


REPORT TO

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

23rd September 2019

Subject:	Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2018/19 and Improvement Plan
Cabinet Portfolio:	Councillor Joyce Underhill, Lead Member, Best Start in Life
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
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DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That :

1. In scrutinizing the two reports from Sandwell Children's Trust, the Scrutiny Board satisfies itself that Sandwell Children's Trust is delivering an efficient and effective service that reflects the Council's contractual requirements.
2. The Scrutiny Board provides comments that can be included in the covering report to the Cabinet meeting in October 2019, when the same two reports from Sandwell Children's Trust will be presented.

- 1.1 Sandwell Children's Trust is required to report to the Scrutiny Board twice each year as part of the obligations set out in the contract between the Council and the Trust.
- 1.2 The Trust is also required to produce an Annual Review of its work, and an Improvement Plan. The Trust was established on 1st April 2018, and so the review of its first year of operation has been finalised and is now presented to the Scrutiny Board for consideration and discussion.
- 1.3 The Trust has also refreshed its Improvement Plan, which is also presented to the Scrutiny Board for consideration and discussion.
- 1.4 The role of the Scrutiny Board is an important part of the assessment regarding the extent to which the Trust is delivering an efficient and effective service that reflects the requirements of the contract between the Council and the Trust. The comments from the Scrutiny Board will be included in the presentation of the Annual Review and Improvement Plan to the Cabinet in October 2019.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 Ensuring that children have the Best Start in Life is a key driver for Sandwell Children's Trust; ensuring that children are safeguarded, protected and, when unable to live with their parents, are effectively cared for.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 After a decade of poor performance, the Secretary of State for Education issued a Direction to the Council in October 2016 under Section 497A (4B) of the Education Act 1996.
- 3.2 The purpose of the Direction was to secure improvements to the Council's children's social care functions, namely safeguarding and looked after children functions including the functions relating to adoption and care leavers.
- 3.3 The Direction set out that these functions should be externalised to a new and distinct legal entity with independence in the management and delivery of services. The Chair of the Trust is a government appointment.
- 3.4 There is a 10-year contract in place starting on 1st April 2018 – with a break clause after 5 years. The contract sets out a number of service delivery schedules, expected outcomes, and Key Performance Indicators.

- 3.5 The contract contains an expectation to achieve at least a 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted judgement by 2020 and 'Good' by 2022. In order to support improvement, there is an Improvement Board independently chaired by a DfE nominee, and a multi-agency Improvement Plan.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Over the course of the first year there have been improvements in performance against most of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI). However, services are still fragile and performance is subject to significant variability from one month to the next. During the 2019/20 period, one of the KPIs has failed to meet the specified target for two months in succession and a specific action plan is in place to recover performance.
- 4.2 The Trust continues to struggle to recruit permanent staff and, whilst the senior management structure is now permanent, the percentage of agency staff at the end of the year is more or less the same as it was at the start of the year.
- 4.3 The number of children in care has increased and the cost of providing care has exceeded the original budget.
- 4.4 The Trust has been subject to 9 separate Ofsted thematic visits and inspections since 1st April 2018. The thematic visits have all noted progress being made but also the significant improvements still needed.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 The Improvement Board is a multi-agency meeting. Securing improvement in the children's services system is reliant on all stakeholders working well together.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

- 6.1 Sandwell Council continues to be under the Direction of the Secretary of State regarding the provision of statutory children's services.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 At the end of the first year of operation the Trust budget was overspent by £6.9m. This was mitigated via a one-off use of Council reserves, the use of Trust reserves and a carry forward overspend of £1.4m.
- 7.2 The expenditure in the second year of the contract has continued to exceed the budget and this position is currently under review and subject to discussion with the DfE.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Sandwell Children's Trust has operated since 1st April 2018. It is governed via an Operational Partnership Board (OPB) which is chaired by the CEO of the Trust. It comprises senior personnel from the Trust and the Council and meets monthly to monitor the delivery of the contract. The OPB reviews the contract annually and is required to do so for the first four years of the contract, until the end of the contract period in 2022.

8.2 There is also a Strategic Partnership Board, chaired by the CEO of the Council or DCS. It comprises the Chair of the Trust and senior Trust personnel together with senior personnel from the Council. It meets quarterly to provide strategic, political and executive oversight to ensure that services are being delivered in accordance with the contract.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 Sandwell Children's Trust provides support to the most vulnerable children in Sandwell.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 Sandwell Children's Trust is its own data-owner.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 Many of the young people known to Sandwell Children's Trust are involved in the criminal justice system. Many are victims of exploitation and abuse.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 There sustainability of current arrangements is impacted by the financial pressures faced by the Council and the Trust.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 Safeguarding and protecting children significantly improves their potential for good health and wellbeing.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 Sandwell Children's Trust leases its office buildings from the Council through a Service Level Agreement.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The Annual Review 2018/19 and the Improvement Plan have been received and accepted by the Strategic Partnership Board and the Improvement Board.

15.2 The Scrutiny Board will need to satisfy itself that the Annual Review 2018/19 is an accurate reflection of the Trust's performance.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 None

17 APPENDICES:

17.1 Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2018/19

17.2 Sandwell Improvement Plan

Lesley Hagger
Executive Director of Children's Services