

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

**12 November 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, Rollins, Shaeen and Reverend P French (co-opted member).

Apologies: Councillor Phillips and Mrs T Majid (co-opted member).

In attendance: Rt.Hon. Jacqui Smith, Chair, Sandwell Children's Trust;
Frances Craven, Chief Executive, Sandwell Children's Trust;
Lesley Hagger, Executive Director, Sandwell Council;
Menna Davies

25/18 **Chairs Announcement**

The Chair advised the Board that Reverend Peter French, Church of England Diocese representative had given notice that he would be moving to a new work position outside of the West Midlands area and that this would be his last meeting as a Co-opted Member of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board.

The Chair thanked Reverend French for his helpful suggestions and valuable contributions to debate during his time as a Member of the Scrutiny Board.

The Chair on behalf of the Board wished him best wishes and good luck for the future.

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26/18 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 22 October 2018 be approved as a correct record.

27/18 Sandwell Children's Trust

The Chief Executive and the Chair Sandwell Children's Trust provided 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 1st April 2018.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board advised that as there were several new Members to the Scrutiny Board this year the reports circulated included background information. She explained that the Trust had day to day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services and that she had requested a glossary of abbreviations and some further information about the '12 reasons to work in Sandwell Children's Trust' and the 'National First Line', which Members had received in advance of the meeting.

The Chair of the Children's Trust introduced the background and main considerations of the report highlighting the following:

- The Children's Trust went live in April 2018 and had been functioning for six months;
- The Trust was a new and distinct legal entity to provide children's social care services in Sandwell;
- The Trust was working extremely hard towards eight priorities of an ambitious improvement plan following the last Ofsted inspection;
- The Trust ambitions are to 'need improvement by 2020' and to be 'good by 2022';
- There are more permanent staff in place in the Trust in October 2018 (121.8) than in October 2017 (81).

The eight Trust Priorities:

1. Leadership
2. Workforce
3. Practice
4. Children Looked after, Care Leavers, Permanence;
5. Child Sexual Exploitation;
6. Performance and Quality Assurance;

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7. Partnership;
8. Voice of the Child.

In relation to the priorities the following progress was reported:

- Strong and effective partnerships are critical and a pledge will be signed by partners to strengthen good partnerships.
- Progress has been made in monitoring visits in culture;
- Improvements in staff morale and in good practice, there is a focus on good practice.
- The Youth Offending Service Ofsted report was 'Good' in partnership with Local Authority and other service.
- Priority 3 The quality of practice – good practice fostered by strong relationships is demonstrated by data and performance information of the 'Beyond Auditing Team'.
- Focus on the Voice of the Child practice standards became embedded in the needs of the service. – Practice cases drilling down into the needs of the service, dripping down into the needs of the service and improving the service.
- Improvements to the dashboard, real time dashboard monitoring real time performance data and real-time day to day caseloads. Key monitoring and input at all different levels.
- 12-week action plans have been introduced to help focus on what can be achievable, the Trust focus on improving the lives of children in the 12 week action planning services such as the adoption service is positive in terms of knowing ourselves how the service works and can react.
- Children Looked After and permanency remains a critical area for the Trust which is continuing to address the arrangements with a focus on strengthening the foundations within fostering and adoption.
- Weekly performance meetings have raised expectations in relation to performance.

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

- A Member of the Board voiced concern that performance data highlighted that the audits completed in the performance data were worse than previous performance and were not demonstrating improvement. Out of 55 audits only 47 were completed and only 10% were good. He wanted to know when we could expect to see improvement. The Chief Executive explained that the quality of the audit was important, the audit

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was not just about compliance and a tick box exercise to say that a child had been visited, which may have been the case in previous audits, but to ensure that each visit was part of the improvement journey and process for every case.

- The Chair of the Trust added that the auditing process was more robust also. The audit was not only about compliance and ticking the box to say a child had been visited but to confirm that the plan was good for the child and about the quality of the plan. The change to the audit process would take time to embed but was moving in the right direction.
- In response to further questions about when significant improvements would be witnessed the Chair of the Trust advised that some improvements had already been witnessed but that although impatient for improvement realistically it would take time. The Chief Executive advised that the Trust had already invested a lot of time and resource on quality of staff to improve training and to improve quality of audit, but there was more to do.
- In response to questions about training and support for schools in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) the Chief Executive advised that she had identified a specialist school group of head teachers which had been tasked to look and understand risk groups, and also using a real-life case to support schools to understand the system; there are issues but the group will work through them.
- The Trust was commended on the 12 reasons for working for the Trust document, for valuing staff and recognising staff worth.
- 121.8 full time staff were currently in post with 12 new staff waiting to start. The success of appointing staff to Sandwell was recognised as not just down to the 12 reasons but to the fact that Sandwell was a learning organisation, financial incentives were similar across the region so that had not really had a bearing on Sandwell's success, but as always there was more to do.
- The risks for achieving success was the demand and the number of young people coming into the system. If young people needed care they need to come in but were the right people coming in? Were partners referring the right young people? We need to work with partners.
- A further risk of the number of young people coming into the system was finance, the Trust had a good settlement with the Council but expenditure was already more than the original financial settlement, also other internal commissioning costs, intensive fostering, staffing and recruitment and other costs.

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- Members asked if 'Beyond Auditing' was looking at all cases and had picked up any issues during supervision sessions and if this was part of practice standards. The Chief Executive advised that supervision was absolutely key to this, caseloads were reducing and that manageable caseloads were one of the 12 reasons to work at Sandwell; supervision was key to professional development.
- The Chair of the Board questioned whether caseloads were going down and whether they were getting more complex. The Chief Executive advised that the breadth and complexity of a case or cases and the focus and experience required could mean that social workers transition to and from cases depending on experience and ability.
- Some audits were not carried out during the year, when they were carried out they had revealed issues where matters have had to be revisited.
- There has been a whole new work stream of closing the loop on matters that had not been finished, to ensure work was closed and actions had taken place. The team were very aware that they needed to close the loop and where training issues were identified they were highlighted.
- 'Seven minute briefings' had been developed to share key points with staff on a regular basis.
- The Chair of the Board asked how the Chief Executive would get young people involved with auditing and if there would be data protection issue, as this had been an issue for Scrutiny Board Members in the past. The Chief Executive agreed that this may be an issue and agreed to think about how to get young people involved without breaching data protection issues.
- In response to the Chair's questions about agency staff becoming permanent in the Trust, the Chair of the Board advised that some agency staff had moved across once they had realised that there were similar flexibilities in working arrangements to agency working and some additional benefits such as holiday entitlement and sickness pay.
- Ofsted had previously identified a weakness related to brothers and sisters in the assessments which had been picked up. There would be ongoing work picked up in training to challenge the performance Board, there was quite a lot of robustness in discussion about pre-birth and other assessments to see children as individuals and part of families.
- The Chair of the Scrutiny Board referred to the many issues coming before schools, school governors and Members relating

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to children and young people and the need to be clear on thresholds on what should be referred to Multi Agency Referral Forum (MARF). The Director of Children's Services advised that it was important for all Members to be clear if they were at all concerned with the wellbeing of a child or young person they should complete a MARF, report it and make sure.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board thanked the Chair and officers from the Children's Trust for a comprehensive performance report.

27/18 Foster Carers Update

The Chair introduced the Fostering Carer Scrutiny Work Group report the Chief Executive Children's Trust welcomed the report and advised that the report had informed ongoing work in the 12-week action plan relating to Fostering.

Menna Davies advised that work was ongoing in the six towns of Sandwell to promote fostering and a campaign to encourage foster carers to join Sandwell Council was underway. Posters and targeted advertising through the radio and various groups including Bangladeshi ladies groups had taken place so far.

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

- Two of the towns were bigger than the rest so resources and advertising should be proportionate.
- Sandwell had interface with Wolverhampton, Dudley and Birmingham.
- Foster carers were best recruited using word of mouth, good experience was the best advertisement.
- Reward our foster carers with incentives and tell them they will be busy. There are a lot of children need help in Sandwell.
- Tell them they will have a lot of support and regular meetings.
- Need to recruit younger foster carers and factor younger families into the foster carer family mix.
- Need to expand the fostering initiatives spend.
- It can take between 8 months and two years to become a foster carer, depending on training. Information is available.
- Information can be found at Community hubs, Church – Mosques etc. Members are volunteering to give out information

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in their wards. The Vice Chair Councillor M Y Hussain agreed to attend quarterly sessions to promote fostering.

- External foster carers and family and friends are becoming mainstream foster carers in Sandwell this is a rich stream of permanent foster carers.

The Chair thanked all for their attendance.

(Meeting ended at 6.10 pm)

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