

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

**Monday 12 November, 2018 at 5.00 pm
in 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. Minutes of previous meeting 22 October 2018
4. Sandwell Children's Trust – Six Monthly Update Report
5. Foster Carer Scrutiny Work Group 2017-18

Date of next meeting – 7 January, 2019

J Britton
Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillors Underhill (Chair);

Councillors S Davies and M Y Hussain (Vice-Chairs);

Councillors Akhter, Allen, Ashman, Hevican, Hickey, M Hussain, Phillips and Shaeen.

Co-opted Members:-

Rev P French (Church of England Diocese representative)

Vacant (Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative)

Tahira Majid (Primary School Governor representative)

Vacant (Secondary School Governor representative)

**Agenda prepared by Deb Breedon
Democratic Services Unit - Tel: 0121 569 3896
E-mail: deborah_breedon@sandwell.gov.uk**

This document is available in large print on request to the above telephone number. The document is also available electronically on the Committee Management Information System which can be accessed from the Council's web site on www.sandwell.gov.uk

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Declaration of Interests

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

**22 October 2018 at 5.00pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Underhill (Chair);
Councillors S Davies and M Y Hussain (Vice-Chairs);
Councillors Akhter, Allen, Ashman, Hevican, M Hussain, Phillips and Shaeen.

Apologies: Councillor Rollins and Reverend P French (co-opted member).

In attendance: Chris Ward – Director Education, Skills and Employment;
Paul Hayward - Team Manager, Learning and Culture -School Organisation & Planning

22/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 23 July and 27 September 2018 be approved as a correct record.

23/18 **School Place Planning**

The Board noted a report on how the council was delivering on its statutory responsibilities to ensure there were a sufficient number of school places available for the children of Sandwell. The following headline data was reported:-

- There had been a 26% increase in Sandwell births from 3727 a year in 2001/02 to 5058 in 2012/13. The birth rate had since reduced and was now fluctuating between 4600 and 4800 a year.
- 38 primary schools had been expanded since 2011 to create an additional 5200 new primary places, including 390 “bulge” places.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 22 October, 2018

- The Council continued to respond to a significant increase in inward migration and retention and there had been a 33% increase in “new to UK” applications in the last two years. The number of mid-year places had increased by 220 in the last four years.
- The Council's policy on expanding schools was to prioritise schools that were rated “good or outstanding”. It was important that a school's Senior Leadership Team was able to manage an expansion without it impacting on pupil performance.
- Shireland Technology Primary, a new free school would open in September 2019 providing an additional 420 places in Smethwick, which was the town under the most significant pressure for places.
- Smethwick, Oldbury, Rowley Regis and West Bromwich were close to capacity in the Primary sector whilst there was some minimal capacity in Tipton and Wednesbury.
- Work had begun to deliver the additional 485 new year 7 places needed from September 2019, to accommodate the first significant increase in projected pupil numbers in the secondary sector.
- West Bromwich Collegiate Academy in West Bromwich would provide 150 Year 7 places each year. For September 2019, the Academy had agreed to admit 175 students to assist with meeting the anticipated demand in the area.
- A number of secondary schools had agreed to take additional pupils in 2019 to assist the Council in managing the delay of a new school to be delivered by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, who were yet to confirm an opening date. Expansions were planned at George Salter Academy and Shireland Collegiate Academy to provide an additional 105 year 7 places from September 2019.
- Future additional provision was also planned at Bristnall Hall Academy, Holly Lodge High School, Wood Green Academy, Q3 Academy Great Barr and new Free School proposal involving the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

In order to fulfil the statutory duty to ensure there were enough school places for the population, local authorities received Basic Need Funding from the Department for Education. Following a change to the way that education services were funded, the Council was one of seven local authorities to receive a £0 Basic Need Funding for 2020/21 and it was anticipated that nil would be received in 2021/22. Applying the same methodology in future

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
22 October, 2018**

years it was currently projected that the Council would receive £7million in 2022/23 and £15million in 2023/24. Consequently, the completion of Q3 Academy Langley and West Bromwich Collegiate Academy would be delayed by around three years and the expansion of four other secondary schools would be delayed by at least four years.

The Department for Education had confirmed an additional one off £2.5million towards the cost of delivering West Bromwich Collegiate Academy. However, unless additional longer term funding was allocated the Council was at risk of failing in its statutory duty. Discussions were taking place with the Department for Education on that matter.

24/18 **Education Performance – Against National and Regional Comparisons**

The Board received a report which summarised school attainment in Sandwell as at 31 September 2018 along with comparisons against national attainment, neighbouring authorities and statistical neighbours.

Overall, Sandwell was ranked 132 out of 150 authorities for those achieving the expected standard or above in reading, writing and maths combined. This was a decline of 1 place on the previous year. 86% of schools were judged by Ofsted to be good or better, matching the national figure. This translated to 84% of primary schools and 72% of secondary schools. All pupil referral units and special schools were judged as good or outstanding.

In Early Years Foundation Stage 66% of pupils had achieved a “good” level of development, compared to 72% nationally, which represented a 2 percentage point improvement on the previous year.

In relation to the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, 79% of pupils were deemed to be working at the required standard in 2018. There was no change from the previous year but nationally there had been an improvement of 2 percentage points in Sandwell, placing us 4 percentage points below the national percentage in 2018.

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
22 October, 2018**

At Key Stage 1 the gap to national performance remained at 4 percentage points with 66% of pupils reaching the expected standard or above compared with 70% nationally.

At Key Stage 2 60% of pupils had achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined compared to 64% nationally. This represented an improvement of 2 percentage points from 2017. National performance had also improved by 2 percentage points. Reading attainment at the expected standard or above (71%) was 4 percentage points below the national figure. The gap to national performance had decreased from the previous year by 2 percentage points. However, pupils were making less progress in reading than all other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment.

At Key Stage 4 Attainment 8 scores are not directly comparable to previous years due to continued changes as more GCSE subjects were reformed. Early indications were that the Attainment 8 score had decreased by 2 percentage points to 40.4%.

In relation to Key Stage 5, a high number of students chose to go out of borough for their post-16 education, which reduced performance for Sandwell and increased it for neighbouring boroughs. With the growth of A-level provision at Sandwell College this trend was starting to slow, but it would take some years to have a significant impact on performance.

The Board noted more detailed breakdowns of performance figures set out in the report. It was noted that 2018 data was provisional and subject to change

From the comments and questions by members, the following points were highlighted:-

- The impact of inward migration on performance figures was almost zero.
- Data showed that pupils living in Sandwell who chose to complete their Key Stage 5 education outside of the borough performed well.
- The viability of sixth forms was being looked at.
- One a and two form entry schools, and secondary schools with less than 900 pupils were likely to face sustainability challenges in the future.

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
22 October, 2018**


- Multi-academy trusts were responsible for the performance of their schools, however, the Local Authority could offer them support if they were open to it.
- There had been an increase in library use by some children as a result of the Booktastic scheme but more work was needed to encourage and support children and their families to foster a love of reading from an early age.

(Meeting ended at 5.42pm)

Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3189
--

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

12 November 2018

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

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted



28 September 2018

Frances Craven
Chief Executive
Sandwell Children's Trust
The Wellman Building
Dudley Road
Oldbury
B69 3DL

Dear Ms Craven

Monitoring visit of Sandwell local authority children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Sandwell local authority children's services on 5 and 6 September 2018. The visit was the second monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2018. The inspectors were Karen Wareing, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Peter McEntee, Her Majesty's Inspector.

Sandwell Children's Trust is making some progress in improving services for children involved in the Public Law Outline (PLO) and pre-proceedings work, but overall some deficits in services remain. Senior managers and leaders understand the scale of change required and have put in place some of the foundations for social work practice to improve. It is too soon to see the impact of the recent initiatives but the continued focus on performance, quality assurance and workforce development demonstrates an improved management grip on services.

Areas covered by the visit

During this visit, inspectors reviewed progress regarding thresholds into care. Inspectors looked at the effectiveness of the PLO process and pre-proceedings work. This included decision-making and consideration of early permanence arrangements. During the visit, inspectors considered progress made against the last inspection findings.

A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including tracking of selected case files, electronic case records, supervision files and notes. Inspectors spoke to social workers and managers and observed a decision-making panel.

Overview

Senior managers in the Trust and the local authority are acutely aware of the scale of change still required to improve services for children and families in Sandwell. Progress against the improvement plan has been maintained and the newly appointed Director of Children's Services (DCS) has started the much-needed work to develop partnership working in the borough.

Senior managers and leaders continue to develop their understanding of frontline practice, through performance management, quality assurance and their direct involvement in services. The audit process has been refreshed and provides the Trust with a good understanding of the strengths and deficits of services. While more needs to be done to develop a shared understanding of 'good' practice, particularly with some frontline managers, the audits provide detailed information on compliance and quality. The moderation process effectively contributes to practice improvement and is used well to develop social workers' knowledge and skills.

Recent audit findings regarding entry to care and the PLO process have resulted in swift action to address concerns. Concise, clearly written guides and process maps have been produced to assist social workers' understanding of legal processes. A legal tracker has been implemented to monitor timescales of all children in pre-proceedings work and a Director's Resources and Decision-Making panel has been established to agree legal planning meetings, issue proceedings and all admissions to care. These very recent developments provide social workers with structure and processes in this area of practice, but it is too soon to assess their impact.

Since the last monitoring visit, the '12 reasons to work in Sandwell Children's Trust' has been developed to attract and retain staff. Since the last inspection, the combined percentage of agency and newly qualified workers has reduced from 60% to 41%, which means that there are now more permanent and experienced staff to manage complex cases. Although the number of agency staff is gradually reducing, the workforce is still fragmented, particularly in care management teams. The drive of senior managers and leaders to tackle poor performance has also resulted in the loss of some staff, and some posts are not yet filled. Caseloads have not yet reached the Trust's expectations, but direct action to review and close cases means that the overall average is reducing. Despite staff vacancies and some staff having higher than expected caseloads, social workers report that they are well supported, and they understand what leaders and managers in the Trust are trying to achieve. Staff morale is high and social workers feel that senior managers and leaders remain visible and accessible.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Drift and delay identified in the last inspection remains. For some children, there are delays in decision-making, legal planning meetings, instigating proceedings, completion of assessments and consideration of early permanence. All of these were highlighted in the last inspection.

Correct decisions are made when children become looked after. However, missed opportunities to intervene, particularly in chronic neglect cases, mean that some children still do not enter care soon enough. These children often enter care in an unplanned way due to a serious incident, rather than as a planned intervention due to ongoing concerns. The decision-making of social workers and managers in some of these cases is hampered by poor quality chronologies which do not contain full and detailed histories. Social workers are not identifying repeated patterns and trends that indicate a lack of change to improve outcomes for children.

Pre-proceedings are well used and there is evidence of regular timetabled meetings. Since the last inspection, pre-proceedings timescales have improved. Family group conferences are regularly discussed and are used to develop support or identify potential carers for children. However, legal advice is not always clear on whether the PLO process should be used or not. Minutes of legal meetings are not always clear about the outcome, which leaves social workers and parents confused about what to do next. Meetings often focus on what parents need to do without clearly demonstrating how this will impact on the child. Letters before proceedings similarly do not always explain in sufficient detail what parents need to do to change, why this will be of benefit to children or set out consequences if progress is not made. Some letters before proceedings are effective in showing the links between parents' actions and the impact on children. Inspectors saw some examples of effective social work with parents where information in letters was clear and explained thoroughly.

Senior leaders and managers have taken swift action to address the deficits in practice noted during recent audits of PLO and pre-proceedings work. A legal tracker has been developed to ensure that all children in pre-proceedings are identified and timescales are monitored. Practice guidance and process maps have also been developed to ensure that social workers are clear about their roles and responsibilities in this area of work. Some social workers spoken to by inspectors were aware of the documents available and considered them valuable. The Director's Resources and Decision-Making panel includes all group heads and representatives from legal, education and health services to oversee and agree to all legal planning, pre-proceedings work, admissions to care and any associated resources. The panel provides case scrutiny and challenge and clear recommendations regarding further action. While all of these developments are recent and too soon for inspectors to assess impact, they demonstrate an improved management grip on services.

The quality of assessments is variable. Some assessments contain detailed recording and analysis which identify and address concerns, but weaker assessments often lack thorough exploration and analysis of significant events. In assessments of brothers and sisters, individual children's needs are often diminished or not given the attention they need.

Pre-birth assessments in some cases are not completed until the child is born due to late referrals from midwives and delays in securing assessors. This lack of early planning often leads to further delay if subsequent assessments are needed and means that children's important early attachments are at risk of disruption.

Assessments considering whether brothers and sisters should be placed together or apart are generally detailed and contain good analysis of the strengths and risks of placement options. Similarly, social workers' evidence reports to court are comprehensive and set out family history, reasons for court applications and analyse permanence arrangements.

Plans are not always specific regarding what needs to happen and within what timescale. When brothers and sisters are included in the same plan, some children's needs are minimised or overlooked. Early permanence options are not always considered or analysed soon enough to show which permanence option is preferred and why. Care plans often simply list the options available and the lack of clear direction creates a risk of delay.

Case records are of variable quality. Some social work visits 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. The voice of the child is clear in most records, but it is not always evident what weight this is given. Some children are not seen alone, and the focus of social work visits is not always directly relevant to the plan. This means that plans are not progressed as swiftly as they should be.

Supervision records are mostly well recorded, setting out the child's circumstances, what is working well, or not. Supervision sessions are not always regular and most lack reflection on social work practice. Records are often unclear about what action should be taken and within what timescales. Managers do not ensure that all actions set are completed. It is noteworthy that some of the audited cases had outstanding actions still to be completed past the prescribed timescales.

The Trust has demonstrated that it has made some improvements since the last inspection. As more areas of practice are scrutinised, senior leaders and managers are putting in measures to improve the services offered. Many of the inspection findings identified at the last inspection remain and practice remains variable, but, crucially, the foundations are in place for practice to improve.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for your positive engagement with this monitoring visit. I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Karen Wareing
Her Majesty's Inspector

22 June 2018

Ms Frances Craven
Chief Executive
Sandwell Children's Trust
The Wellman Building
Dudley Road
Oldbury
B69 3DL

Dear Ms Craven

Monitoring visit to Sandwell children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Sandwell children's services on 30 and 31 May 2018. The visit was the first monitoring visit since the local authority was judged to be inadequate in January 2018. The visit was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors, Karen Wareing and Andy Waugh.

Sandwell Children's Trust was established on 1 April 2018 to provide children's services on behalf of the local authority. The Trust has brought a renewed energy and determination to improve services for children and families in the borough. Although it is too early to assess the impact of its work on social work practice, the Trust has been quick to assess the scale of change required, and work to address the legacy of poor social work practice is underway. A positive start has been made to improve services for children and young people in Sandwell.

Areas covered by the visit

During this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the areas of help and protection and children looked after, with a focus on the quality of social work assessments. Inspectors also considered the effectiveness of the performance information and quality assurance systems in supporting practice improvements.

The visit considered a range of evidence, including tracking of selected case files, sampling of electronic case records and supervision notes. Inspectors spoke to a range of staff including managers and social workers.

Overview

Since the re-inspection in 2018, a great deal of work has been completed to establish the Sandwell Children's Trust. An ambitious improvement plan has been developed which sets out eight priority areas and with all eight priorities being led by the chief

executive and directors of the Trust. Although work has started on most of the priorities, it is significant that since the re-inspection there has been a lack of urgency to develop partnership working in the borough. This partnership working is crucial to ensure that children and families receive services to improve their outcomes.

Some long-standing barriers to improvement remain, most notably the instability of the workforce. Nearly a third of the workforce are agency or interim staff. This means that some children are having too many changes of social worker, which inhibits the development of trusting and meaningful relationships. Caseloads are too high for some workers, which means that they have insufficient time to devote to in-depth work with children. The Trust recognises that action is required to combat this and is developing a renewed offer to social workers to attract and retain staff. The Trust is also reviewing its structure and staffing levels to ensure manageable caseloads and strengthened management support. Social workers and team managers feel positive about the changes made and the introduction of the Trust. They see leaders as visible and accessible and a management grip on services is discernible.

The Trust has taken proactive steps to develop a performance and quality assurance framework. Weekly performance meetings with team managers and group heads maintain a focus on compliance and quality. Team managers and social workers are mostly positive about the ongoing scrutiny of their work and recognising the impact on children is the Trust's starting point. Leaders recognise the need to balance challenge and support to staff as they work to improve performance. Work to ensure that data is reliable is ongoing and the Trust hopes to develop a live performance dashboard to further improve the quality of information.

The Trust has been swift to act when performance data has raised concerns. For example, a sharp rise in the number of child protection investigations resulted in Sandwell's improvement partner completing diagnostic work, which led to practice changes and an appropriate reduction in numbers.

Findings and evaluation of progress

The Trust is reinforcing a culture of learning and development through its performance and quality assurance framework. It is still developing its audit tool and assessing auditors to ensure that there is a shared understanding of what constitutes good practice. Its own initial audits show that most cases are not yet good. Staff spoke positively about the new 'beyond auditing' process, whereby team members will have opportunities to develop their practice. Staff will receive in-depth feedback and guidance following the audit process to understand what they need to do to close the loop and improve their practice. In addition, learning opportunities will be enhanced with such things as 'lunch and learn' sessions devoted to key topics such as assessments, which commenced during the monitoring visit.

Assessments are not yet good. They are not routinely updated when children's circumstances change. This means that subsequent plans are made without full and up-to-date information. Although assessments contain some historical information, chronologies are not sufficiently concise and clear to present the main events in a child's life. Although the written information is not always of a good quality, social workers know their children well. Social workers report that they feel well supported by their managers and that they value supervision. Training is available, and they have access to resources to assist them in their work, for example research information.

Managers do not provide social workers with consistently clear direction and timescales to complete assessments in most cases. Although performance data shows that 86% of assessments are completed within 45 working days, managers are not setting and reviewing timescales as assessments progress. Similarly, independent reviewing officers do not challenge or escalate concerns when assessments are not completed. This means that some assessments are prolonged, leading to delays in providing services to children and families.

Although children are seen in assessments, the frequency of visits is not commensurate with the length of time taken to complete the work. In some longer assessments, children are only seen on one or two occasions and therefore opportunities to gather a richer body of evidence are missed.

The child's voice is inconsistently recorded in assessments. Direct work is not evident in all cases and some children therefore have not been helped to understand their history and circumstances.

Risks and protective factors are described well in assessments, but analysis does not thoroughly examine the impact on children. Social workers do not always exercise professional curiosity and they do not consistently challenge where there is disguised compliance. Some social workers have an over-optimistic view of parents' ability to change and, in some cases, services are repeatedly offered, and cases closed without evidence that the necessary changes have been made and sustained.

Partner agencies are mostly consulted in assessments but in some, key professionals, for example health professionals, are omitted. When professional views are sought, it is not always clear what their view is regarding the presenting concerns and what should happen next.

Some social workers make good use of research in their assessments and in most cases, they reach clear recommendations. Managers signing off assessments present a clear synopsis of the case, along with rationale for their recommendations. This demonstrates that managers have a clear understanding of the work completed by

social workers and that the right actions and services are put in place to improve children's outcomes.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for your positive engagement with this monitoring visit. From our discussions, you have a clear understanding of the hard work required to improve services and you have made a positive start. I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Karen Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector



Sandwell Children’s Trust

Performance Monitoring Report

October 2018

Performance Summary

Overall, performance across several of the fifteen indicators has improved since the Trust went live.

- The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan continues to drop and this month it is 77.8 children per 10,000 of our population (631 children in total). Since April 2018 there has been a reduction of 198 children on a Child Protection plan. (PI29 provisionally to change to PI2). **The trend for Quarter 2 is a reduction from 83 to 77.8.**
- The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days has increased slightly to 13 as of 30 September 2018 with a further 28 cases unallocated for less than 5 working days. Daily performance reporting supplied on unallocated and embedding of the peripatetic team has improved timeliness of reallocating cases. (PI5). **The trend in Quarter 2 is a reduction from 38 to 13 cases.**
- The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks increased significantly from 69.3% to 82.3% in September 2018. Performance as an average since 1 April 2018 (76.4%) is slightly above March 2018 figure of 75.4% (PI6). **The trend in Quarter 2 is an increase from 76.6% to 82.3%.**
- Average caseloads have decreased across the service to 18.9 cases per worker with caseloads across the whole service becoming more manageable. Caseloads for each worker have reduced by an average of two cases since June 2018 (this is more noticeable in Care Management service where averages have reduced from 22.5 per worker to 18.2 over the same time period). Continued effort to reduce caseloads within the service with support from the beyond auditing team and the unwavering focus on recruitment and retention of social workers is a priority to reduce caseloads further. 508 cases have been closed between June and September 2018, and the number of Social Workers in post at the end of September was 205. (PI14) **The trend for Quarter 2 is a reduction from 20.19 to 18.80, with the greatest reduction within Care Management.**
- The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better have increased for month of September 2018 to 54.8% from 46.4% in August 2018 since 1 April 2018 audits rated Requires Improvement or above is at an average of 52.2% which is slightly below performance of 55.6% in March 2018. Audits are being moderated in line with Ofsted inspection case file auditing process with improved closing the loop activity and Quality Assurance processes being embedded across the Trust (PI15). **The Quarter 2 trend is a reduction from 61.7% to 54.8%. However, the overall trend is a gradual increase from 40% in March 2018 to the current**

percentage of 54.8%. It is important to consider the nuance in comparing thematic audit outcomes month by month. This is outlined in detail in later sections.

- There have been steady improvements in the percentage of Children with an updated Child Protection Plan within the last six months from 91.2% to 95.7% although this performance has decreased slightly on August figure of 96.9% (PI7). **The trend in Quarter 2 is one of stability 95.8% to 95.7%.** The reduction of average caseload across Care Management Service has contributed towards the overall improvement since April 2018.
- There continues to be an upward steady trajectory in the percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements as at the end of September the performance is now 90.5% which is a 3.4% improvement on March 2018 (PI11). **The trend for Quarter 2 is that this indicator has remained stable.**
- At the end of September 2018, there had been a significant increase in the percentage of children on CP plans with a case supervision held within the previous 4 weeks. This has increased from 36% to 69.9% over the last two months. The impact of weekly performance board meetings has seen a positive shift in performance over the last two months and will continue to be scrutinised to ensure further progress in this measure (performance is now 8.1% above March 2018). **The trend in Quarter 2 is an increase from 36% to 69.9%. Whilst this appears a huge increase, on average, since April 2018 improvement in this area has been steady. Children in Need visits completed within 28 days has also increased from 47.4% to 64.3% in Quarter 2 (PI8 and PI10).**
- The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers has increased to 34.1%. However, the number of these posts that are unfilled by either a permanent or agency worker is 23.2 (including long term sickness and maternity leave), which represents 10.5% “unfilled vacancies” (PI13). **The trend in Quarter 2 is an increase from 32.6% to 34.4% of permanent social workers. However, as described the actual unfilled vacancies is only 10.5%.**
- The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days has decreased to 72% in September 2018, this is primarily due to working on the backlog to complete and Authorise assessments which are over 45 days and has in turn affected the figure for the last two months. It is important to highlight that since the end of August 2018, 75 out of 141 overdue assessments have been completed reducing the number of assessments open over 45 days to 66 in September 2018. Performance is therefore expected to improve in the coming months. It is worth noting that the cumulative position across the service is at 83.2% since 1 April which

is in line with latest comparator data. **The trend for Quarter 2 is a reduction from 89.6% to 72%, but as described this is due to clearing the backlog of overdue assessments and is expected to rise in the next quarter.**

- The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales (recorded on LCS) is too low (at 79%). Exception reporting for LAC reviews found that the real percentage of this measure is 94%, and the discrepancy is that these are not recorded on the case management system work is underway to ensure that cases are updated in a timely manner including updating the Childs Looked After Plan in a timely way. (PI12). **This has reduced from 83.9% to 79% over Quarter 2.**
- The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours has decreased in September to 50%, although the cumulative position is at 65.8% since the 1 April 2018. This represents an overall average improvement in comparison to March by 11.6% (PI9). **The trend in Quarter 2 is steady at around 50% with a spike to 71.4% in August 2018. We are reviewing our contract with Barnardo's and will drive improved performance in this area.**
- The percentage of contacts accepted as a referral within 24 hours increased by 16% on previous month to 73.5%. (PI1). **The trend in Quarter 2 is a steady upward trajectory from 69.4% to 73.5%.**
- There has been a significant reduction in Initial Child Protection Conferences held within the Statutory timescales in September 2018 (PI13). **The trend for Quarter 2 in this area is a reduction from 67.6% to 59.6%. This is due to seven families whose conference was delayed due to late notification and no S47 in place.**

Quality Assurance Activity

This report provides a summary of the findings of the quality assurance activity undertaken during September 2018 and outlines the key findings and themes. In addition to reporting on all the QA related activities undertaken in September, this report will also provide an update from audit activity undertaken via LSCB in Q1 and Q2 of 2018. This will bring us up to date with all the QA reporting, till date. This report will also provide information related to our Learning and Development Service and how learning from QA activities are being used to inform our priorities in L&D.

During September 2018, the Quality Assurance Service undertook the following activities aimed at better understanding the quality of practice:

- Audit activity across the service following the QA framework. The theme for this month was Section 47 enquiries.
- Update from Learning and development
- Work undertaken by the Beyond Auditing Team.
- Focussed QA intervention with Children with Disabilities Team.
- Continuous oversight, support and challenge from the safeguarding unit.
- Performance monitoring following scrutiny of data from the performance dashboard.
- Learning from compliments and complaints.
- Update from LSCB audits – Q1 and Q2.

This report gives a summary of findings and actions from various activities undertaken that are mentioned above.

1. Summary of Key Findings from Monthly Case File Audit Activity during August 2018

Table 1: Overall audit performance and ratings, measuring progress since last month

Service	August Audits		G	RI	I	August 2018		
	Target	Actual				G	RI	I
Quality Assurance Children's Audit Activity	55	47	5 10.6%	21 44.6%	21 44.6%	3 11%	10 36%	15 53%
Moderations	25	29	0 0%	13 44.8%	16 55.17%	0 0%	11 39%	17 61%

A total of 55 audits were sent out for completion in September. The theme of audits was section 47 enquiries. Managers were requested to audit the whole case file with a special focus on the relevance and robustness of our child protections enquiries – which included the strategy discussion and section 47 investigation. Cases were selected from all parts of the

service – front door (including MASH and SAAT teams), care management, and Looked after service, even though a bulk of cases from the sample were from the front door. This was done to allow us a balanced perspective of our child protection processes followed across the entire service, whilst scrutinising the robustness of our front door where majority of these investigations are conducted.

Table 1 shows the overall performance with audit returns and how the quality of our overall intervention was rated by managers, before and after moderation. It also tracks our performance in terms of lifting the quality of practice since last month. It must be noted, that there is improvement noted both before and after moderation of the audits. The quality of our work requiring improvement has increased from 39% to approximately 45%, and the inadequate rating has reduced from 61% to 55%. Both these measures demonstrate a move in the right direction whereby the service being delivered by the service is progressing from inadequate to RI.

Compliance update:

Table 2: Overall compliance in September 2018

Total number of audits expected	Total returned	Overall compliance	Moderations expected	Moderations completed	Moderation Compliance
55	47	85.4%	25	29	116%

Compliance with audit returns this month has been approximately 85%, which is a marked improvement from previous few months. Whilst this improvement needs to be celebrated, all efforts have to be maintained to keep the momentum going and ensuring high compliance in future. It was agreed that approximately 50% of returned audits would be moderated to inform the findings in this report. In actual, a higher number of moderations needed to be completed to ensure we have a balanced feedback for all parts of the service. The quality of completed audits were also variable, as can be seen from the findings. All the audits rated as good by the auditing managers were downgraded, with two being downgraded to inadequate, of which one was an inadequate escalation.

Summary of findings from audits:

Overall findings from all 47 audits that were completed are shown in the following table. These are the findings prior to moderations:

Table 3: Detailed findings from all completed audits (47in total).

Parameter	Good Approx. Percentage	Requires Improvement Approx. Percentage	Inadequate Approx. Percentage
Quality and impact of earlier intervention	9 19.14%	18 38.29%	20 42.55%
Assessment and Analysis of risk	7 14.89%	19 40.42%	20 42.55%
Plan	7 14.89%	15 31.91%	20 42.55%
Review	6 12.76%	15 31.91%	15 31.91%
Voice of the child	4 8.5%	21 44.68%	19 40.42%
Supervision /Management Oversight	7 14.89%	20 42.55%	18 38.29%
Impact on the child	10 21.27%	15 31.91%	18 38.29%
Impact on the family	10 21.27%	15 31.91%	18 38.29%
Overall	5 10.63%	21 44.68%	21 44.68%

The findings from all moderated audits (29 in total), have been collated with the audit tool being broken down into the key areas of practice which is presented in the table below. It must be noted that where areas pf practice fell into the RI category this was often due to evidence of procedures being followed, however practice still fell short of being judged as good. Most of the cases deemed to be inadequate were primarily due to evidence of poor practice in relation to application of thresholds, quality and timeliness of assessments, plans, reviews and supervisions/management oversight.

Table 4: Detailed findings from moderated audits (29 in total).

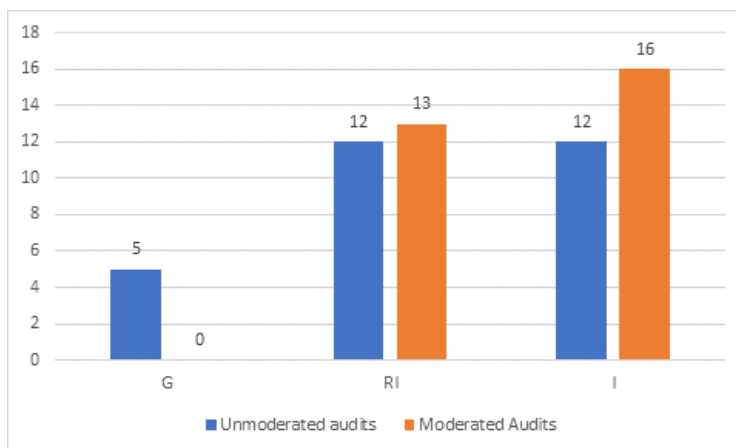
Parameter	Good Approx. Percentage	Requires Improvement Approx. Percentage	Inadequate Approx. Percentage
Quality and impact of earlier intervention	0 0%	9 31.03%	20 68.9%
Assessment and Analysis of risk	1 3.44%	10 34.4%	18 62%
Plan	1 3.44%	10 34.4%	17 58.6%
Review	0 0%	10 34.4%	15 51.7%
Voice of the child	1 3.44%	15 51.7%	13 44.8%
Supervision /Management Oversight	1 3.44%	13 44.8%	15 51.7%
Impact on the child	2 6.8%	12 41.3%	15 51.7%
Impact on the family	3 10.34%	10 34.4%	16 55.17%
Overall	0 0%	13 44.8%	16 55.17%

During the moderation process, it was evident that the overall quality of audits is improving. They are better written and presented, with managers making time to explain their judgement. There are still some cases where poorly written audits have been submitted, and feedback has been provided to each of those managers. An additional audit training day has been scheduled on 18th October to support any managers – new and existing, on how to complete good audits. There will be 1:1 support for managers who wish to be supported on the audit days (already scheduled in diaries) going forward. The moderation process also highlighted that whilst most manager’s overall judgements are in line with Ofsted grade descriptors, their rating of aspects of case work varies. This finding is also reflected in table 3 and 4 above where variations can be seen across all parameters. This demonstrates that manager’s understanding of what good practice looks like needs further refining so that their expected standards of practice can be raised. Work is currently being undertaken by the head of safeguarding to refine our practice standards, and align it to the process maps defining work flow in various parts of the service. Once this is complete, plans are for it to be launched

and training to be provided to all new and existing staff to familiarise them of our renewed practice standards. This will set clear expectations in terms of quality of practice across the board. The following table shows the overall variance in ratings in the cohort that was moderated:

Table 5: Overall comparison of ratings before and after moderation.

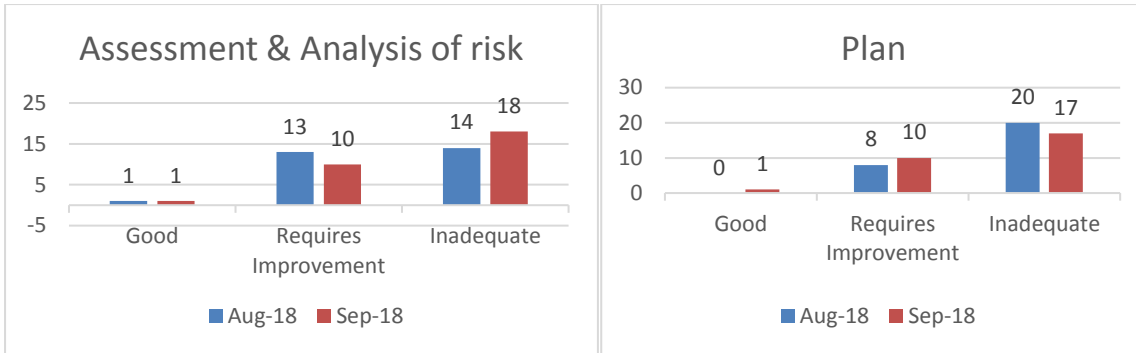
Audit type	G	RI	I
Unmoderated audits	5	12	12
Moderated Audits	0	13	16 (incl. 3 escalations)



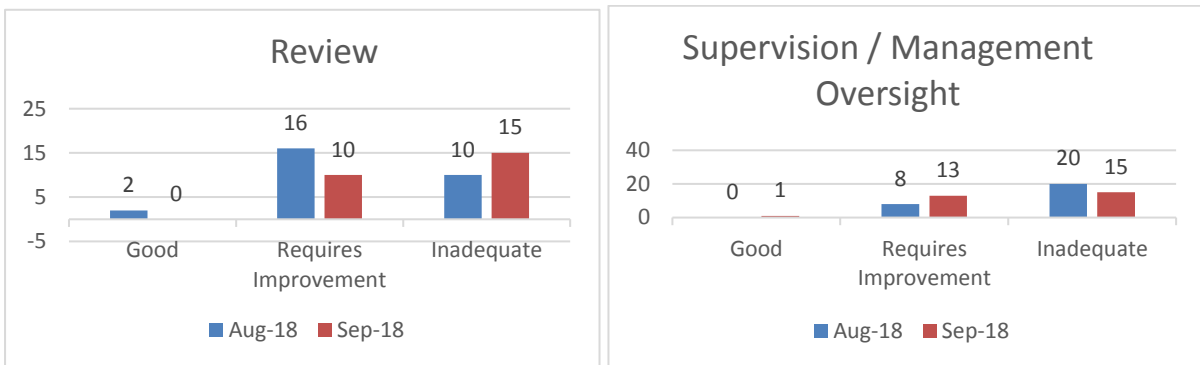
Of the audits rated as good – 2 were moderated to be inadequate – of which one was an inadequate escalation for management response. Remaining 3 were moderated to be RI, of which 1 with strong evidence of good practice. A further 2 audits which were initially rated as RI were downgraded to be inadequate. All managers have been offered detailed feedback and support to assist in building their understanding of what good looks like. Their line managers have also been informed so that continued support can be offered in the form of coaching and mentoring.

Measuring improvements in quality of intervention month on month:

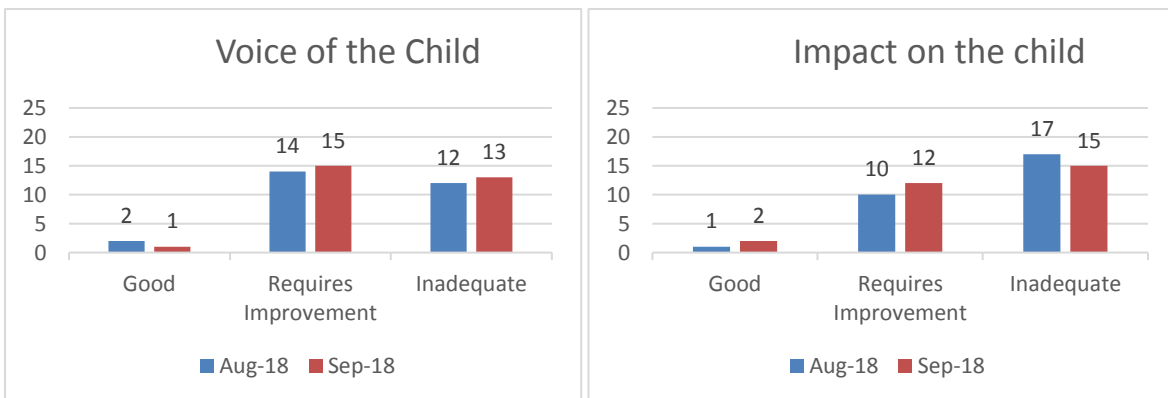
We plan to track any improvements reporting by auditing activity in future. This will evidence any improvements made, and will also assist in informing out strategies to support the service in raising service standards. The following diagrams demonstrate progress made (if any) since last month, across various parameters of social work practice:



The above two charts show that the quality of our assessments continue to remain weak with the number of inadequate assessments/risk assessments showing an increase. Assessments inform the plans for the child. If assessments are weak, it is likely that the plans will not be as robust. In the above chart, we see that our plans need to be strengthened to ensure the right outcomes are being achieved and a positive impact is being made on the child.



The review process alludes to independent oversight for CP and LAC cases, and social work oversight on CIN planning process. Supervision/management oversight is a method of offering support and direction to case planning, along with independent overview by the IRO service. Collectively, this should work to provide checks and balances and overall support required to achieve positive outcomes for a child and family. The above two charts demonstrate that our practice within these very important mechanisms remains weak, and there is a need for it to be strengthened swiftly if any improvements in casework is to be registered.



The above table shows that we are improving at securing the voice of the child. It demonstrates greater social work commitment to make time to see children, and use appropriate tools to secure their views and feelings. It is worth noting that whilst we are improving at establishing the views and wishes of children, the impact on child is recorded as low. The reason behind low impact of our intervention is because we need to get better at understanding the lived experience of our children by securing meaningful voice of child. This information then needs to find its way into our assessment and planning process. Supervision/management oversight and independent review mechanisms need to be strong to support this process and provide direction. Due to poor management oversight and threshold establishment at an early stage, children continue to suffer and plans remain ineffective to create a positive impact on the life of the child. These are our areas where practice needs to be lifted, and improvements made swiftly.

Findings around the theme of audit – Section 47 process:

What is working well –

1. The process of section 47 or child protection process is clear and well embedded at the front door.
2. Contacts coming in are largely processes swiftly and sent to MASH for decision. MASH discussion takes place in a timely manner and decision is communicated to managers to progress the referral, once the child protection concerns are established.
3. Strategy discussion is also held in a timely manner, and by virtue to being held in MASH, these meetings are largely working together compliant.
4. Section 47 investigations are also predominantly completed in a timely manner with a clear management oversight recorded for further actions.
5. Where necessary, initial child protection conferences are also held within 15 working days from strategy meeting.
6. Some assessments are detailed, and capture information appropriately.
7. Social work initial visit to the child and family following the strategy meeting at the front door are usually within acceptable timescales (mostly within 24 hours, at the front door).
8. Children are seen and spoken to on their own and their wishes and feelings are clearly recorded on case file.
9. Multi agency information sharing is good at the front door by virtue of having MASH.
10. Where a need for swift response to safeguard a child is identified i.e. working with police to exercise powers of police protection, or indeed securing a court order to safeguard a child, these decisions and processes are completed with good partnership working at the front door.

What we need to improve –

This section has been broken down into two sections – general areas for improvement which appear to apply to all parts of service, and specific findings for different parts of the service i.e. front door (MASH and SAAT), and Care management and LAC service.

General findings:

1. Child protection investigations i.e. S.47 enquiries need to be made robust by timely relationship building with families through prompt visiting once investigations are initiated. Visits need to be made as often as needed, and all actions taken (medical, ABE etc) need to be recorded meaningfully in the investigation document.
2. Investigations need to include views from all relevant partner agencies to inform the outcome of the investigation, ensuring we speak to absent fathers, and ensure that our investigation is informed by evidence and meaningful voice of the child. Most of these areas appear wholly missing in our current investigations, which renders our risk assessments superficial and therefore future plans appear misplaced or lacking grip and direction.
3. All section 47 investigations are not always followed by a robust single assessment (as they should do). Sometimes there is no assessment done at all. This practice needs to be changed and due diligence needs to be applied in following process, meaningfully.
4. The assessments, when completed, often lack depth in understanding the cycle of abuse. They focus more on 'here and now' rather than considering history, promoting lateral thinking and deriving evidence based analysis.
5. Our analysis becomes over-optimistic as we seem to be relying on self-reporting by parents to inform our assessments, without challenging families to test the validity and depth of information they volunteer. We are not very good at seeking relevant information from partner agencies. In section 47 investigations, where there is any discrepancy in information provided by two agencies, it needs to be clarified to reach a reasonable conclusion, rather than muddling through the information and concluding that the concerns about the child remain unsubstantiated. Such approach may allow meeting the timescales of a process, but almost never provides one with the root cause of any issue.
6. Another area of weakness is our inability to work with 'hard to engage' families. A majority of our section 47s seem to be carried out where domestic violence is a prominent risk factor. In such cases, it is essential that social workers understand the importance of 'power and control' and how it impacts in the way people behave. To decide that the family is not willing to engage is easy, to understand what lies behind that non-engagement is what is required. Only then we can tailor our approach with these families, and understand the value of what remains 'un-reported or not said'.
7. It is well known that our assessments remain weak and lack evidence due to lack of appropriate tools being used to understand and measure abuse such as neglect, DV etc. This finding still holds in these audits as well. Our child protection investigations, and outcomes are compromised because we seem to fail to articulate the extent of needs and risks associated with each case. Our approach to problem solving therefore is often misplaced and watered down, or not provided at the right level (thresholds) at the right time.
8. Often Chronology and Genograms are missing which shows their importance is not understood well throughout the service.
9. There needs to be a better understanding and rigour around Connected persons/family and friend's placements. Currently family placements are being made without a full appreciation of the legal impact of those arrangements.

Specific learning for Front Door: All the general findings mentioned above apply to the front door. In addition to those, the service specific findings are:

1. Whilst the child protection process is followed appropriately and managed in a timely manner, there is a need for attention to detail. The MASH information gathering is good; however, it lacks robust analysis and decision making. This shows that we are not making the best use of MASH arrangement by adding value to information on file.
2. Information gathered within MASH document remains primarily in EH module, rather than finding its way into LCS to support decision making around thresholds. Even if the information is sent to social care, a lack of strong analysis at the initial stage most often slows/skews decision making going forward. There are cases which have been closed/stepped down for EH support, when clearly thresholds for further enquiries/assessments were met. If only there was appropriate reflection on past and current information held within MASH, initial thresholds could be well established.
3. Once the cases are referred to social care for a strategy discussion, whilst these discussions are held in a timely manner, they mostly repeat the information from MASH case discussion. Whilst most of the strategy discussions in SAAT are working together compliant, it is not clear if they are so by virtue of proximity to MASH or if they are actually liaising with the professionals associated with the family, which would allow sharing of most up to date information. In more straightforward cases, these strategy discussions are able to come to a reasonable outcome. However, where the cases are complex, mostly strategy discussions at front door are lacking depth and rigour in foresight and decision making. They seem to be led by police investigations, rather than having a joint perspective on risks and case management.
4. Decisions like outcome of MASH, threshold decision, strategy discussion outcome, and section 47 investigation decisions lack a clear rationale. It is essential to explain rationale for clarity and accountability.
5. Application of thresholds at various levels of decision making are often compromised due to poor assessment and analysis, especially pre-birth. Assessments need to be improved by using information from history, consideration of information from all 'relevant' partner agencies.
6. Assessments are not always individualised in order that the needs and risks to individual child are fully understood. Part of this problem may be that we do not promote holistic understanding of situation. However, a major issue appears to be that assessments are completed based on one visit or not even that. Information collated from the section 47 visit is used to inform assessments. We need to visit the child and family at planned intervals to complete an assessment which can be further strengthened by including the child's lived experience, their views, wishes and feelings. Better quality assessments would inform planning, appropriate decision making and threshold application more accurately.
7. Attention needs to be given to children's needs relating to disability and identity. Currently, whilst the disability may (or may not) be recorded, information is not used to understand how it impacts on the holistic needs of the child. Similarly, the child's identity, needs to better relate to their culture and heritage.
8. Social work practice need to make a more determined approach to understanding the lived experience of a child in order that informs the child's plan. There is a need for more effective direct work with children and families.

9. The Voice of the Child is being captured, but not meaningfully. Also, there needs to be an understanding that Voice of the Child needs to be used to inform the care planning.
10. Quality and impact of supervision needs strengthening. There is management oversight, which may be useful in cases with low level concerns. Where we are dealing with complex issues, an in-depth supervision is needed to promote professional curiosity and offer support and direction at the right time. Disjointed management oversight in various documents/times does not appear to be effective in understanding gravity of concerns, and offer direction to the case.

Specific learning for CM and LAC service – All the general findings mentioned above apply to Care Management and LAC teams. In addition to those, the service specific findings are:

1. Section 47 enquiries are usually made in these services on existing cases. The teams usually have a knowledge of families which are already open to them. It is concerning that in majority of cases audited, the child protection process does not seem to start as soon as concerns are identified. There is a delay (sometimes concerning length of delay) in initiating these enquiries without any rationale given to explain the drift.
2. Strategy discussions are often not WT complaint, and at best are held with only police.
3. There is further delay between strategy discussion and section 47 investigations, which is unacceptable. Usually child protection concerns in these teams are real, as they are based on some evidence known to the teams. Any delays, therefore, in completing the investigation process is unacceptable.
4. Examples have been seen where another strategy discussion has been recorded, perhaps only to demonstrate that the 15-day indicator has been met. This practice must be stopped as it will show that we are doing more investigations than we actually are. Drift and delays need to be dealt with, learning made, and practice needs to be improved for future.

Specific learning for IRO service –

1. Even where concerns are established, the CP plans that follow are weak due to weak assessments. The IRO service needs to offer independent oversight on cases, and offer constructive criticism to bring the case back on track. Instead, the service currently seems to follow decisions made by the social work team, thereby offering little challenge, and adding little value to the planning process.
2. CP plans seem to rely heavily on parents to make positive changes. It must be understood that it is these parents who have contributed to the cycle of neglect/abuse over many years before concerns get established. Parents will not be able to bring a positive change without support. This support, and the accountability of change needs to be clearly defined, and allowed reasonable time within the child's timeline to register change.
3. When change is not registered within the agreed timeline, the IRO service needs to provide an overview, and advocate on behalf of the child. This needs to be done using appropriate tools to register IRO concerns with relevant agencies, and robust oversight to be provided to prevent drift and delay. Currently this is not routinely done.

Actions taken to impact change –

1. All moderated audits have been shared with auditing manager, and the social work team in order for learnings to be made. One to one support has been offered, and taken, to discuss how to complete a good audit, and rate a case based on evidence in case file.
2. Learning from the audit activity is shared with all OMs and GHs in a meeting chaired by the Director of performance and QA on a monthly basis.
3. Learning from these audits are included in the bite-size trainings for TMs, aspiring TM training which is also open to IROs, and in ASYE support sessions. This is with a view widen the scope of learning and reflection in the service.
4. These audits have identified major concerns around uniformity of following child protection process across the board. In order to bring uniformity in practice, work is currently being undertaken under the overall leadership of Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance to revise our practice standards, and process map for basic social work processes. These revised practice standards and process maps are planned to be launched and widely disseminated to all staff across the service to ensure everyone is clear on expectations of the Trust when completing core social work tasks, including child protection investigations.
5. The issue about MASH information not finding its way meaningfully into referrals has been discussed with senior management, and there is a commitment to address this issue. Director of Quality Assurance will be overseeing progress on this matter through the 12-week improvement plan for the front door.
6. Decision making at every stage needs to be explained using appropriate rationale. This message will be communicated to the group head for front door so that this matter can be addressed. This learning will also be included in practice standards, to ensure uniformity of practice across the board.
7. The section 47 template on LCS is not the most conducive to record all activities undertaken by a social worker. Social workers therefore use the document creatively, and sometime the recording is not effective. There is a task and finish group looking at enhancing this document which should address this matter in future.
8. The issue of social workers needing tools to assess issues like neglect and DV has been well known. Social work tools have now been approved for use and will be launched at the Sandwell Children's Trust Staff Conference on 19th October 2018. Social workers will need further training for using these tools, and L&D service will be planning to roll out training in this area.
9. There are direct workshops planned to support staff with various themes like – work 'with' families and not 'to', re-boot on signs of safety framework, basic safeguarding, reflective supervisions etc.
10. IRO service is starting to look at Mid-Point audits. Activities are underway to develop a tool and train IROs to complete these audits. It is expected that this will start by 1st December 2018.
11. Discussions are being held with L&D service to revamp our training offer as it currently does not meet the needs of the service holistically. There is a need for training around 'hard to engage/resistant' families, section 47 investigations, identifying neglect, understanding thresholds for various services etc.

2. Update on Beyond Auditing (BA) Activity

BA team was back in Care management 2 and 12 for re-audit. These teams had BA intervention in May/June 2018, and now the teams were re-audited to evaluate how well the teams had embedded learning from the initial BA support, and to assess the efficacy of BA intervention.

Re-Audit Judgements and Brief Overview of the Findings

CM2 - 10 cases were re-audited and these were a combination of full audits and dip samples. One of the cases that was audited has now moved to LAC.

Audit Rating/Month	Good	RI	Inadequate	Inadequate escalation
May/June 2018			8	2
September 2018			9 (1 case has moved to LAC)	1

What is working well?

- In a couple of cases where supervision was present, it was more detailed including actions informing the plan.
- In relation to a couple of cases a DRP was raised by the IRO due to concerns about the drift and delay that was evident

CM12 - 11 Cases from the original BA cohort re-audited. However, one of the cases has been closed and another has transferred to LAC.

Audit Rating/Month	Good	RI	Inadequate	Inadequate escalation
May/June 2018	1	3	7	
September 2018		4	4 (1 case has moved to LAC)	2

What is working well?

- Within a few cases, regular supervision was noted which was more detailed and included actions.
- In one case, there is evidence of robust IRO oversight of the planning for the child including discussions with the social worker, team manager and adoption team

manager in respect of each potential option and the implications of each for the child. In another, a DRP 3 has been issued due to significant drift and delay in progressing children's care plans.

What are we worried about?

The learning points for both teams were on similar lines, and therefore have been amalgamated as follows:

- Overall, supervision has not been taking place regularly and the management oversight is not robust in providing SW with the case direction required to enable effective interventions and timely outcomes to be achieved for children. Management oversight needs to evidence a robust response to risk and care planning to achieve long term positive outcomes for children.
- BA audits have not been routinely used as a learning tool to understand the issues in the cases, ensure that the actions are progressed and lift practice. Delay in the action plan identified as part of the conclusion of BA in June has not been progressed.
- In the three CP cases that were stepped down from a CP to CIN, Auditors were unable to determine what evidence was being used to evidence that the risks had sufficiently reduced and could be sustained.
- Overall, difficult to identify what difference is being made to the children. Very little evidence of risk being reduced through appropriate intervention despite statutory involvement.

Beyond Auditing Recommendations

1. OM's to continue to monitor the progress of the BA cases by the TM to ensure that audit actions are completed and the cases progressed every month from the 15.10.18. IRO to also ensure oversight of cases audited overseen by the IRO TM.
2. BA Manager to review case note alerts for all BA cases to ensure that the BA Auditors have work flowed the cases to all OM's, IRO's/IRO TM's and GH's to support continued oversight of these cases by 15.10.18
3. OM and TM to devise a TM support plan which focuses on strengthening care planning skills, securing more timely outcomes for children, improving the team performance, the quality of the TM oversight to secure better outcomes for children by 31.10.18.
4. TM to attend the five Management Impact Workshops to strengthen practice from November -December 2018.
5. Group Supervision to be held every month by the OM's with the TM's and separately with the IRO's and the IRO Managers to continue to provide spaces for critical reflection on practice informed by the learning from audits, complaints and SCR's to strengthen practice. Impact needs to be measured and reviewed from November 2018.
6. GH's (operational and safeguarding) to ensure that service events also provide the same reflection and learning (as outlined in action 5) identifying how the impact can be tracked from November 2018.

7. OM's to dip sample assessments and the plans monthly to ensure that TM's quality assurance of assessments, informed by chronologies and genograms and plans are robust and provide the necessary challenge if they need to be improved.
8. GH's and OM's to consider how the drift and delay evident for children particularly at transfer points within the child's journey (particularly from SAAT to CM and CM to LAC) can be reduced resulting in more timely interventions as part of the work undertaken for OFSTED Preparation.
9. The Quality Assurance Service to develop a mechanism to dip sample' and review the progress of audited cases particularly those that have been rated as inadequate escalation or re-audited as part of the BA programme are reviewed the performance boards by 31.10.18.

3. Update from LSCB Audits – Q1 and Q2

LSCB organised Multi-Agency audits in quarter 1 to assess 'Multi Agency partnership response to Child Protection'. These audits were completed in May and June 2018. The audit findings, and 7-minute briefing from this audit activity has recently been circulated to all partner agencies for wider dissemination and learning in each agency. The main recommendations from this audit activity were:

1. Regular professional's meetings should be held with all agencies in attendance to assist in documenting the information shared and ensuring all agencies are cited on the risks both current and historic
2. Consult the regional safeguarding procedures to utilise the SSCB escalation policy if required, especially where actions from previous core group meetings have not progressed
3. Professionals to request copies of the child's plan and core group minutes and ensure these are reviewed in each meeting.
4. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Ensure that at all stages of the process accurate actions and decisions are recorded (on the child's file) and shared with relevant personnel (including the worker who raised the initial concern).

In Quarter 2, the theme was 'Multi-Agency response to targeted Services and the Lead Professional role'. The audit findings and 7-minute briefing from these audit themes will be consolidated and circulated to all partner agencies shortly. The main recommendations from these audits were:

Recommendations for Seniors/Managers:

1. Managers/seniors to be more vigilant in their oversight of cases, and to attend "Core Working Together", at least once every 3 years, and relate the aspects of Professional Curiosity to be used in relation to supervision of cases.

2. Supervision of cases to be consistently reflective, looking at family history/dynamics and build into supervision structure to examine why services are involved with this family in the first place.

Recommendations for Frontline Practitioners:

1. Practitioners should complete regular chronologies and family histories, to ensure that they are getting the 'big picture' and not just focusing on the presenting problems. Also ensuring that they are working with the whole family, to give a holistic approach to ensure effective change that can be maintained.
2. Evidence that practitioners are actively seeking to gain consent to work with the whole family, and exercising professional curiosity if families are only consenting for work with certain child/ren. To ensure that practitioners are working on all areas needing support, not focusing on what the parents are stating the children's needs are.
3. Ensure that the right agencies/individuals are invited to multi-agency meetings, and when agencies fail to attend that this is escalated to seniors within their organisation by other members of the group.
4. Professional disagreements to be resolved outside of the meetings, and if they cannot be resolved, to be escalated.
5. Good practice guide to be developed for TAF/Core Groups, focusing on when a case is stepped down from Targeted Services and/or another Lead Professional takes over to ensure a consistent approach to the support offered to the family.
6. Showing evidence of persistence, professional curiosity, and creative methods of engaging with families, through accurate and timely record keeping. Practitioners should attend "Core Working Together" training at least once every three years.

The theme for Q3 of LSCB audits is around CSE and Missing. The findings from these audits will be reported in due course once they are consolidated.

4. Final Summary

This report continues to bring together all QA related activities being undertaken in Sandwell Children's Trust.

It gives the Trust a better insight and understanding into our direction of travel, and issues that need to be resolved and improvements needed in order to achieve a good standard of practice which delivers timelier and much improved outcomes for the children and young people of Sandwell.

The Audit teams work tirelessly to triangulate their findings and report to all parts of the service through various meetings and forums with a common goal of raising practice standards.

This is done with a view to tailor future training needs of workers and managers, the ASYE and Aspire programme, and support the service in their improvement journey.

Whilst services continue to steadily make improvements, the various audit processes highlight the fact that practice needs to continue to develop and improve in critical areas such as IRO oversight and supervisions, direct work with children to understand their lived experience, and use of good timely assessments and voice of child to inform care planning. Monthly audit activity has also highlighted the need to accurate threshold application at each level and concerns to be raised in a meaningful manner with places accountability of actions of responsible professionals.

There is also a need for managers and workers to be held more accountable for their roles, and supported within an enabling environment. This accountability needs to be extended when closing the loop, and taking responsibility to ensure learning from audits are reflected upon to improve practice. Going forward, Care planning is an essential area that needs to be strengthened and plans are already underway to streamline the process which is expected to offer clarity and support to the workforce. Focussed sessions have been planned to be rolled out to managers across the service in the following months. These sessions will be informed by learning from audits and will be aimed to strengthen management decision making at various stages of care planning.

Nadhim Zahawi MP
Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State for Children and Families
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
LONDON

5 October 2018

Dear Minister

SANDWELL CHILDREN'S TRUST

I am pleased to submit my fourth report since being appointed as Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust.

Our key priorities since my last report in June have been to continue the improvement; to stabilise the workforce and to recruit the substantive leadership team. I am pleased that we have made good progress in all these areas.

Our Improvement Plan is now well embedded in the business of the Trust. We were able to report to the most recent Improvement Board that:

- 44 actions are now complete (36%)
- 30 actions are on track (24.5%)
- 35 actions are judged not on track, but with actions in place to mitigate (28.5%)
- 14 actions are overdue or not on track (11%)

I am pleased to report that we now have a full permanent senior leadership team with the recruitment of Pauline Turner, currently Director of Performance, Quality and Innovation at Doncaster Children's Trust. She will be our permanent Director of Operations. This is a particularly pleasing appointment as Pauline has good knowledge of the Trust already as part of the Doncaster Trust work as our Improvement Advisers.

We have completed a review of the leadership and management structure which will be implemented in October 2018 with the intention of increasing management capacity to drive improvement. Whilst the intention is to strengthen management grip, we will also see a slimming down of the numbers of Group Heads from seven to five.

We continue to work hard on recruitment and retention at the front line. We successfully launched our Sandwell Offer – the 12 reasons to work at Sandwell - to staff in July. The 12 reasons were well received, but we are now focused on ensuring the delivery of all elements of the offer particularly the learning and development opportunities.

We have recently started our first cohort of managers on the Firstline programme and will be introducing the Frontline programme to the Trust in the coming year with work already underway on this.

We are seeing results in our approach to the workforce. In August 2018, we had 206 social workers in post against an establishment of 220. This is a significant increase over the 156 in post in August 2016. In addition, we have made real progress in ensuring the stability of the workforce with the proportion of temporary staff dropping from 35.7% in August 2017 to 26.7% in August 2018.

It is also worth noting that whilst we have seen social workers leaving the Trust, in many cases our view was that they were underperforming and were not willing to be subject to the far more rigorous performance regime now in place.

Our focus on improvement of practice remains central to our work. The new Quality Assurance Framework is now well embedded and we are achieving good results with our Beyond Auditing work which enables the results of audits to be translated directly into work with and alongside frontline workers to focus on the best standards of practice. We have clear minimum practice standards and the performance governance system is becoming well embedded. Staff are now responding to the weekly performance meetings and the higher expectations being placed on them. We have also recently developed Comprehensive Performance Dashboards which enable more 'real time' analysis of performance.

Most importantly, this work is impacting on quality, practice and demand. There has been a reduction of 230 in child protection numbers since April 2018; there is an improvement in the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences from 68% in April to 79% in August; Child Protection Plans updated at six monthly intervals has improved from 91.2% in March to 96.9% in August 2018.

The combined impact of more permanent social workers and work on dealing with cases means that caseloads have reduced from an average of 21 to 19.4% across the service. This is still higher than our target caseload, but represents good progress.

There is also a greater grip on the demand for the service through the weekly Directors' Resource and Decision making panel which considers all legal proceedings and admissions to care ensuring that the quality of decision making is tested fully and resources are aligned to decision making.

We are pleased that this progress was recognised during our most recent OFSTED monitoring visit. OFSTED recognised the understanding and grip of the senior leadership on the scale of the improvement task. They commended the development of standards and tools to support better frontline practice, but they noted that there is still much to do to ensure that this practice becomes embedded. We are clear that this is the case and are particularly focussed on increasing the pace, quality and timeliness of work on cases. Whilst OFSTED recognises the change that the new leadership has brought, we know that the key

task now is to ensure that this impacts on front line practice consistently. This remains the key focus of the Board and the senior leadership team.

OFSTED noted the work on audit and commended the swift follow up when issues were identified. They noted the work on recruitment and retention, the progress on getting permanent staff and recognised that staff morale is good and that staff have a good understanding of our priorities as a Trust and what we are trying to achieve.

In response to OFSTED's concern about how cases of chronic neglect are dealt with, the Improvement Board which includes all partners has decided to focus on ensuring better identification and action in cases of neglect.

We have also been subject to an Inspection of our Youth Offending Service. I am pleased that the overall rating is Good, although we are also clear that more work needs to be done on ensuring effective leadership and governance of the service.

We continue to benefit from Paul Moffatt, CEO of Doncaster Children's Trust chairing our Improvement Board. He has placed a particular emphasis on the role of partners within the Board and we have seen improved engagement in recent meetings. In addition, we are working very well with Lesley Hagger, Sandwell's new DCS who has already helped to revitalise partnership arrangements as recognised in the OFSTED monitoring letter.

In line with the Financial Mechanism included within the contract, the Board has reviewed the current year's financial performance and will be reporting to Sandwell Council a forecast overspend of £3.6m. The key drivers of this overspend are the increased numbers of Looked After Children and the cost of external placements. This additional demand was recognised at the point at which the Trust became live in April 2018 and we are now beginning discussions with the Council about how this overspend will be dealt with.

We are particularly keen to ensure that we address the root causes of the overspend and find innovative ways of delivering value for money. We already have a much tighter grip on the children coming into care through the Directors' Resource and Decision panel. Furthermore, we have prepared an 'invest to save' case to be presented to the Council. This will focus on

- Temporary managerial capacity to enable us to review and, where appropriate, move children on to return home or to permanency and to close cases.
- Developing alternatives to expensive external placements e.g. intensive foster care
- Support for the restructuring of the Group Heads reducing numbers from 7 to 5 with attendant cost savings.

We are also hopeful of sourcing additional support for our Beyond Auditing work which is at the heart of driving improved social work practice through the Trust.

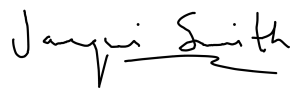
On a positive note, I am very pleased with the focus that the Board has placed on putting children and young people's voices at the heart of our work. With the Council, we are reviewing the role of the Corporate Parenting Board and how we can provide suitable support; we are developing a group of young people who will act as Young People's Advisers

to the Trust including contributing to induction and to interviews; we will develop a Shadow Board so that we can enable meaningful input into the decision making of the Board by young people; we have begun a programme of work with the young people to develop their views of the ideal social worker and foster carers which we will incorporate into training and recruitment as well.

Our relationship with Sandwell Council remains positive and constructive. In particular, the appointment of the new DCS, Lesley Hagger provides a key partner for our work together.

I would like to express my appreciation for the support of your staff at the DfE and, in particular, for Gail Emmerson our new Lead. We would love to welcome you to the Trust and look forward to being able to talk to you in more detail about the progress we're making.


Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end of the name.

Rt Hon Jacqui Smith
Chair, Sandwell Children's Trust

REPORT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

12 November 2018

Subject:	Foster Carer Scrutiny Work Group 2017-18
Cabinet Portfolio:	Councillor Simon Hackett - Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Councillor Joyce Underhill – Chair Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board Deborah Breedon, Scrutiny Officer Deborah_breedon@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board:

1. consider the findings of the Foster Carer Work Group and refer comments to the Sandwell Children's Trust to develop the foster carer offer and support recruitment and retention of foster carers.
2. request an update from the Sandwell the Children's Trust relating to Foster Carers in Sandwell.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Chair of the Children's Services and Education(CSE) Scrutiny Board requested a summary of the findings of the Foster Carers Work Group 2017-2018 and an update about Foster Carers in Sandwell.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION

- 2.1 Sandwell's vision is to ensure our children get the best possible start in life and for Sandwell to be a place where we live healthy lives, where people increasingly choose to bring up their families, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.
- 2.2 The Sandwell Children's Trust commenced on 1 April 2018 and delivery of foster care in Sandwell was transferred to the Trust. Foster carers talked with the Council to ensure continuity of service and that they were consulted about the Sandwell foster carer offer before the transfer.

3.0 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 3.1 Lead officers and foster carers were consulted during evidence gathering.

4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 None arising from this report.

5.0 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Increasing the number of Sandwell Council foster carers would make a reduction of demand for agency foster carers and potentially make savings.
- 5.2 The number of looked after children (LAC) in Sandwell continued to increase and the number of foster carers employed by Sandwell Council was reducing.
- 5.3 Cost of incentives to recruit and retain foster carers to Sandwell Council work force would be an investment to save on costs of agency staff.

6.0 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Legislation and guidance relating to foster care:
Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4:
Fostering Services (2011);
Putting Children First 2016;
The Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- 6.2 Under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State has the power to give a local authority such directions as the Secretary of State thinks fit to enable the functions under this legislation (children's social care functions) to be performed to an adequate standard.

7.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The Trust will be subject to and will have to adhere to the requirements under the Equality Act 2010 that are relevant.

8.0 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The Trust has adopted the Council's Information Governance and Data Protection policies. The Trust responds to freedom of information and subject access requests. Data sharing agreements and protocols have been drawn up between the Trust and the Council which determine the ways in which the two organisations work together.

9.0 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

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

10.0 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 10.1 The Trust is implementing actions to recruit and retain foster carers.
- 10.2 The Foster Care Training Plan 2017 provides a range of training and development opportunities to develop foster carers skills in meeting the needs of looked after children.

11.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

11.1 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.

12.0 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

12.1 There is no impact on any Council managed property or land arising from this report.

13.0 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 In conclusion, the report outlined the process, the evidence gathered and the findings of the Foster Carer Work Group. It has provided a summary of incentives and the conclusions of the work group in the report attached at Appendix 1.

14.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board Dataset June 2017

Risk register to Audit Committee August 2017

Scrutiny Update April 2017

Fostering Action Plan

Foster Carers Group (task and finish) steering group

Foster Friendly Council:

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/get-involved/championing-fostering/fostering-friendly>

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/combining-fostering-report-v5.pdf>



CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

FOSTER CARERS WORK GROUP

1.0 WHAT IS FOSTERING

Fostering is looking after a child who cannot live with their parents and becomes looked after by the Local Authority as a result, in Sandwell's case by the Sandwell Children's Trust. Fostering comes in many forms, it can be a very short-term arrangement, or it can mean giving a home to a child until they reach adulthood. There are many reasons why children need to be looked after and there are many people, with different skills and experiences who become foster carers.

2.0 REASONS FOR UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW

- 2.1 A performance summary reported to Corporate Parenting Board in in July 2017 highlighted the following:
- 614 looked after children (LAC) in Sandwell;
 - 469 resided in a foster placement, 270 (58%) resided with internal foster carers and 199 (42%) resided with an independent fostering agency carer;
 - 262 (43%) of LAC resided in Sandwell with 352 (57%) living in a place outside of the Borough and 64 children living 20 miles or more away from their home address.
- 2.2 The rising numbers of looked after children and associated costs of agency carers had put pressure on the corporate budget. The Scrutiny Work Group wanted to consider ways for the Council to reduce costs and encourage more people to become and remain as foster carers in Sandwell.

3.0 NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 [The Fostering System in England Review 2017](#) made 36 recommendations to the Government about how the outcomes of children in foster care could be improved. The report focussed on supporting carers to make fostering more effective, rationalising the professional supervision of foster care placements to prevent unnecessary intrusion into the life of the foster family and the child in care.
- 3.2 The DfE report recommendations highlighted the need for children who were unable to live with their own families to have the best possible experience and opportunities, that it was not just about keeping them safe but about offering continuity, access to support and opportunities.
- 3.3 The report highlighted that the last thing that was needed was for the foster carer to be a dispassionate and subjective advocate for the child or children in their care; the final recommendation was that foster carers needed to be treated professionally.
- 3.4 The review found wide inconsistencies and a general lack of clarity about the compensation and reward given to carers.
- 3.5 Evidence from the 'Fostering Network' suggested that there was a shortfall of approximately 5,900 in the number of carers in England however the review found that although more carers were needed, there was not an absolute shortage and the majority of children needing a fostering placement on any one day were placed. Any shortages were found to be due to geography or the availability of carers who could look after more challenging children.
- 3.6 The review supported the development of a register of foster carers, so that matching could be underpinned by accurate and current information about carers experience, skills and availability. There was also a need to find out why carers leave before retirement.
- 3.7 Other areas covered in the review related to matching, contact and siblings. One positive area of the report was a strengthening of the roles of child/young person and their carer's. The report called for a systematic review of the experiences of those in foster care and a greater focus on their voice in decision making about their lives.

- 3.8 A second positive was that the report called for a restoration of parental capacity for carers, so that they felt able to show love and affection to individual children, for having a central role in day-to-day and longer-term decision making, and having a 'parental' role in their foster children's lives beyond 21st birthday.
- 3.9 A third positive was the practical recommendations to improve the system for planning and commissioning foster care provision and rationalising the care roles where they may not be working effectively.
- 3.10 The report has not been translated in legislation yet and the 2013 regulation still applies

4.0 **BACKGROUND AND LOCAL CONTEXT**

- 4.1 A Fostering Update was provided to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board on 24th April 2017.
- 4.2 The report highlighted issues such as the cost of children in care in Sandwell and that Sandwell had a consistently high percentage of children in care when compared with national and regional Local Authorities.
- 4.3 Ofsted inspections had highlighted that there were issues and matters that required improvement in children's services several changes were outlined but children's services remained inadequate and required improvement.
- 4.4 Scrutiny Board noted that numbers of children in care in Sandwell fluctuated but was on the increase and was higher than the regional and national average. The Board emphasised the need for more in-house foster carers to be recruited and was advised that an aim of Children's Services was to appoint 30 foster carers per annum, year on year to build a consistent foster carer offer.
- 4.5 Scrutiny Board resolved to include the 'Foster Carer Offer' in the Work Programme 2017-18 and a work group was established to find out more about the current foster carer offer in Sandwell and future arrangements for foster carers.

5.0 MAIN CONSIDERATIONS OF THE WORK GROUP

5.1 Purpose:

- What was the Sandwell fostering offer?
- What more could the Council do to support foster carers in Sandwell?
- What more could it do to improve the fostering offer in Sandwell?
- What did it offer in comparison with Foster agencies?
- How did it celebrate foster carer achievements?

5.2 The aims of the review

- To aspire to Sandwell becoming a foster friendly local authority.
- To improve the foster carer offer and ensure support by professionals and peers in their role.
- To recruit and retain foster carers.
- To improve training for foster carers.
- To ensure children in care had stability and experience of secure family life.
- To actively promote foster caring to the hard to reach groups.
- To promote maximum satisfaction to foster.
- To give foster carers opportunity to shape the foster carer offer.

5.3 The Foster Carers Work Group comprised of Councillors Phillips, Ashman, Hickey, Preece and Saeed. The object of the work group was to explore what existing council services and work streams could do to improve the fostering offer in Sandwell for people who fostered in Sandwell and people who worked for Sandwell Council and were foster carers.

5.4 The Work Group had been advised that Sandwell Council needed to increase the number of foster carer's and to do what it could to retain foster carer's in what was a very challenging and essential role. The rising number of looked after children and associated costs of agency carers continued to put pressure on the corporate budget.

5.5 The Work Group aims were to make recommendations to build a strong and secure base of foster carers in Sandwell; to keep young people safe and to help them feel respected and cared for. The Work Group aligned its work to the priority that 'all children benefit from the best start in life and had access to community life, leisure and entertainment in

neighbourhoods where families chose to bring up their families’.

- 5.6 The Work Group looked at alternatives and possible improvements to the way Sandwell provided foster care, including possibility of waged carers that could take on Sandwell’s most challenging young people, those that had been in residential care or remand and demonstrated complex and challenging behaviours.
- 5.7 A survey of foster carers was carried out by Social Workers on behalf of the Scrutiny Work Group, findings were shared with Children’s Services and Scrutiny Board and are included in paragraph 6.1 of this report.
- 5.8 Council Services were contacted to find out what the current offer and current incentives were for foster carers and what more could be offered. Findings were shared with Children’s Services and Scrutiny Board and are considered in paragraph 6.2 of this report.
- 5.9 The Work Group reported its initial findings to the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board on 12 March 2018. The Board felt that feedback from the Fostering Work Group gave a useful insight into the foster carers’ perceptions and possible incentives for foster carers moving forward.

6.0 TIMING

- 6.1 On 12th March 2018 Scrutiny Board received feedback from the Fostering Work Group and an Update about the Sandwell Children’s Trust from the Interim Executive Director. The Trust Project Director advised the Board that the Trust would go live on 1st April 2018.
- 6.2 The Trust had been registered with Ofsted and would be setting up an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and an Independent Adoption Agency (IAA). Officers were working closely with foster carers to inform and re-assure them to help the transition move smoothly.
- 6.3 There was a lot happening at this time to prepare for the move to the Trust, which was going live on 1 April 2018, there would be an Ofsted inspection visit 30-31 May 2018 and there would be a period of settling in for the Trust and services that had transferred to the Trust.
- 6.4 In addition, there were changes in management of Children’s Services. The Interim Director of Children’s Services left the Authority at the end of March 2018, new Directors were appointed at the Trust and there

was a period before the Council's new Director for Children's Services came into post.

6.5 The summary report of the findings of the Fostering Work Group was delayed due to timing of several conflicting and impacting matters. The main messages from the work had been shared informally with the relevant officers, at the work group meetings and at Scrutiny Board meeting prior to the Trust going live on 1st April 2018.

7.0 FINDINGS

7.1 The Foster Carer Survey

7.1.1 The survey was prepared to send out to all foster carers electronically, however, officers from Children's Services determined that due to data protection the email should be sent from Fostering Services and that it was not timely to do so as a survey had recently been sent to all foster carers relating to the change to the Trust. The questions from the survey were asked on a one to one basis with foster carers.

7.1.2 Only 28 out of almost 280 foster carers completed the survey (10%), therefore the evaluation only reflected the views of foster carers who had been approached by officers. The Work Group agreed that the feedback was varied but useful, it highlighted several issues for further investigation by Children's Services about fostering in Sandwell.

7.1.3 The responses included interesting suggestions and comment made about training, housing provision and individual experiences regarding support and communication.

7.1.4 The comments received in relation to training included current and future provision, and highlighted the need for flexible times (week days, evenings and weekends), a range of methods for training (virtual and face to face sessions) and the need for more awareness about specific medical conditions, fostering processes and structures.

7.1.5 There were unfavourable comments which highlighted a lack of consistency from social workers and their varied levels of experience regarding support, responsiveness and communication. Members recognised that foster carers also had varied experience and levels of support required.

- 7.1.6 There were favourable comments about excellent support for foster carers and a positive view of fostering in Sandwell.
- 7.1.7 It was highlighted that relationships in foster homes were often disrupted due to staff turnover and administrative delays, also bonds had been broken with children due to rapid change.
- 7.1.8 The feedback was collated by Children's Services officers and had informed and helped to shape the future Foster Care Offer. A summary of all of the questions raised and responses given is attached. (Appendix 1).

7.2 Council Services

- 7.2.1 At the request of the Scrutiny Work Group, officers in relevant service groups listed incentives that were offered by the Council to Foster Carers in Sandwell. The following responses were collated from Leisure, Housing and Council Tax Services:

7.2.2 Leisure offer

- a) Leisure pass benefits to the Looked After Child are:
- FREE public Swimming
 - FREE Gym & Fitness Classes
 - FREE Swimming Lessons
 - FREE Holiday Camps
 - FREE Coached Activities
 - Up to 10% Off all other bookable activities
 - Advanced booking facility
- b) Free entry for Care/Social workers who must accompany Looked After Children for activities where applicable.
- c) All foster families receive the following benefits:
- FREE public swimming
 - FREE Gym & Fitness Classes
 - Up to 50% off Holiday Camps
 - Up to 50% off Swimming Lessons
 - Up to 10% Off all other bookable activities
 - Advanced booking facility
- d) Leisure Pass can be used at the following Centres:
- Haden Hill Leisure Centre
 - Hadley Stadium
 - Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre
 - Langley Swimming Centre

- Portway Lifestyle Centre
- Smethwick Swimming Centre
- Tipton Leisure Centre
- Tipton Sports Academy
- Wednesbury Leisure Centre

7.2.3 Housing Offer

As per the Council's existing policy, priority within housing allocations policy is given to foster carers and those approved by the Council to adopt who need to move to a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child. Reference: Housing Allocations Policy (effective from 17.04.13).

7.2.4 Council Tax

The Service Manager Appeals was contacted regarding the possibility of a Council Tax deduction for foster carers. He advised that Wolverhampton City Council did not offer Council Tax relief for foster carers as previously indicated. It was explained that the fostering payment included an amount for council tax, but no amount was specified.

There is no legislative relief for foster carers paying council tax, it would be up to Sandwell Council to decide whether to provide local relief, but obviously assessments around those eligible and ineligible would need to be conducted alongside cost implications

7.3 Other Council Incentives investigated for Foster Carers

7.3.1 Fostering Training Plan April 2017

The Training, Support and Development Plan 2017 for foster carers in Sandwell highlighted opportunities for foster carers.

7.3.2 Time off for public duties

The Work Group looked at opportunities to 'grow our own' staff in the Council and to include foster carers in current policies e.g. carers leave, emergency leave and time off for public duties. Council employees benefit from [Magistrates / time off for public duties etc](#) and [School Governors/ time off for public duties](#)

7.3.3 Flexibility training and recruitment:

Other agencies were identified as providing training at weekends and evenings but at the time of evidence gathering the Council did not have the capacity to offer training for foster carers out of normal working hours.

By recruiting foster carers to the Council, the authority could save at least £10k per annum as opposed to going to a private foster agency. This would be the case for the Children's Trust once the Trust goes live.

7.3.4 Foster Friendly Council

The Work Group discussed the possibility of the Council becoming a Foster Friendly Council. The background papers contain the links to 'Fostering Friendly Policy' and 'Combining Fostering and Other Work' reports.

7.3.5 Venues for foster carer groups and support meetings

The Work Group considered that it was important for foster carers to talk to peers and support workers to share experiences and issues. They determined that it would be helpful if the Council could consider making venues available for foster carer groups to hold support meetings at low or no cost to the support group as an incentive.

7.3.6 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)

During evidence gathering, the following key points were raised:

- The Sandwell Fostering Service would be registering as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). The Sandwell Children's Trust, Fostering was likely to happen end of summer early autumn 2018.
- There would be a registered manager of the service and an appointed person – both would be responsible for fostering.
- The IFA would have to be inspected by Ofsted
- The service would be standalone and would rewrite, refresh and rebrand fostering in Sandwell. At the time of the evidence gathering the Council was looking at procedures, using what we already knew and putting together with another part that was brand new (the IFA would be a different framework).
- At the time of the evidence gathering the move to the Trust was 6 weeks away and the Council was waiting for a response in relation

to the IFA. The Wellman Building was complete and staff were moving into the building.

- Fostering would be at Wellman Building.

8.0 THE CURRENT POSITION

8.1 The Children's Trust came into effect 1st April 2018. Foster Carers were transferred under TUPE arrangements to the Sandwell Children's Trust.

8.2 The number of children receiving support from Children's Services in Sandwell at the beginning in March 2018 was as follows:

- 2,871 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service.
- 871 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan.
- 1 child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement.
- 753 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 95 per 10,000 children).
- 406 (or 54%) lived outside the local authority area.
- 54 lived in residential children's homes, of whom 92% live outside the authority area.
- None lived in residential special schools.
- 576 lived with foster families, of whom 51% live outside the authority area.
- 59 lived with parents, of whom 15% live outside the authority area.
- 22 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

8.3 Department for Education has published [Fostering Better Outcomes](#) - The Government response to the Education Select Committee into fostering and Foster Care in England 2017, it was presented to Parliament in July 2018.

8.4 Following an Ofsted Inspection in the summer The Sandwell Children's Trust, [Improvement Plan](#) was considered and approved by Sandwell Council Cabinet at a meeting 19 September 2018.

8.5 The actions and aims were aligned were to the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (SIF) recommendations and prioritised:

1. Leadership
2. Workforce
3. Practice
4. Children Looked After

5. CSE, Exploitation, Missing & Trafficked
6. Performance and Quality Assurance
7. Partnership
8. Voice and Experience of the Child

- 8.6 Priority 4 – Children Looked After, Care Leavers and Permanence
 ‘This is a fundamental priority of the plan as we believe that 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.
- 8.7 The Improvement Plan highlighted the need to review the fostering service and external placement strategy. The recommendations, aims and actions relate to Foster Carers are below 8.8.1 & 8.8.2:

8.7.1 **Ofsted**

Recommendation (O9) Increase the number of foster carers to meet the varied needs of children looked after.	
Aims - Children are matched to carers which support them living with siblings and as close to their existing communities as possible Review if there is an option to develop one or explore block contract arrangement with providers in the region – with linked step-down foster carers (Nov 2018)	Actions - Provider Services Group Head Review and develop the current foster care sufficiency strategy and actions being taken to increase the number of foster carers. (July 2018)

8.7.2 **Single Inspection Framework 2017**

Recommendations (S2) Ensure that fosters carers are clear about their delegated responsibilities and are furnished with sufficient, timely information about children in order that they can make informed decisions.	
Aims - Foster carers are clear about their roles and delegated responsibilities and confidently make decisions based on detailed information about the child. ‘Foster to Adopt’ is considered by all social workers working with and supporting foster carers.	Actions - Provider Services Group Head ‘Foster to adopt’ policy to be reviewed and disseminated with a clear focus on increasing the number of foster to adopt’ carers. (Nov 2018).

<p>Aims continued:- The Fostering Service is to review its policies and where appropriate relaunch training to ensure that the Foster Service is compliant with all regulatory standards. (Nov 2018)</p>	<p>Actions continued:- Provider Services Group Head Provide additional training to social workers and managers to ensure that they are clear about the importance of sharing key information with carers/providers. (Nov 2018).</p>
---	--

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The Work Group found that there was a need for the Council to recruit and retain foster carers in Sandwell and to highlight the value of improving the offer for foster carers to reduce the cost of agency foster carers.
- 9.2 The Work Group found that there was a need to review the incentives for foster carers and what more the Council could do to improve the offer and support fosters carers that work in Sandwell Council and that live in Sandwell in their role.
- 9.3 The Work Group findings inform the actions arising from Ofsted and Single Inspection Framework inspections.

10.0 Background papers:

[The Fostering System in England Review 2017](#)
[Foster Care Charter 2011](#)
[Fostering Better Outcomes 2018](#)

The Sandwell Fostering Offer Survey - Results

Questions / Responses

Other than being a foster carer for Sandwell

(1) Are you engaged in any form of employment?

Yes (Full-time)	6
Yes (Part-time)	3
No	18

If yes are you currently an employee of Sandwell MBC?

Yes	1 (part/time)
No	8

If Yes, as a Council employee, is there anything the Council can do to make your role as a Foster Carer easier?

No comments

(2) To what extent would the following be of interest to you?

	1 Not at all	2 some extent	3 Very much
How to deal with complex young people.	3	15	9
Council tax reduction each year for fostering young people for 250+ days of the year.	4	6	18
Financial bonus for looking after young children for 250+ days of the year.	1	6	14
Training adapted to your specific needs.	2	7	15
Timing of training to meet your needs	2	7	16
Greater support in my role as a foster carer	5	9	10

- (3) Are you aware of the training opportunities available to foster carers in Sandwell? 26 responded yes

If yes, is the programme extensive enough to cover your learning requirements as a Foster Carer?

Yes – it completely meets my needs	15
Yes – it partially meets my needs	9
No – it does not meet my needs	2

If no, what other training courses could be included or improved?

<p>Work shop to find out more about the structure of the department, how children come into care and how decisions are made until they reach the foster carer.</p> <p>Training for disabilities e.g. global development delay; Chromosome abnormality.</p> <p>Weekend training.</p>

- (4) Would alternative ways of training be of interest to you?

Such as	No	Yes
Workshops	1	15
Away days	1	3
On line training other	1	14
Evening	1	1

If other, please specify

Workshops include experience foster carers giving advice.
 Artemis on-line training can be done anytime, at home and at night.
 On-line training due to ill timings at present.
 Drug awareness for young Adults- families to take part together.
 Evening and online training.
 Weekend, evening or school holiday training events/ meetings
 Dealing with children/babies with complex needs.
 Conference call seminars
 On-site childcare would help foster carers.

(5) How many children would you normally foster at any one time?

1	1 - 2	2	3	4
9	3	4	4	1

(6) What type of foster care do you normally provide?

Long term	18
Emergency	4
Specialist e.g. disability	4
Short term	4
Respite	2

(7) Would you consider fostering more children at one time e.g. siblings?

Yes	19
No	8

If no, what were the reasons or barriers for you not doing so?

Down sized house from a six to a three-bedroom house.
 Only have two spare rooms or would have more children.
 Feel taking another child would disturb the long-term placement.

(8) Has the number of spare rooms in your home or your Council housing provision in Sandwell affected on your ability to foster more young people?

Yes	9
No	16

- (9) Have you attended or engaged in events and initiatives that raise the public profile of fostering?

Yes	12
No	14

(10)

Would you be in supporting further events? If so, please provide contact details.

Yes	8
No	2

- (11) Do you have any other comments to make about fostering in Sandwell?

- Some social workers had been good but others not do good.
- The good social workers seem to leave. Why is the Council not trying to keep the good social workers?
- I have received in-house training and have been a mentor for other carers on a voluntary basis.
- We have had no problems working with Sandwell and know that it is the lack of investment causing the problems that Sandwell have.
- Majority of carers feel that there is no support to carers and extended families. Morale extremely low, turnover of staff, no communication, feel criticised at times. Would not recommend Sandwell as a first choice for fostering.
- Excellent support for foster carers – placements always very helpful, informative and at the end of the phone for them.
- Staff change too much, bonds with children broken due to this paper work was lost.
- Still waiting for five months bus pass money as paper work gone missing with the staff.
- Level of communication with social worker of two of the placements very poor.
- Slow progress of cases – no sense of urgency to sort out the child's future.
- A tailored approach to supervision would be good. People who provide respite care still receive six-week supervision but do not have permanent placements this is a waste of time – nothing to discuss. Moving to 12-week supervision could be considered. Need to be more flexible to focus on the carers needs.
- We have to attend many hospital and specialist appointments lots of home visits.
- Very positive view of fostering in Sandwell.

- Fostering in Sandwell is very rewarding.
- Some training is repeated for older carers.
- Would like to see honest and quicker communication between department and the foster carers. Can be frustrating, the lack of support and lack of communication.
- Carers want to be respected and to offer the best care they can to vulnerable children in their care.
- Would like to see more support for younger people regardless of their needs.