role; a reference group of Head



Teachers has been established which will meet on a monthly basis to support the work of the Trust;

- The Director of Children Services has taken forward the discussion around future safeguarding arrangements and the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) will be in place from April 2019. A detailed project plan is in place and agreed by members of the MASA group;
- Partners have been invited to an event on the 8 November 18 to welcome them to the Trust and to reenergise partnership working by seeking a commitment to a 'Partner Pledge'.

4.12 **Priority 8 – Voice of the Child:** This priority is central to the improvement plan given that the child's voice should thread through all the priorities. The importance of capturing and understanding the child's voice and experience is fundamental in ensuring that children are effectively supported and safeguarded.

### ***Six Month Progress – Headline Summary***

- The Trust Board has placed an emphasis on putting children and young people's voices at the heart of our work. The Trust is an integral part of a review of the role of the Corporate Parenting Board;
- The Trust is developing a group of young people who will act as Young People's Advisers to the Trust including contributing to induction, recruitment of staff, training and shaping policies when appropriate;
- Work is underway to develop a Trust Shadow Board so that the Trust can enable meaningful input into the decision making of the Board by young people and this is envisaged to go live in the new year;
- The Trust has begun a programme of work with the young people to develop their views of the ideal social worker and foster carers which will be incorporated into training and recruitment;
- The Trust is currently working with young people to look at ways in which they can take part in the auditing of cases.

### **External Evaluation**

#### *Ofsted Monitoring Visits*

- 4.13 On the 30 and 31 May 2018 Ofsted undertook a monitoring visit to review progress in the areas of help and protection and children looked after with a focus on the quality of social work assessment.
- 4.14 A further monitoring visit took place on the 5 and 6 September 2018 and focussed on thresholds into care and looked after children.
- 4.15 The Ofsted monitoring visits raised specific areas for improvement as set out in **Appendix 1 – Monitoring Visit Letters**. Ofsted noted improvements in the culture of the organisation, the focus of the

leadership team and improvements in staff morale. Other feedback was that the quality of practice is too variable, with assessments and plans lacking rigour and interventions not timely enough. Ofsted positively recognised that the Trust continues to develop its understanding of frontline practice, through performance management, quality assurances and our direct involvement in services.

### Ofsted Inspection of the Youth Offending Service

- 4.16 The Trust has also been subject to an Inspection of our Youth Offending Service. The Trust expects the rating to be **Good when the report is published**, although it is clear that more work needs to be done on ensuring effective leadership and governance of the service.

### **Performance Monitoring**

- 4.17 The Trust is obliged to provide the Council with a monthly and quarterly Performance Report. A Performance Report is attached at **Appendix 2** and sets out the performance over the past six months in relation to a suite of fifteen key performance indicators and a summary of the Trust's quality assurance activity.
- 4.18 Overall, performance over the past six months has seen improvements in a number of areas. However, the fragility of the workforce remains a key risk in further reducing caseloads, continuing to improve compliance and the ability to create capacity to focus on the quality of practice. In addition, the biggest risk is in maintaining a focus on front line practice.

## **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 Through the formal contract governance arrangements, Sandwell Children's Trust and the Council meet monthly through the Operational Partnership Board and quarterly via the Strategic Partnership Board.
- 5.2 In addition to these formal contract governance arrangements, the Trust Chief Executive and Director of Children Services meet on a regular basis.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 This report provides a six month update on the progress made by Sandwell Children's Trust. No alternative options are required.

## **7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The finances provided by Sandwell Council to Sandwell Children's Trust is covered within a single budget envelope called the Contract Sum and on the 1 April 18 this amounted to approximately £58.23m. Of this sum, the Trust pay Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) £2.15m for

the provision of a number of back office support services under the Support Services Agreement. The Trust also occupy a number of properties and pay a further £0.63m to SMBC.

7.2 In addition, Sandwell Children's Trust receive a further £5.899m from Grants and Partner Contributions, and DfE funding for irrecoverable VAT which is estimated at £1.66m in 2018/19. Since the formation of The Trust there have been discussions between HMRC and DfE. These discussions have resulted in Sandwell Children's Trust being able to reclaim VAT through a standard VAT return rather than a grant from DfE.

7.3 The pre-go live increase in demand for services and in particular the increase in Looked After Children in the last quarter of 2017/18 has had an impact on the Trust budget for 2018/19. This pressure will need to be discussed as part of the annual Contract Sum negotiations to ensure a sustainable medium-term plan is agreed as part of the development of Trust's business plan.

## 8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Sandwell Children's Trust is commissioned by the Council and the relationship between the parties is set out primarily in the Articles of Association and Service Delivery Contract.

8.2 The Chair of the Trust was appointed by the Department for Education and provides quarterly reports to the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families. Her latest report can be found at **Appendix 3**.

8.3 A comprehensive programme of governance arrangements is in place. The Trust and Council officers meet on at least a monthly basis at the Operational Partnership Board (OPB) to consider performance and operational matters. The OPB is chaired by the Trust Chief Executive. Each quarter the Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust, Trust Chief Executive meets with the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services at a Strategic Partnership Board (SPB). Since the Trust went live there have been two meetings of the SPB.

8.4 Following the departure of the Sandwell Children's Commissioner, the DfE have established a Sandwell Improvement Board chaired by an independent chair. The Board has been established to provide leadership and challenge across the partnership to ensure that there is sustainable improvement in outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in the Borough. The Trust provides a monthly update to this Board on progress made against the Improvement Plan.

8.5 As a separate organisation, the Trust has in place a Trust Board made up of Non-Executive Directors and Executive Directors with an approved scheme of delegations. The Trust Board meets monthly to consider the overall direction of the company and it receives regular reports on matters

that relate to the performance and quality of the services, finances and human resources. In addition, three Committees have been established that cover:

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Finance and Infrastructure Committee
- Remuneration Committee

8.6 The Trust has in place a comprehensive risk management strategy and developing risk register. The Trust risk register sets out the key strategic, financial and operational 'high' risks which have been aligned to the delivery of the Improvement Plan and key performance metrics.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

9.1 There are no specific equality implications arising from the proposals in the report

## **10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

10.1 There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

## **11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

11.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

12.1 The performance of the Trust is monitored on a monthly basis both by the Trust itself and the Council. Continued dialogue and commitment between the Trust and the Council will ensure that the Improvement Plan is delivered and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people are improved.

## **13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

13.1 Sandwell Children's Trust aims to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families and improve social care practice. In this way, the Trust will contribute towards the health and wellbeing of the wider community.

## **14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

14.1 There is no direct impact to Council land or property as a result of this report.

## 15 APPENDICES:

15.1 Appendix One – Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback Letters

15.2 Appendix Two – Trust Performance Monitoring Report

15.3 Appendix Three – Chair’s letter to the Minister



**Frances Craven**  
**Trust Chief Executive**