



2018/19

## Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review



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## Foreword

We are very happy to present Sandwell Children’s Trust’s first annual report on our progress within our inaugural year of operating as an independent organisation to deliver statutory and targeted children’s services to the children and young people of Sandwell. This report, part of our contractual arrangements with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, is a ‘look backwards’ to all our successes and challenges within our first year of operation.

We have compiled this report in the spirit of partnership with SMBC, and we demonstrate our financial performance against the contract sum, and how we have managed this against our demand for providing services to the children and young people of Sandwell. We set out what our financial challenges have been and present a summary of our end of year accounts.

Most importantly, we show the progress we have made on our improvement journey; in particular our ‘12 reasons to work for Sandwell Children’s Trust’ and highlight what others, included Ofsted have said about us. Finally, we set out where we have made changes to our contractual arrangements with the council.

In the years to come each annual report will build on the last, and provide us with a useful opportunity to take stock and reflect on our journey.

It has been a challenging year, and we are proud to say all our staff within Sandwell Children’s Trust have risen to this challenge. We continue to be impressed by everybody’s contribution to getting us where we aim to be, which is Good by 2022.



**The Right Honourable Jacqui Smith**  
Chair of Sandwell Children’s Trust



**Frances Craven**  
Chief Executive of Sandwell Children’s Trust

## Executive Summary

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 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services, and has the aim of providing 'Good' services to our children and families' by 2022.

### Financial Context

The finances provided by SMBC to the Trust was covered by a Contract Sum that on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 amounted to approximately £58.23m funding from SMBC and contributions from our partners of £5.898m. Prior to the Trust going live, a Budget Development Working Group existed, with representatives from SMBC, Trust and DfE.

Within the financial year 2018/19, there were three main budget pressures that contributed to the 2018/19 outturn position. These were:

- The number of Children in Care had increased (and therefore the demand for placements increased)
- The demand for externally funded placements increased due to insufficient capacity in the market of internal foster carers
- The percentage of agency social workers had not reduced as quickly as expected as there remains a fragility within our permanent workforce

This meant that the Trust had the challenge of improving services for children and families, in the face of a difficult financial situation.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 the pressures described have either remained or increased. Highlights of this are:

- The number of Children in Care has increased from 778 to 901 (a 15.8% increase).
- The demand for children's placements has increased from £23.99m to £31.72m (a 32.2% increase)

Where we can, we have addressed these pressures and mitigated against this 'in-year' but in the medium term, in collaboration with SMBC, we have produced a comprehensive Medium Term Financial Plan that outlines where we can, and will make realistic savings. Our aim is to make financial savings over the next four years:

- Year 2 - £612,051
- Year 3 - £2,646,757
- Year 4 - £5,818,910
- Year 5 - £7,334,781

Should the Medium Term Financial Plan be agreed, this will mean that our operating costs (staffing and elements of non-pay) are expected to return close to the original contract sum by 2023.

We began operation with a need to provide additional infrastructure to assist our improvement. For part of 2018/19 and then 2019/20, we successfully obtained funds from the Department for Education to continue to deliver the '12 reasons to work for Sandwell Children's Trust', through a comprehensive training package for our staff, and the infrastructure to support our newly qualified social workers, and bolster practice improvement through 'Beyond Auditing'.

## Improvement

In addition to managing our financial position, the Trust came into being to provide better services to the children and families of Sandwell. To do this 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 10 May 2018. The Improvement Plan has eight priorities and is based on the actions and recommendations from Ofsted 2017 Single Inspection alongside the recommendations made by the DfE appointed Children's Commissioner. The Improvement Plan underpins our aims to become 'Requires Improvement' by 2020 and 'Good' by 2022.

One of our first activities in 2018 was to develop a clear and comprehensive performance framework to help us track our improvements and know where the areas of deficit are. Our overall performance has improved on average, although our performance in key areas has been variable over the course of the year. Examples of this are:

- A reduction in social worker vacancies
- A reduction of social worker and independent reviewing officer caseloads
- Timely allocation of work and efficient transfers between services
- An increase in the timeliness and throughput of contacts
- An increase in the number of chronologies updated
- More core group meetings being completed within timescale
- An increase in the frequency of visiting our children

In addition to these quantitative performance measures, we have taken the approach of strengthening our Quality Assurance infrastructure, with both a 'regular' quality assurance service and a more targeted 'beyond auditing' team. This has meant we have the benefit of tackling poor practice head on, in a safe and productive way, in conjunction with practitioners and front-line staff. Our Contract with SMBC stipulates that we are to audit 90 random case files every three months. We have surpassed this expectation, and have undertaken over 600 audits across the course of the year (a monthly average of 53). This does not include the targeted and themed auditing of the beyond auditing team. We have seen improvements across the year on average, with significantly more case files audited as Requires Improvement or better (from 42.9% to 67.4%).

There has been a whole range of other improvement activities we have put into place within our first year, which we expect to bring about sustained progress towards our aims. Key activities have been:

### *Priority 1 - Leadership*

- Creating a culture of openness, where staff feel confident to do their job in a safe and supported way and flourish
- Experienced Trust Board members, who bring a breadth of knowledge, skills and experience and constructive challenge
- A permanent and experienced senior leadership team
- The creation of a communications and engagement strategy that has brought senior leadership closer to front line staff

### *Priority 2 - Workforce*

- The creation of our workforce strategy “the 12 reasons to work for Sandwell Children’s Trust”, and our work to achieve its goals of attracting and retaining a stable, experienced workforce
- Greater stability across the workforce, but with the recognition that it is still fragile
- A management realignment, with increased management capacity at Operations Manager level, which reduces the number of direct reports for each manager enabling greater focus on improvement

### *Priority 3 - Practice*

- The revision and in some cases creation of processes, procedures and practice guidance
- Our services to children and young people have improved in a range of ways, which is demonstrated by our key performance measures and qualitative measures

### *Priority 4 – Children in Care, Care Leavers and Permanence*

- A joined-up strategic approach to managing our Children in Care placements

### *Priority 5 - Exploitation*

- A greater understanding and more comprehensive infrastructure for tackling exploitation

### *Priority 6 –Quality Assurance*

- Strengthened the IRO / CP Chair service to ensure more robust oversight on individual children’s plans
- Implementation of the Beyond Auditing framework

### *Priority 7 – Partnership*

- Better relationships with key partners at both strategic and operational levels, particularly the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

### *Priority 8 – Voice of the Child*

- The creation of our participation strategy and the foundations for meaningful participation to be one of the golden threads across our organisation

Following our first year, we have refreshed our improvement plan to consider the wider improvement context, and areas for improvement as a result of feedback from our external inspections.

### **External Inspections**

As an organisation seeking to improve from an ‘Inadequate’ Ofsted rating, we are subject to the Monitoring Visit arrangements on a quarterly basis. This, in conjunction with the regulatory inspections of the Voluntary Adoption Agency, the Independent Fostering Agency, and the Youth Offending Service and council wide SEND inspection, has meant that we have welcomed inspectors a total of seven times in twelve months.

Our monitoring visits have been invaluable as a barometer of our improvement across the course of the year, and Ofsted have noted significant improvements in some areas – giving us confidence that

we are 'going in the right direction'. However, they have also commented where our progress remains to be well evidenced. Areas of note are:

- How we conduct our legal meetings within the Public Law Outline
- How we undertake Pre-birth assessments
- How we are considering Early permanence options
- Our arrangements for ensuring a single front door
- Consistency of approach in auditing
- How well we use supervision as a tool for progressing plans and obtaining positive outcomes for children.

We have had inspections for our Voluntary Adoption Agency and our Independent Fostering Agency, which were again a very useful but challenging experience. Whilst we had a judgement of Requires Improvement for adoption, we were judged as failing to meet the minimum standards for fostering, and issued with three compliance notices setting out Ofsted's expectations for improvement by 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019. This is set out in the main body of this report.

Our Youth Offending Service was inspected in August 2018. This service area was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, and received a judgement of 'Good', with outstanding aspects, something we are very proud of.

In conclusion, over the course of the year, we have made improvements across the range of our services in the face of a many service challenges. There have been great successes and disappointments, but this does not detract from the hard work and dedication of our staff and partners, all pulling in the same direction to make children and families lives better in Sandwell. We continue to be optimistic in our ambition to be to achieve our aims of Requires Improvement by 2020 and Good by 2022.

## Introduction

The Annual Review is a contractual obligation of Sandwell Children's Trust in its reporting to the Council and interested parties such as the senior civil servant (while a Statutory Direction is in force). First and foremost, the aim of the review is to look back over the previous 12 months and understand how far we have achieved our specified goals within that year. The review should therefore be the first strategic document of the year, that informs our business plan and our improvement plan.

Schedule 3 of the Service Delivery Contract outlines the matters that are to be reported on as part of the Annual Review. These are addressed in the following sections:

- Section (a)** the Trust's performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (b)** demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (c)** the Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (d)** the Improvement Plan (where applicable);
- Section (e)** the thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year;
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- Section (j)** the contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance); and
- Section (k)** such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.



## Section (a) - The Trust's performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year

The Trust's budget for 2018/19 was based on the report of the Budget Development Working Group (BDWG) on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018, before the Trust went live. The Trust budget was based on the best information at that time. The report from the BDWG acknowledges that the budget assumed there were a certain number of children in care (c720) but at the point of the Trust 'going live' the numbers and therefore the costs were different. An example is that there were 778 children in care at 1 April 2018.

The Trust began with a brand-new finance team and thus sought support from Sandwell MBC's finance team. Working closely with SMBC during 2018/19 was not only important in terms of reporting but also seeking information where appropriate.

The Trust highlighted an overspend against budget from the very early days of the Trust. This was caused by the number and cost of external placements against the budget that was set. Part of this was caused by budget pressures on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, but in addition the number of children in care have increased from 778 to 901 at 31 March 2019.

After use of reserves the Trust reported a **£1.579m** overspend, this was after receiving an additional £5 million of funding from SMBC. Key overspends against the budget set at BDWG were:

External Residential Placements	£1.643m
Independent Foster Carers	£2.855m
Secure Units	£0.596m
Leaving Care Support Accommodation/Rents	£2.312m
<b>Total of major overspends (over £500k)</b>	<b>£7.406m</b>

As can be seen above, the major overspends are linked to external placement costs. There are a number of other overspends within the budget but these are either net off, are funded by income or are under £500k.

The Trust, in collaboration with SMBC, produced a draft Medium Term Financial Plan. While our Business Plan (2019/20 – 2022/23) was developed prior to Christmas 2018 with a medium term financial outlook, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was developed with the first year's financial data. The draft MTFP has been shared with SMBC. SMBC have offered very constructive challenge and this has allowed further development of the MTFP.

## Section (b) - Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year

The national challenges for qualified social workers who are willing to work in statutory services is well known, and the West Midlands region (and Sandwell Borough) is not immune to these difficulties. It is important to understand our service demand within this context.

Understanding demand within the Trust is complex and multi-faceted, with many variables and assumptions. We have set out our financial performance in the previous section, and we have developed a draft Medium Term Financial Plan to address the known deficits. This plan has been drawn up based on our demand models, which we set out here.

It is useful to consider our demand in the following terms:

1. How many referrals we receive from our partners, the public and children and families themselves.
2. How many children and families we are working with (and therefore how many staff we need)
3. How many placements do we need for children to live, both in the short term and in the long term

We have worked hard within the last 12 months to put ourselves in the position where we understand our demand in these three areas, and are able to make realistic predictions for how these variables change so we are able to use our resources most efficiently, whilst providing as good a service for children and families as we can.

### Our referrals

The number of referrals we have serves as an indicator for how many children and families we are likely to work with over the longer term.

In 2018/19:

- The increased referral rate to SCT in 2017/18 (775.8 per 10,000 children) has continued in 2018/19 and is 782.79 per 10,000 children. This continues to be higher than our statistical neighbours (688.2 in 2017/18). Traditionally, the demand for referrals decrease when the wider partnership is more confident in managing risk, and consistently applies the threshold criteria for referrals. More work needs to be done to achieve this, although we have begun to engage with key partners at a strategic level.
- The percentage of contacts that are accepted as referrals within 24 hours in 2018/19 is 75.4%, which is a slight improvement from the previous year (69%). This shows that we are responding quicker when we believe a child is in need of a service or in need of protection.
- The percentage of referrals that are re-referrals within the last 12 months has slightly increased over the course of this year (from 21.06% to 24.1%), but is still well under our comparators. This a good sign, and goes some way to show that we are effective in our interventions with children and families.
- The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has reduced in the year 2018/19 to 295.24 from 339.00 the previous year. This shows we are more purposeful when we are faced with deciding whether to proceed with S47 enquiries, where previously this was higher than our comparators.

- The rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has also reduced from 141.3 in the previous year to 108.95 this year.

Overall, this shows that we have continued to receive referrals at a rate far higher than our comparators. However, alongside the dip sampling of assessments, S47's and ICPC's the above measures provide clear evidence that we are acting more confidently and consistently when applying thresholds for our services, and working in a more timely fashion.

### Our children in Sandwell Children's Trust

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, we had 883 children with a Child in Need Plan, 584 children with a Child Protection Plan and 901 Children in Care. In both the areas of Child Protection and Children in Care, we have more children on average than our statistical neighbours:

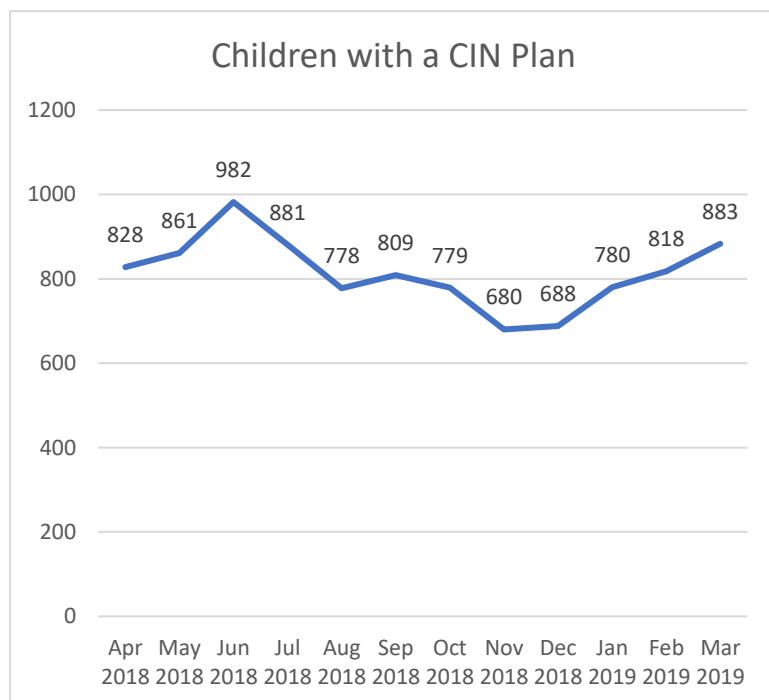
**Table 1 – Comparison with Statistical Neighbours**

	Sandwell (31 <sup>st</sup> March 2019)	Statistical Neighbour Average 2017/18	England Average 2017/18
Children with a Child Protection Plan	72 per 10,000	60 per 10,000	45.3 per 10,000
Children in Care	111.1 per 10,000	90 per 10,000	62 per 10,000

This highlights our challenge in ensuring improvement whilst working with more children and families than ever.

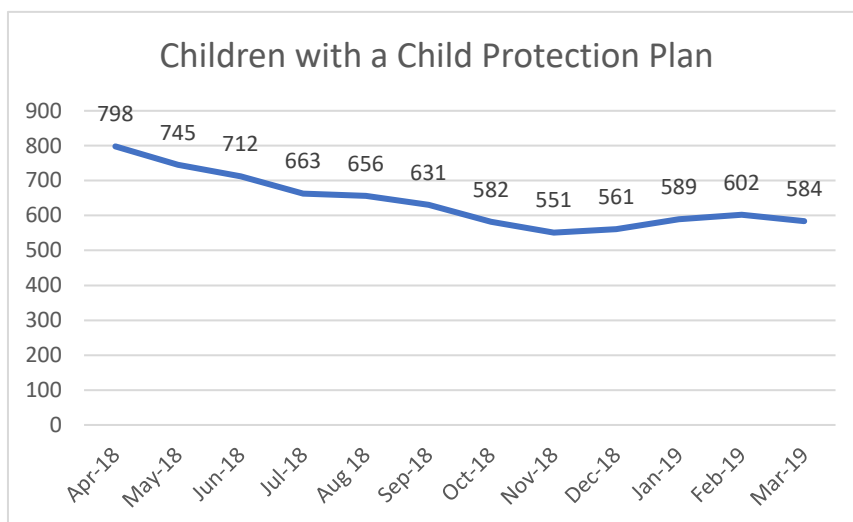
#### Children in Need

The graph below shows that we began the year with 828 children in need and quickly recognised that this was an area to better understand. Following a short review of these children, between July 2018 and December 2018, it was clear that a lot of these children did not require a statutory service, and therefore we created a project team to progress case closures. The graph demonstrates this reduction, but also an increase of 200 cases between December 2018 and March 2019. We have again reviewed and identified those cases that should be closed. This is an area kept under constant review.

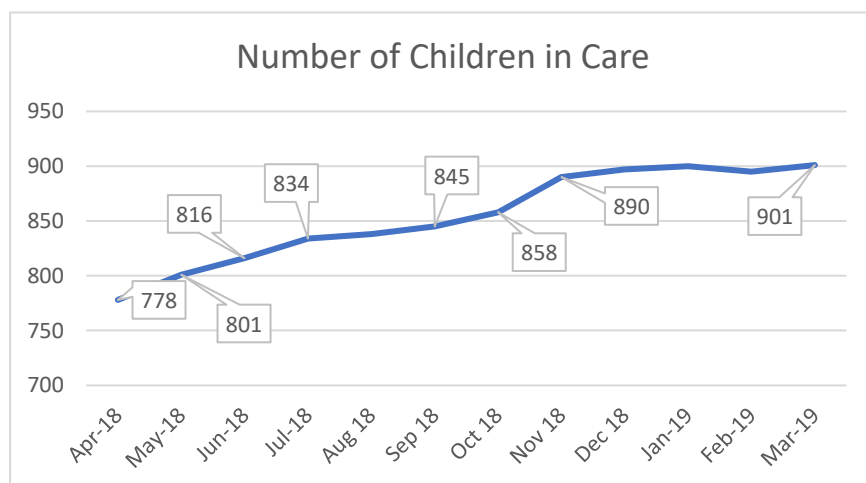


### Children with a Child Protection Plan

We began the year with 798 children who were subject of a Child Protection Plan, and across the course of the year reduced this number to 584. This is because we quickly recognised there was a lot of drift and delay in progressing these children’s plans. To address this, we held a panel to ensure these children’s plans were being progressed. This led to many children being either ‘stepped down’ to a Child in Need plan, or decisions made to secure their long-term welfare. The graph below demonstrates this reduction within the first half of the year, and that since November 2018 there has been more stability in this measure.



### Children in Care



We began the financial year 2018/19 with 778 children in care and saw a sharp increase in the first half of the year, which coincided with taking action for children with a Child Protection Plan. During this period, approximately 50% of children who ceased the child protection plan became looked after.

### Demand for Staff

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that Sandwell Children’s Trust employs nearly 600 staff, of which around half are social workers. If not for the range of specialist and support staff within the Trust, social workers would not have the foundation and infrastructure to work effectively with children and their families.

Nevertheless, our focus in 2018/19 has been to ensure we have a stable ‘case holding’ workforce, as it is the consistency and skill of this workforce that will bring about the improved outcomes we expect for our children and families.

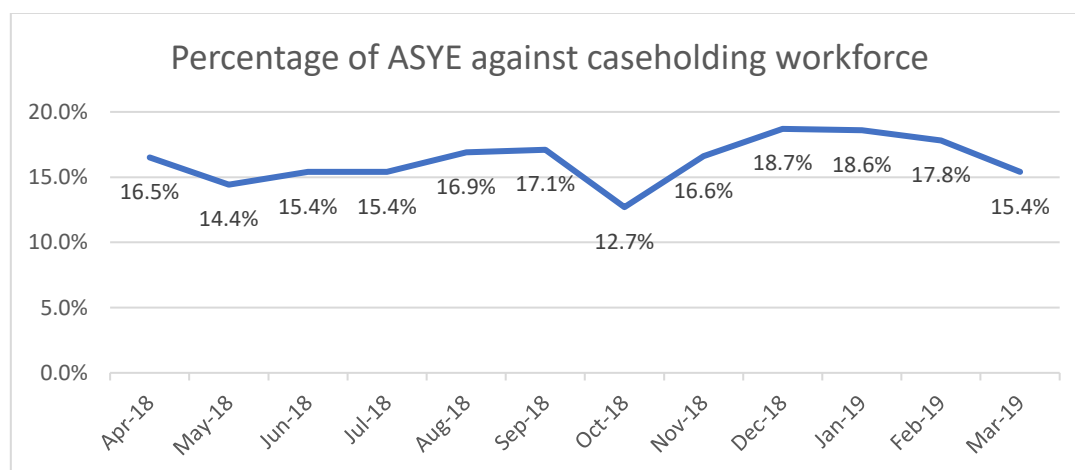
There are a range of models we can use to determine how many social workers we need to work with our families, some more complex than others. However, in conjunction with SMBC, we have a very simple calculation for this, which is:

1. For social workers working with Children in Need and those with a Child Protection Plan (within the care management service), an average of 18 children.
2. For social workers working with long term Children in Care (within the Children in Care Service), an average of 15 children.
3. For Social Workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE), there is a reduction of 20% within these average caseloads.

These figures are based upon work undertaken by the Children’s Commissioner Malcom Newsam prior to the Trust going live.

### *Social Workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE)*

The Trust, along with all children’s services nationally, has a reliance on newly qualified social workers in their first year of employment (ASYE). During this year, social workers are required to complete a range of training, practice based learning, observations and a portfolio under the supervision of an experienced social worker. The benefits of maintaining a significant cohort of newly qualified social workers are clear, as it enables us to keep a steady flow of social workers into our organisation, contributing to a stable workforce. However, there have been challenges associated with managing this group of staff, in our first year, which has included the ability to provide appropriate support and supervision and protecting caseloads. We have recognised this and obtained funding from the DfE for 2019/20 to further support this.



Clearly, the more newly qualified social workers we have, the more pressure there is on our experienced workforce, not only in relation the support they need to provide, but also the proportion of cases allocated to them. Therefore, our aim is to never have more than 20% of our case holding workforce within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment.

**Table 2 – Percentage of newly qualified social workers (ASYE) against total case holding social workers**

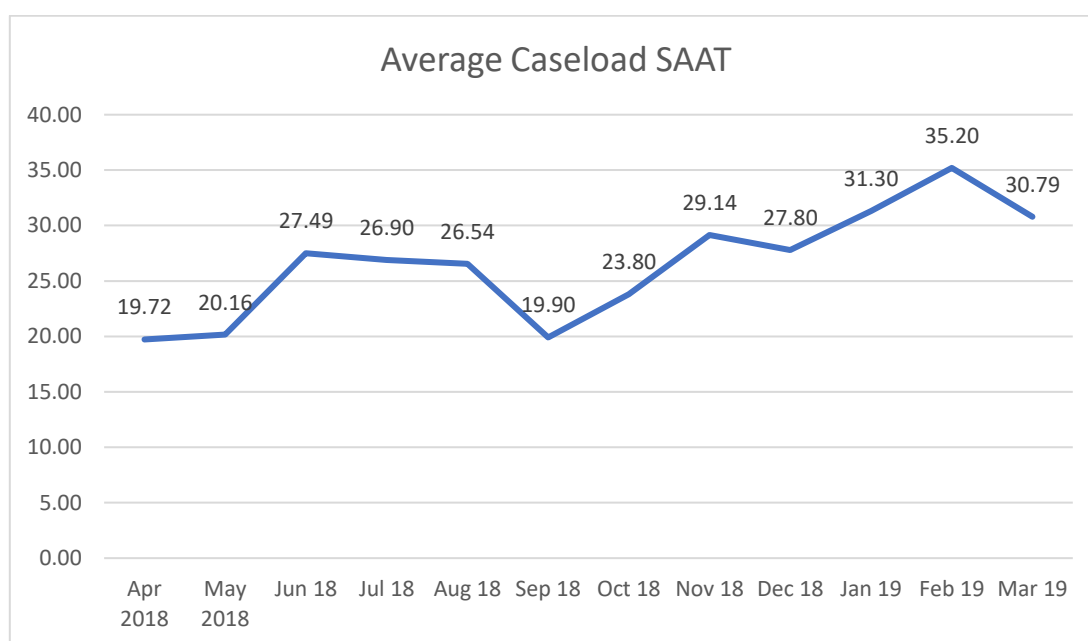
	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19
Total Social Workers	211.89	214.89	202.29	201.29	206.29	204.83	204.83	205.19	218.69	220.69	218.69	227.69
Total ASYEs	35	31	31	31	35	35	26	34	41	41	39	35
% Total ASYEs	16.5%	14.4%	15.4%	15.4%	16.9%	17.1%	12.7%	16.6%	18.7%	18.6%	17.8%	15.4%

As expected, this percentage has remained relatively stable across the year apart from a drop in September 2018, when most of the cohort complete their portfolio, ending their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment.

*Safeguarding and Assessment Teams (Assessments of Children and Families)*

The Safeguarding and Assessment Teams are responsible for undertaking assessments that arise from new referrals and make recommendations as to what our interventions should be. This work is short-term and should last no longer than 45 working days.

Due to the nature of this work, teams have a ‘duty cycle’ that impacts on their caseload on five-weekly basis, i.e. week 1 (duty week) is higher than week 5. This sees a fluctuation in average caseload over the cycle.



**Table 3– Average Caseload SAAT**

	Apr 2018	May 2018	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19
Number of Cases SAAT	643	637	756	807	690	554	715	816	834	955	1084	1010
Total Case holders SAAT FTE	33	32	28	30.00	26.00	27.80	30.00	28.00	30.00	29.80	30.80	32.80
Average Caseload SAAT	19.72	20.16	27.49	26.90	26.54	19.90	23.80	29.14	27.80	31.30	35.20	30.79

There has been an increasing trend in average caseload across the year, which may at first seem negative. However, there are some factors that mitigate against this increase:

- The service has addressed a backlog of assessments that had been over 45 working days, and in December, January and February this was being tackled alongside a spike in referrals. Once these assessments are complete caseloads will reflect the actual throughput of work. There are some circumstances that require a ‘shorter style assessment’, which will be used more as these teams grow in confidence. This will allow social workers to hold more cases at any one time.

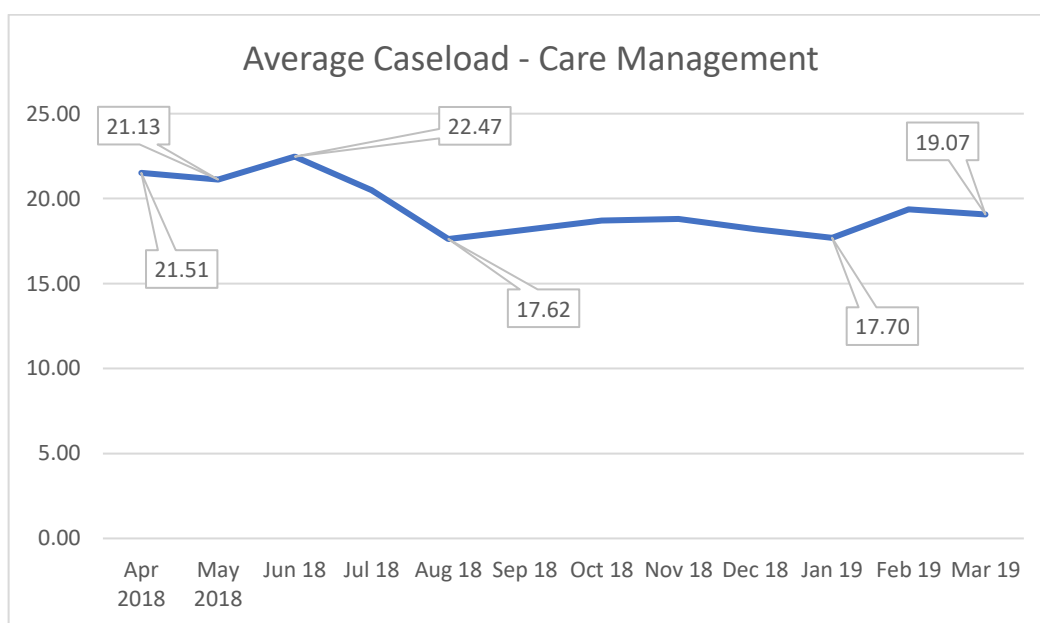
- It is expected that as the service improves, more single assessments will be completed within 25 working days where possible. Reducing the length of time assessments are open will reduce the number of cases on average.

*Medium and Longer-Term Intervention (Care Management and Looked After Children)*

Most of our casework take place within these two services, whether children are subject of Child in Need Plans, Child Protection Plans or Children in Care.

We have a target of 18 children per social worker in the Care Management Service in line with the recommendations from the Commissioner in 2017. We began the year with an average caseload of 21.51 children, which contributed to a trend in permanent staff leaving this area of the service. To tackle the recruitment and retention challenge in this area, in line with the 12 reasons, we decided in June 2018 to pay an additional market supplement to social workers and Team Managers in this area. The impact of our work to reduce caseloads in this area over the course of the year is evident, with a low of 17.7 children per social worker in January 2019. This does not consider the complexity of the work within this service area, which is widely acknowledged.

It is important to note that in September 2018, when we had a new cohort of social workers in their ASYE, their ability to hold a 'full' caseload is limited, which puts additional pressure on experienced workers. This means that the average caseload in the graph below does not tell the whole story for experienced staff, particularly from September 2018 to April 2019.



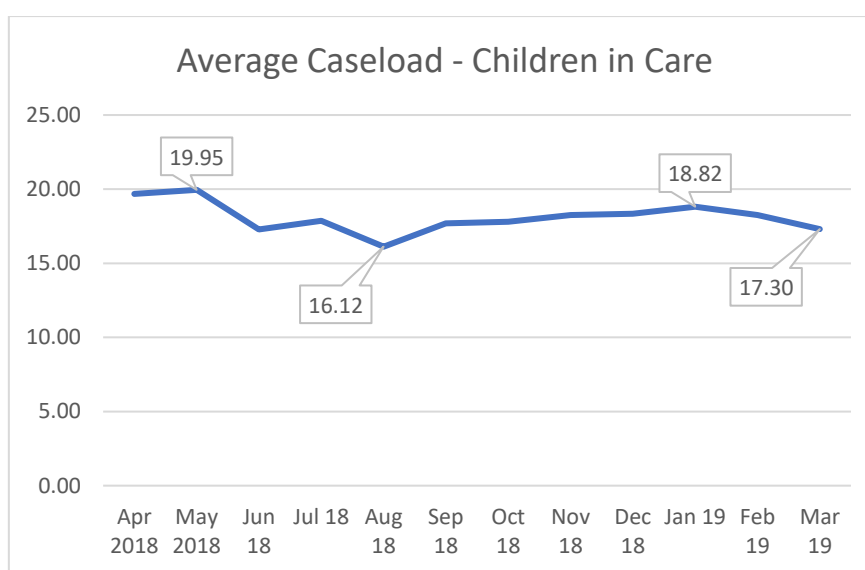
**Table 4 – Average Caseload Care Management and Children with Disabilities**

	Apr 2018	May 2018	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19
Number Cases CM/CWD	2166	2176	2103	1920	1614	1692	1660	1705	1830	1833	1909	1957
Total Case holders CM/CWD FTE	101	103	94	93.68	91.59	93.10	88.60	90.70	100.6	103.6	98.60	102.6
Average Caseload CM/CWD	21.51	21.13	22.47	20.50	17.62	18.17	18.70	18.80	18.20	17.70	19.36	19.07

The work undertaken by the Children in Care service is to ensure that children who are to remain in the care of Sandwell Children’s Trust are protected from significant harm, live as fulfilled a life as possible, achieve their potential and become independent members of society. These children need stability in their arrangements and benefit from good relationships with their social workers, carers and key professionals.

To provide enough time for these relationships to develop, we have a target of 15 cases per worker in the Children in Care service, which is in line with the recommendations from the Commissioner in 2017. We have redistributed four qualified social workers from Targeted Services to the Children in Care Team in order to bolster staffing in this area.

We began the year with approximately 19.6 children per social worker, which is significantly above our target of 15. This has reduced over the course of the year to 17.3 children, with a ‘low’ of 16.12 in August 2018. More work is to be done in this area, and is one of our highest priorities.



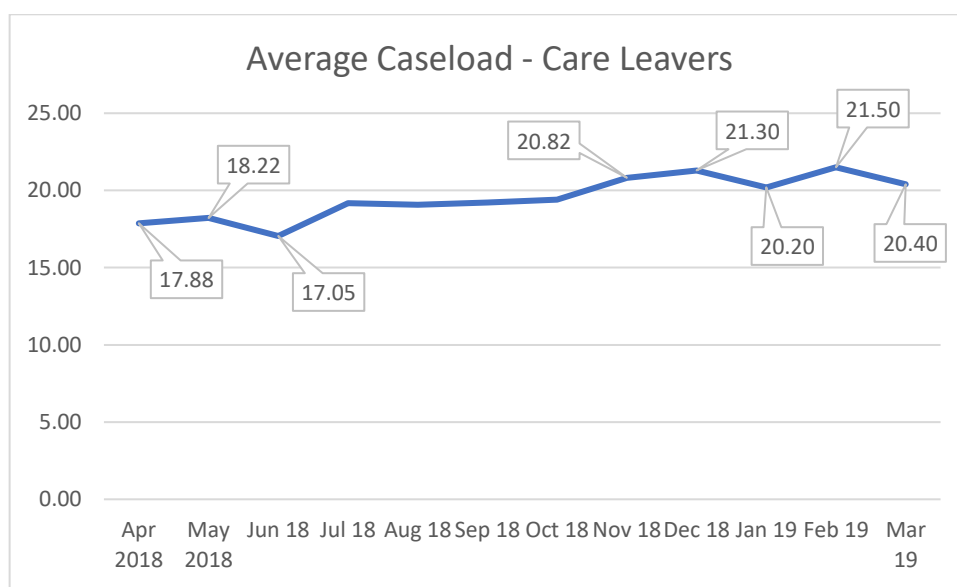
**Table 5 – Average Caseload Children in Care Team**

	Apr 2018	May 2018	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19
Number Cases (Children in Care)	433	439	380	393	403	424	427	420	422	433	438	467
Total Case holders (Children in Care) FTE	22	22	22	22.00	25.00	24.00	24.00	23.00	23.00	23.00	24.00	27.00
Average Caseload (Children in Care)	19.68	19.95	17.27	17.86	16.12	17.70	17.80	18.26	18.34	18.82	18.25	17.30



## Care Leavers

Our care leavers service also provides a service to children who are 16 or over who are still in care. This cohort has steadily increased over the course of the year, in line with our whole children in care population. As such, caseloads have increased from 17.88 young people per worker to 20.4 young people per worker. Prior to April 2018, a change in legislation meant that we have a statutory responsibility to support care leavers until they are 25 years of age, which will mean a steady increase in the number of young people in these teams over the next few years.



**Table 6 – Average Caseload Care Leavers Teams**

	Apr 2018	May 2018	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19
Number of Children - Care Leavers	286	286	370	368	366	369	373	379	384	389	393	394
Total case holders Care Leavers FTE (inc. PAs)	16	16	19.20	19.20	19.20	19.20	19.20	18.20	18.00	19.30	18.30	19.30
Average Caseload Care Leavers	17.88	18.22	17.05	19.17	19.06	19.22	19.40	20.82	21.30	20.20	21.50	20.40

### *Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)*

Much of our work in our first year has been to understand and develop a fostering service that is fit for purpose. We inherited a poor performing service, that did not know itself well enough, where the scale of improvement required was bigger than we expected.

Feedback from the IFA inspection in March 2019 was that SCT needed to be explicit regarding the modelling of its establishment in this area and how it is handling demand. As a result, there has been significant work undertaken to establish the right structure.

For the next financial year, the Independent Fostering Agency is modelled on 16.5 fostering households per Supervising Social Worker, and circa 6 assessments at any one time for an assessing social worker. This is based on recent benchmarking with local and national comparators. Data is

not available for Fostering Caseloads over the course of the year. However, the current calculations are as follows:

- The connected carer team is currently working with 132 families. At a caseload ratio of 16.5 households per worker, this requires an establishment of 8 social workers.
- The mainstream team is currently working with 118 families. At a caseload of 16.5 households per worker this equates to a need for 7.15 social workers.
- There is an acknowledged need for a fostering assessment team, with six social workers, bringing assessments 'in-house'.

Overall, therefore, we have increased our fostering service by one team manager and 8.5 social workers. We are in the process of recruiting to these additional posts.

### **Demand for Foster Placements for Children in Care (Internal and External)**

A priority for SCT within the last year has been to understand and model, where we can, the number of foster care placements we need as there are clear links between children's placement and financial modelling (outlined in Section (a)). Our aim is to have as many children as possible looked after within the borough of Sandwell, where we have more influence on local services. In order to do this, the Chief Executive chairs a regular meeting to progress matters regarding our strategic approach to Looked After Children. The Looked After Children Strategic Group is a long-term programme of work with 3 workstreams, each led by a Director. The aims of this group are:

- **Managing the current demand of Looked After Children:**
  - We have worked to resolve bottlenecks at key points in a child's journey to ensure that children's plans are appropriate. This has included discharging a cohort of children from care who were placed with parents under a Care Order.
  - We have begun to explore whether children who are placed with connected or mainstream carers who are very settled could be discharged through Special Guardianship.
  - We have put in place arrangements for closer management oversight of all children entering care and are working (with our Family Solutions Team) to support as many children to remain in their family where it is safe to do so at an earlier stage.
  - We are working closely with the judiciary and CAFCASS as part of the Family Justice Board to explore ways in which they would be more confident in the use of Special Guardianship at the end of care proceedings
  - We have re-established links with CAFCASS to build a better working relationship within the courts, and raise our credibility in this arena.
  - Legal planning meetings now benefit from consistent oversight from the Head of Service to manage practice and reduce
  - We are in the process of revising the Special Guardianship (payments to carers) policy that will allow us to make better use of Special Guardianship as a permanence option, thus reducing continued statutory intervention in children's lives and social work resource in delivering statutory services where resource not required).
  - We have established the court team and are in the process of launching a second court team

### Invest to Save:

- We have developed a medium term financial strategy that seeks to invest in initiatives that offer opportunities to make savings at the same time as better meeting the needs of our children and young people. Examples of this are:
  - Family Drug and Alcohol Court
  - 'In-house' training flats to promote independence
- We have produced a range of data that allows us to begin to understand our Children in Care cohort and redesign our current 'Edge of Care' services, and provided additional capacity within our structures to develop this offer

### Growing the Market:

- We are leading on the re-procurement of external placements provision through a framework on behalf of several west midlands authorities – which will provide us with more influence when making bespoke arrangements for our children
- We have begun to target those children who could be moved from high cost residential placements to family placements over the long term – which we believe will ultimately make significant savings while increasing a child's opportunity to thrive in a family setting
- We are working with our colleagues from SMBC to developing in-house supported accommodation for young people over 16
- The development of a marketing strategy for foster carer recruitment, which includes targeted marketing (i.e. social media) and local marketing

The number of Children in Care who need a placement is the biggest contributor to our resource deficit outlined in Section (a). First and foremost, we need to ensure that all our children in care are in the right placement for them, and wherever possible we must be getting best value for money from these placements.

The table below shows where our Children in Care have been placed since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, focused on those settings that have the highest resource implications.

**Table 7 – Children in Care by accommodation type (excluding placement with parents, placed for adoption and health care settings)**

Type of Accommodation	Q4 2017/18	Q1 2018/9	Q2 2018/19	Q3 2018/19	Q4 2018/19
Foster Placement - In House provision	199	219	194	187	178
Foster Placement - Connected Carer	130	148	151	162	190
Foster Placement - External	227	262	286	317	293
Residential Homes - External	48	55	55	56	48
Secure Accommodation	0	2	4	2	0
Independent Living	58	53	54	68	52
Family Centre or Mother and Baby unit	4	4	1	3	6

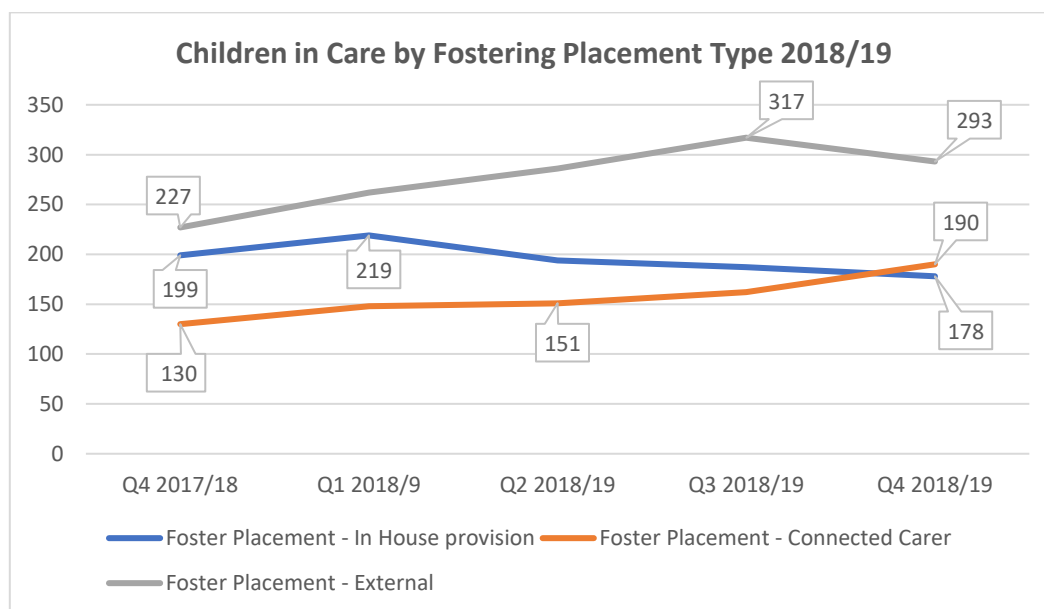
From a financial perspective, the following outlines our expenditure against budgets for Children in Care placements. It is clear to see that our demand for these placements has led to overspending in this area against our budgets.

**Table 8 – Costs associated with placements (2018/19)**

	Budget	Actual	Difference
External Residential	9,143,900	10,787,259	-1,643,359
External Foster Care	8,230,100	11,085,089	-2,854,989
Secure Units	296,100	892,122	-596,022
Internal Foster Care	4,685,200	5,002,191	-316,991
Leaving Care Accommodation	1,637,299	2,608,550	-971,251
Leaving Care Rents		1,339,966	-1,339,966
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,992,599</b>	<b>31,715,177</b>	<b>-7,722,578</b>

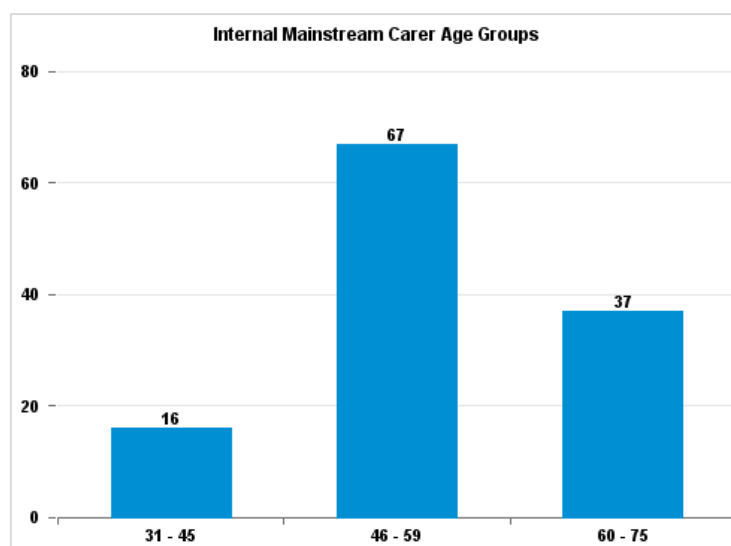
### Approved Foster Carers

As a Trust, we are registered as an Independent Fostering Agency. However, we are no different from a Local Authority fostering service in that we provide support for both mainstream and connected carers, alongside commissioning agency foster care placements.



As at 31 March 2019, we had 178 children placed with internal foster carers, which is an overall decrease of 21. 293 children were placed with external agency foster carers, which was an increase of 66. Finally, and most notably our use of connected carers has increased by 60.

The graph below outlines that 37 out of 120 (31%) mainstream foster carers (who were approved on 31 March 2019) are aged over 60, and are therefore more likely to retire within the next five years. This, alongside a reduction of children’s placements with internal foster carers represents a sufficiency challenge for us.



Many local authorities set themselves targets for a certain number of new foster carers (and therefore new placements) every year. It is clear that we would benefit from as many good quality internal foster carer placements as we can obtain.

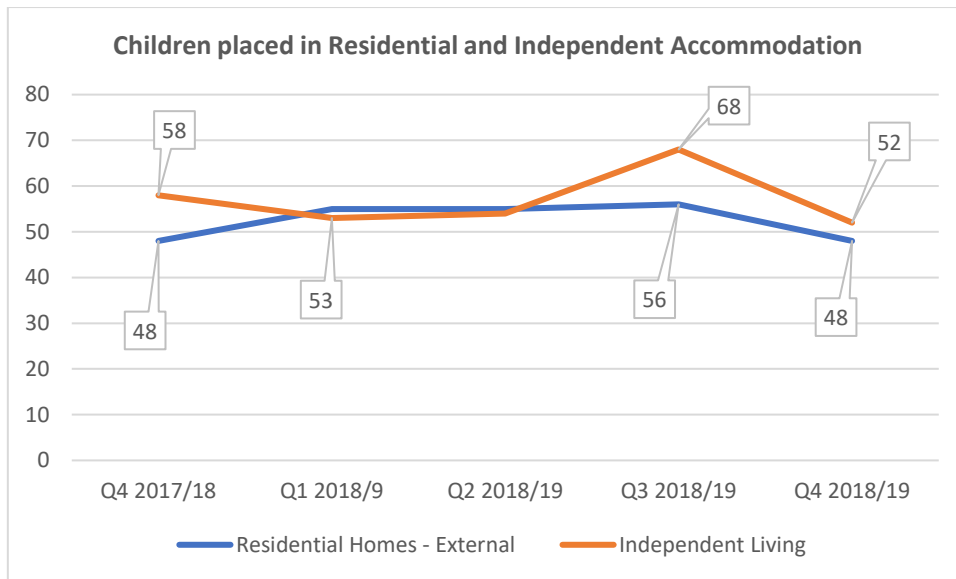
#### *Residential Placements*

We do not operate any residential children's homes and are therefore whenever we need to place a child outside of a family setting we do this through a commissioned agency. External residential placements represent our highest cost placements, and are a clear area for ensuring we are making the best use of resources. Whilst there will always be a need to accommodate children with complex needs, often there are more appropriate 'family settings' for these children, which we have explored.

A further pressure for us is independent accommodation for older Children in Care and Care Leavers.

**Table 9 – Children in Care by accommodation type (residential and independent)**

Type of Accommodation	Q4 2017/18	Q1 2018/9	Q2 2018/19	Q3 2018/19	Q4 2018/19
Residential Homes - External	48	55	55	56	48
Secure Accommodation	0	2	4	2	0
Independent Living	58	53	54	68	52
Family Centre or Mother and Baby unit	4	4	1	3	6



Whilst the total number of Children in Care has increased over the course of the year, we have worked hard to ensure children remain in a family setting and are managing our demand, which began with the implementation of Directors Resource Panel to approve any child-related spend above £500. Whilst demand for residential placements increased mid-year it has reduced in both areas to the original number or below.

## Section (c) - The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year

When the contract was put into place, Sandwell Children's Trust and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council agreed on a suite of 15 Key Performance Indicators that would demonstrate improvement. These indicators, which are measured monthly, are outlined below along with agreed targets and tolerances.

Our overall approach to performance in our first year of operation has been to fully understand our performance in key areas and interrogate our data in the right way to know where our strengths and areas of weakness are. This has allowed us to begin to genuinely tackle poor performance and make changes and improvements that are sustainable.

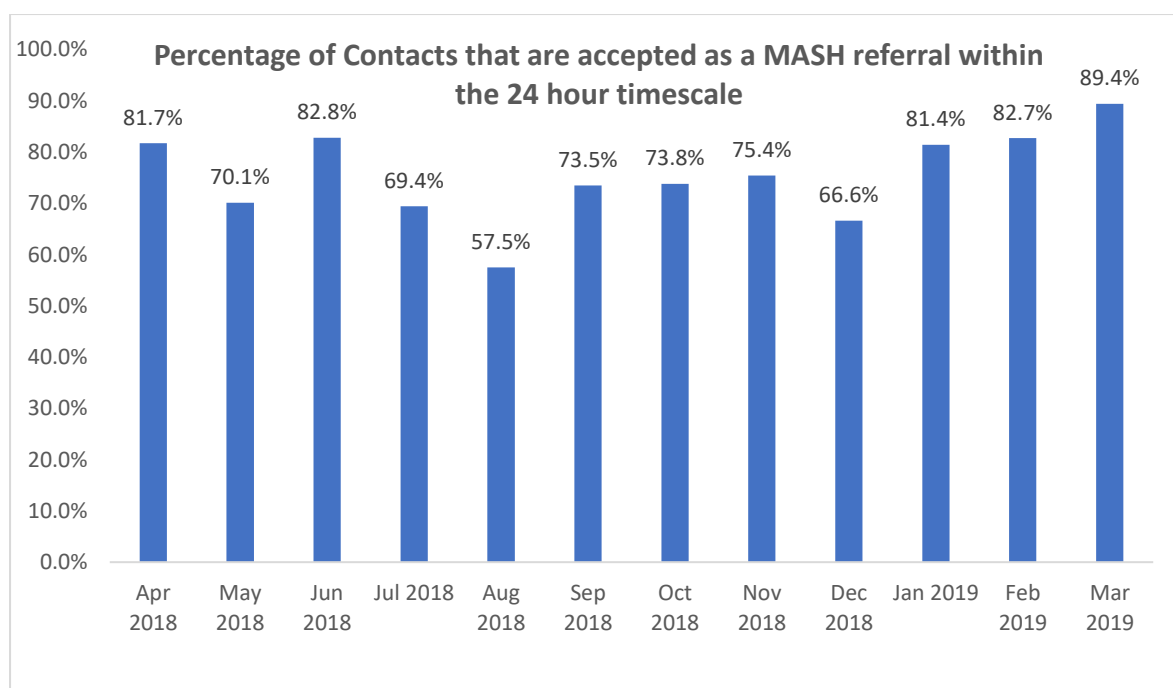
### PI1 - The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours

**Target: > 75%**

**Tolerance: > 65%**

**Failure: < 65%**

This measure is important as it shows how efficiently our front door is operating and how quickly we are responding to referrals. The contacts that become a MASH referral are the more complex decisions that need to be made, in circumstances that are the least clear. Measuring this data shows how efficiently we are handling our complex referrals.



Whilst this measure has been sporadic over the course of the first half of the year, there has been steady improvement since September 2018, which has been due to increased oversight and purpose in this area. A contact "timestamp" has been live for three months in Social Workers and Team Managers worktrays enabling Management and Leadership to track contact from starting point to completion, this has enabled a visual overview of timeliness and risk management.

**PI2 - The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population.**

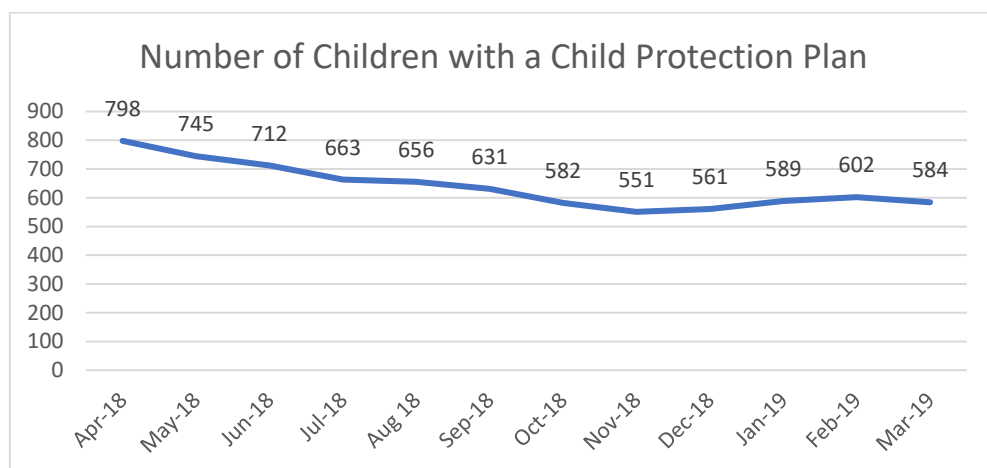
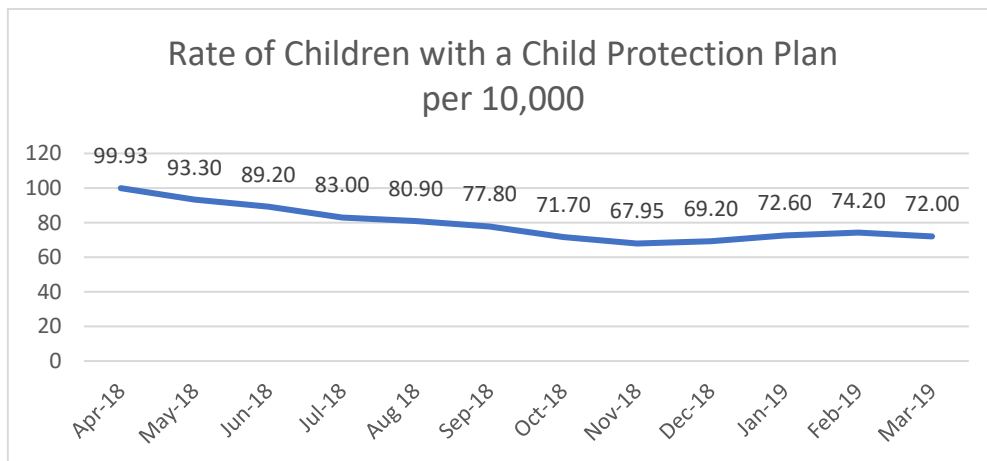
**Target: < 65 children per 10,000**

**Tolerance: < 80 children per 10,000**

**Failure: > 80 children per 10,000**

This measure gives us a sense of our demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds for Child Protection. Our statistical neighbour average is 60 and the England average is 45.3 (measured at the end of the financial year 2017/18). In the coming months, these comparator averages will be updated with 2019 data.

This measure has reduced over the course of the year from 99.93 children per 10,000 of our population (798 children in total) to 72 (584).



Since April 2018 there has been a reduction of 245 children on a Child Protection plan, which is a direct result of the work we have undertaken to ensure children’s plans are being progressed.



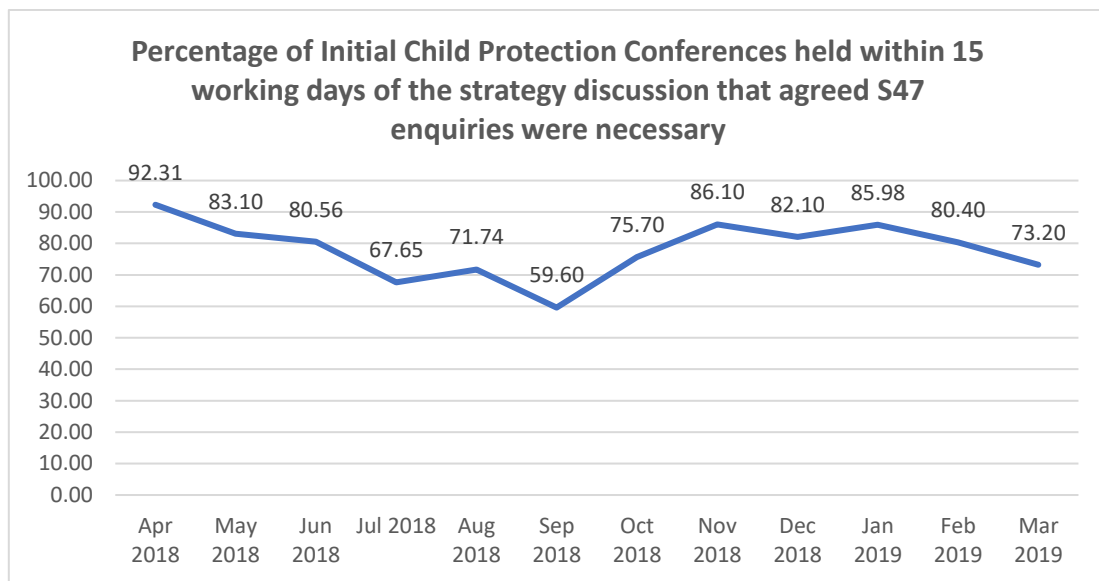
**PI3 – The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary.**

**Target: > 80%**

**Tolerance: >65%**

**Failure: < 65%**

This measure shows how efficiently we are completing S47 enquiries and organising Initial Child Protection Conferences. It gives us a sense of how we are managing demand in this area and how quickly we can bring together a group of professionals to make decisions for children who are potentially at risk of significant harm.



There have been decreases in performance in Initial Child Protection Conferences held within the Statutory timescales over the summer months of 2018 and towards the end of the year. During the summer, it was reported that the performance was affected significantly by social workers who left the organisation without preparing a report for a child protection conference, causing there to be an adjournment. It should also be noted that in Quarter 4, 306 ICPC's were held compared with 209 in Q3 and 161 in Quarter 2. This is a significant increase in demand, which has had a slight impact on this measure.

## PI4 - The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days

**Target: > 85%**

**Tolerance: >75%**

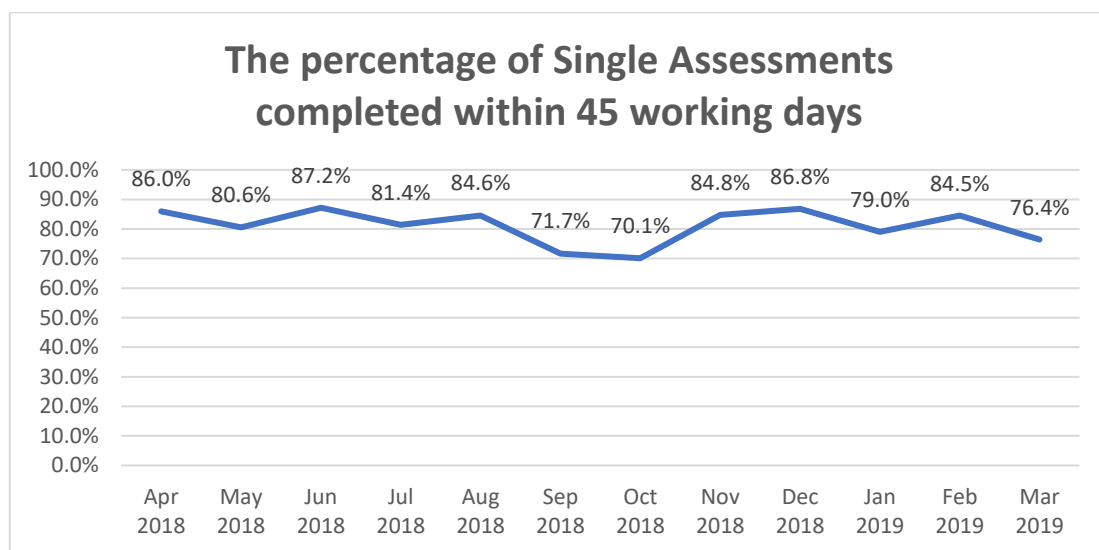
**Failure: < 75%**

Upon the receipt of a referral to our service, an assessment of children's needs is usually required. These 'Single Assessments' are normally completed by Social Workers within the Safeguarding and Assessment Teams (SAAT). Whenever we identify the need for longer term intervention in a family's life, we undertake 'updating' assessments to determine the efficacy of these interventions and evidence a improvement within their lives. Similarly, we undertake assessment of children's needs when they are in our care, to ensure that we are doing all we can to meet their needs.

In line with our improvement plan, we have begun to undertake these update assessments more formally, and in Quarter 4 we begun to:

- Ensure every Child in Care is visited at least every six weeks
- Ensure that an update assessment is undertaken prior to a child's review

As formally updating a child's assessment has not been routine in Sandwell until now, we gave ourselves the challenging task to complete. Towards the end of the year we have seen a dip in the timeliness of assessments as many 'update' assessments were opened at the same time.



Whilst this measure has been relatively stable over the course of the year, there have been times where this has been below 75%. We recognise the need to undertake this in a more timely way and fully expect this to improve now we have clear expectations and processes.

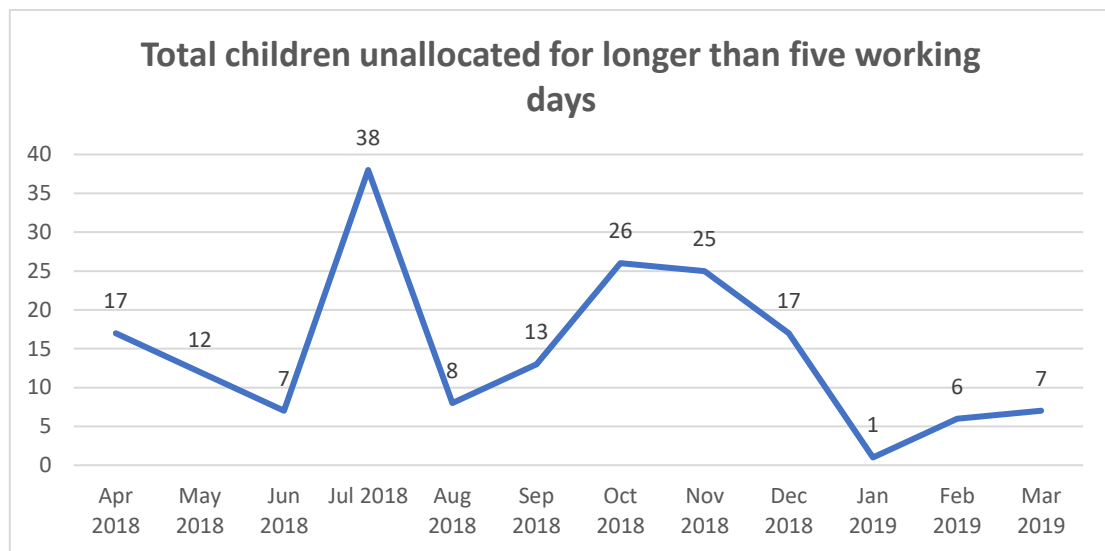
## PI5 - The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days

**Target: < 10**

**Tolerance: <30**

**Failure: >30**

This measure helps to demonstrate how well we have oversight on every child's situation, and how well we are handling throughput at the Front Door and other transfer points. Poor performance in this area would mean children do not have a social worker for lengthy periods of time, which could be a dangerous situation. There are circumstances where having children unallocated for a short period of time is reasonable, but this should be kept to a minimum.



Between April 2018 and March 2019 an average of 14 children were unallocated for longer than five days, although it can be clearly seen that there has been a reduction in Quarter 4, to an average of 4.67 children.

Unallocated children such as these are usually attributed to cases awaiting allocation by Care Management Teams from the Front Door/Single Assessment Teams. Daily reporting on this measure has enabled the trust to have robust oversight of this measure and the improvement consultant reviews this list daily to resolve issues with team managers.

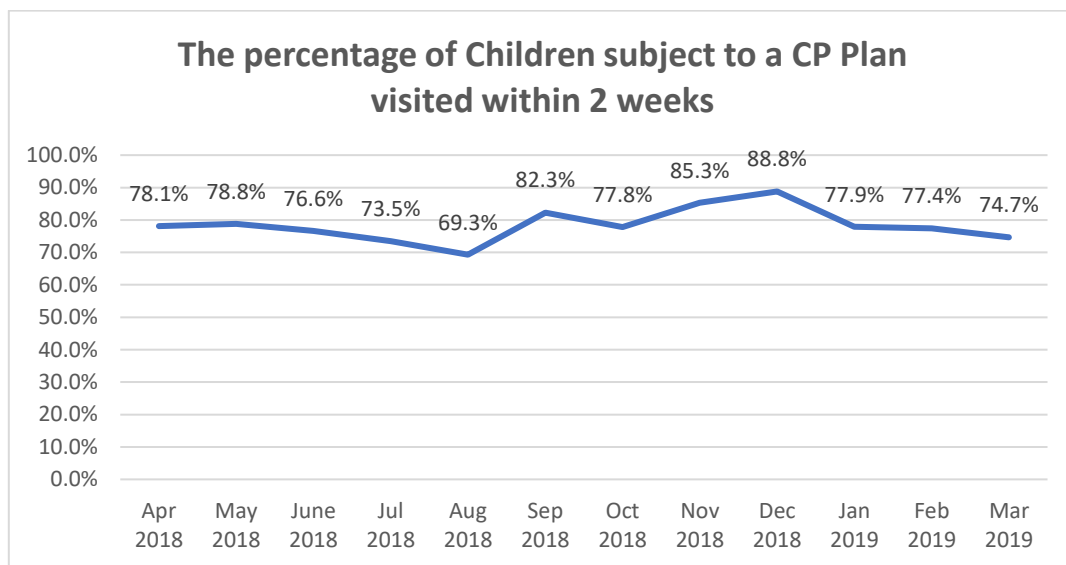
## PI6 - The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks

**Target: > 80%**

**Tolerance: >70%**

**Failure: < 70%**

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child Protection. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child Protection Plan at least every 2 weeks. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention and safeguarding.



Performance over the course of the year has improved, but in Quarter 4 it dipped to 74.7%. As an average throughout the year this measure is 78.2%, which is 1.8% below our target and 1.3% above the position as at 31 March 2018. Dips in performance in this area has been a direct result of a delay in recording on our case management system by specific teams and an increase of average caseloads across the Care Management Service (increase of 0.87 cases per worker in in Quarter 4).

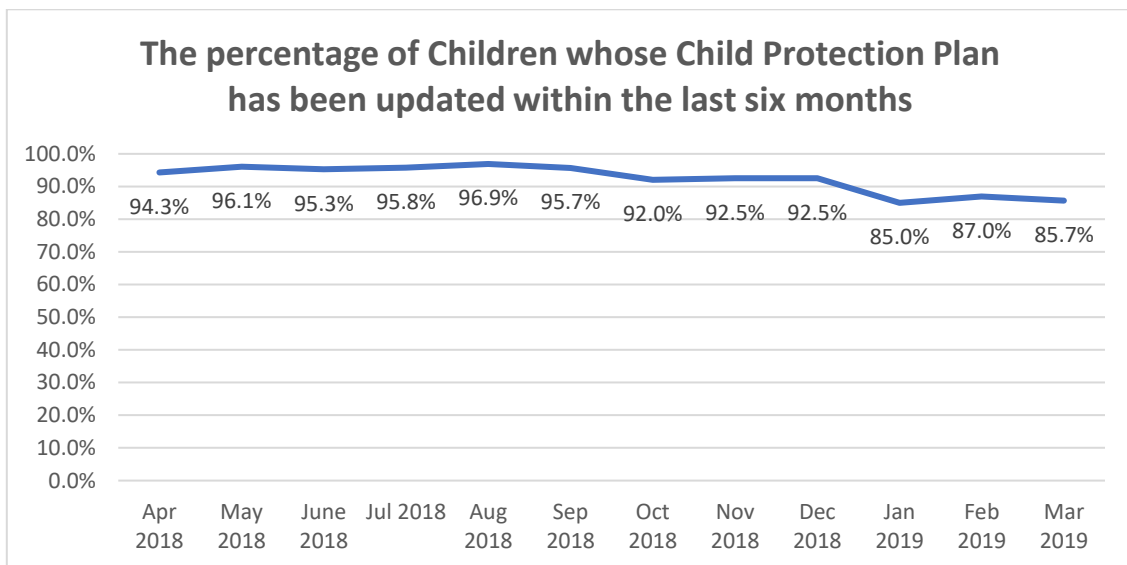
**PI7- The percentage of Children whose Child Protection Plan has been updated within the last six months**

**Target: > 95%**

**Tolerance: >85%**

**Failure: < 85%**

This indicator shows how often we are reviewing children’s plans and our interventions with families. Good performance in this area would show we are ensuring our interventions are having the desired impact, and making changes where warranted.



As can be seen, performance has reduced by 8.6% over the financial year, and is now very close to falling under our agreed tolerance. However, over the course of the financial year an average of 92.4% of plans were updated at six monthly intervals. To improve in this area, we have:

- Increased monitoring by Operations Managers and the use of team admin days to achieve better recording across the service
- Focus on daily performance dashboards by Team Manager to inform forward planning and to ensure plans which are due to be updated are robustly monitored across the service and identify plans as an opportunity to be updated at earlier points in time
- Team managers are encouraged to utilise performance intelligence to ensure that any plan over 150 days is updated as a priority

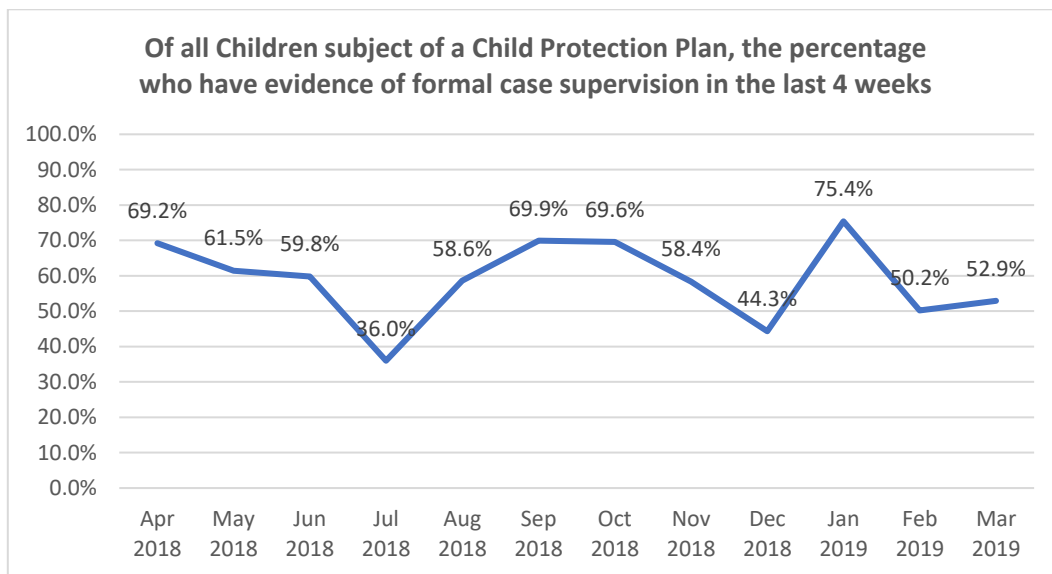
**PI8 – Of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the percentage who have evidence of formal case supervision within the previous 4 weeks**

**Target: > 65%**

**Tolerance: >50%**

**Failure: < 50%**

This measure helps to demonstrate formal management oversight for this cohort of children. Good performance in this area shows that Team Managers are regularly considering progress in these cases and providing social workers the opportunity for reflection on a case by case basis.



Performance across the year has been variable, with low points in July and December 2018 (36% and 44% respectively). As an average throughout the financial year 2018-19 performance is 65.8%, which is slightly above our target of 65%. There remain several underperforming teams in this measure who will continue to be scrutinised to ensure efficient and timely improvements.

The Care Management Service has put the following plan of action in place to ensure performance improves:

- Recording of supervision has been prioritised
- Time management and organisation is an area of development for some Team Managers, and are being supported in this
- Operations Managers will continue to arrange cover for those Team Managers on sick leave to allow supervision to continue uninterrupted.

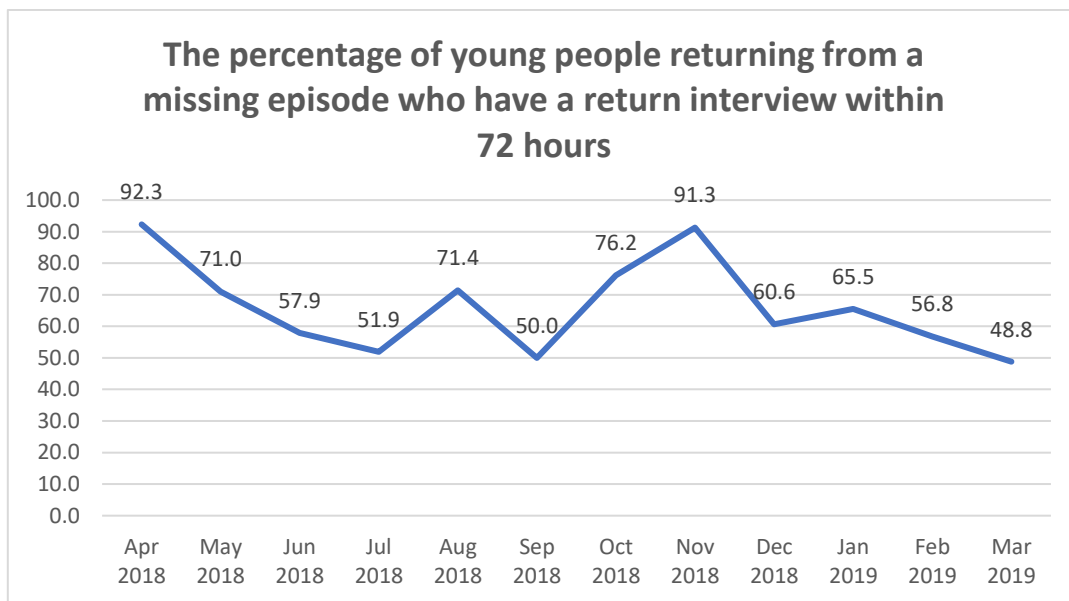
**PI9 - The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours**

**Target: > 70%**

**Tolerance: > 50%**

**Failure: < 50%**

This measure helps to understand how well we are responding to children at risk of exploitation after they return from being missing. Good performance would mean we are gathering information / intelligence from children at the earliest opportunity that would help us safeguard them better in the future and build more accurate intelligence.



Whilst information shows a variable picture across the year (high performance in April 2018 and November 2018, and low performance in September 2018 and March 2019), the 12 -month average is 65.1%, which is slightly below our target by 4.9%.

There are plans to reorganise services in this area, and the poor performance of our commissioned services has been a contributing factor in these proposals. In the interim, 2 measures have been taken:

- Our commissioned partner Barnardo's have been sent a letter of concern and asked to provide an action plan to improve performance.
- SCT staff are being trained to undertake these visits, to provide a contingency.

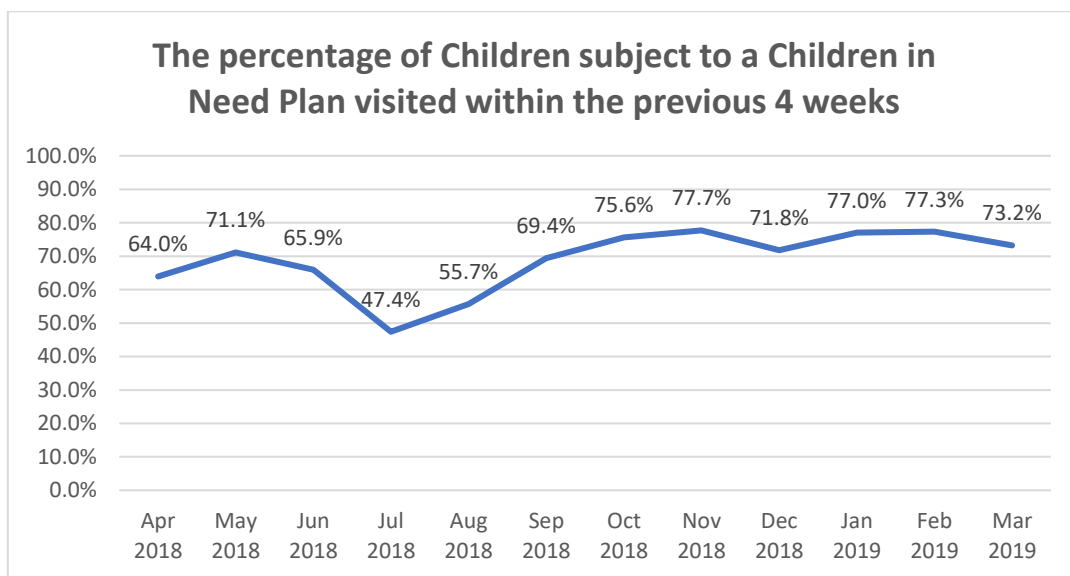
**PI10 - The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks**

**Target: > 73%**

**Tolerance: > 58%**

**Failure: < 58%**

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child in Need. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child in Need Plan at least every 4 weeks. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention, and prevention of the need for safeguarding.



Performance within the second half of the financial year improved significantly and has been sustained. Our performance at 31 March 2019 is 10.6% above the position on 31 March 2018 (62.7% to 73.2%), and our 12-month average is 68.3%. It is notable that our average performance in the latter half of the year was 75.3% which is above our target. This area of work is a huge priority for the Trust, as with all our key areas of performance, we hold individual Team Managers and Operations Managers to account in Weekly Performance Boards.



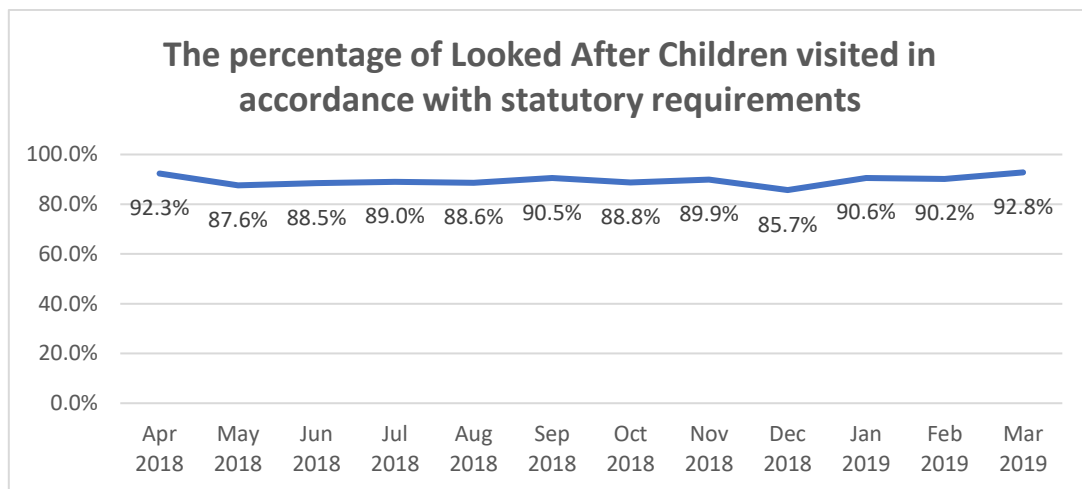
## PI11 – The percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements

**Target: > 90%**

**Tolerance: > 80%**

**Failure: < 80%**

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with our Looked After Children. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is defined by statute. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance helps to show we have established relationships with our Looked After Children, know their needs and meet their needs.



Performance has been maintained over the course of the year, and our 12-month average is 89.5%. Our performance since 1 January 2019 has been above 90%, and our year end performance is 5.7% higher than when the trust went live.

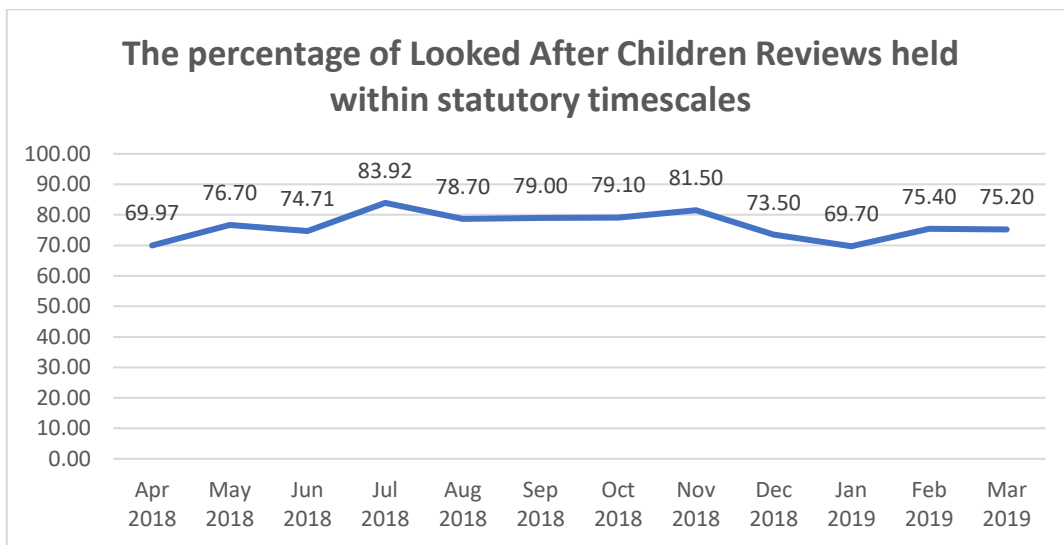
## PI12 - The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales

Target: > 80%

Tolerance: > 70%

Failure: < 70%

This measure shows the timeliness of Looked After Children reviews, and contributes to our understanding of how well we monitor the progress of Looked After Children's plans, and ensure that we are doing what we say we will. Good performance in this area will show that we independently review children's plans on a regular basis, at least every 6 months.



Average performance across the year is 76.4% (which is 3.6% below our target). There have been fluctuations throughout the year with higher performance in July 2018 and November 2018 and poorer performance in April 2018 and January 2019. This is reported to be due to a dependency on Social Workers to finalise any open Care Plans before IRO's can record their LAC Reviews on the LCS system along with pre-meeting reports being completed by IROs. (Performance is dependent upon the review meeting being recorded on the LCS system.)

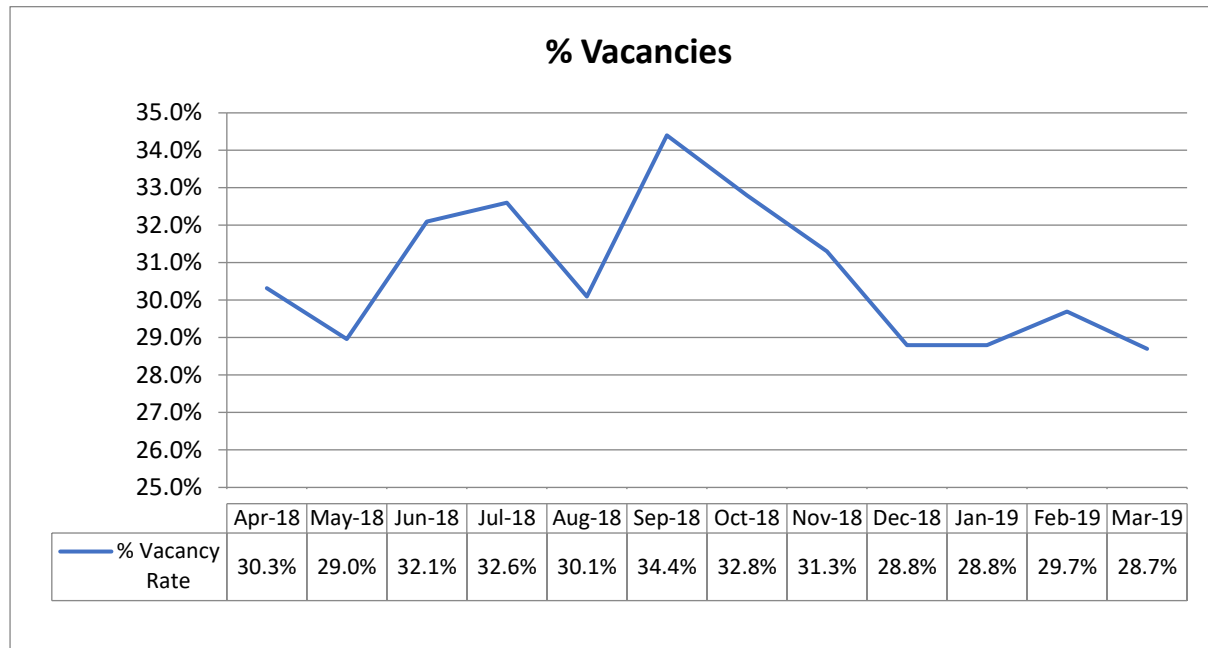
### PI13 - The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers

**Target: < 32%**

**Tolerance: <37%**

**Failure: > 37%**

This measure helps us to determine the stability of our case holding workforce. Whilst agency social workers are essential for an organisation to quickly meet fluctuations in demand, a stable, permanent workforce is also critical for long term improvement.



As can be seen there has been quite a fluctuation in this measure over the course of the year, which has stabilised more recently.

As at 31 March 2019 the Trust were 7.9 social workers over our establishment of 220 including agency workers (the total permanent vacancies were 63.31). Since December 2018, permanent vacancies have been consistent at under 30%, although the 12-month average is 30.7% (equating to an average of 67.6 permanent vacancies).

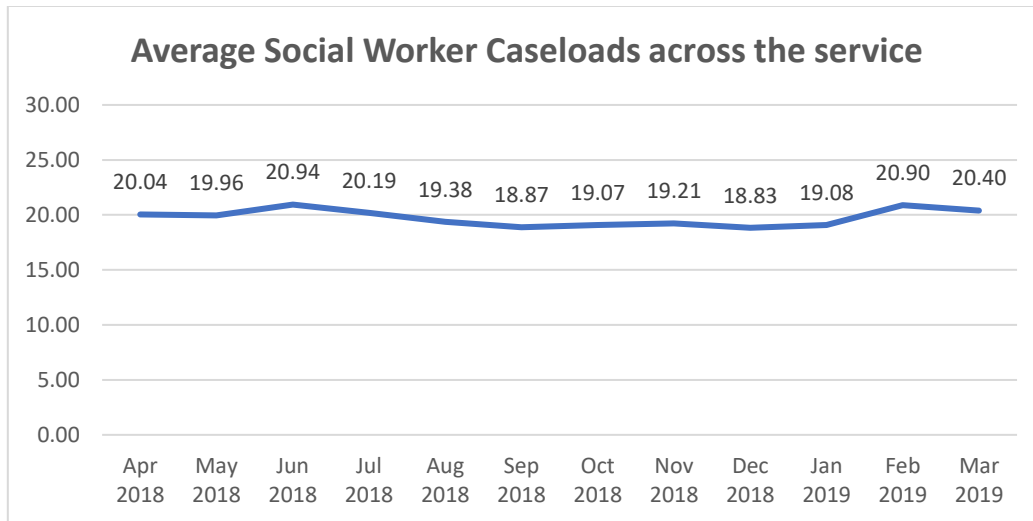
## PI14 - Average caseloads across the service

**Target: < 18.5**

**Tolerance: <23%**

**Failure: > 23%**

This measure helps us to understand the changing demand within our organisation so that we can target our recruitment and retention activities, and adjust our establishment.



Our 12-month average in this measure is 19.7 children per social worker which is just above our contract target of 18.5 cases in year 1. This overall measure has remained static throughout the financial year with the highest average caseload reaching 20.94 in June 2018 and lowest of 18.83 in December 2018.

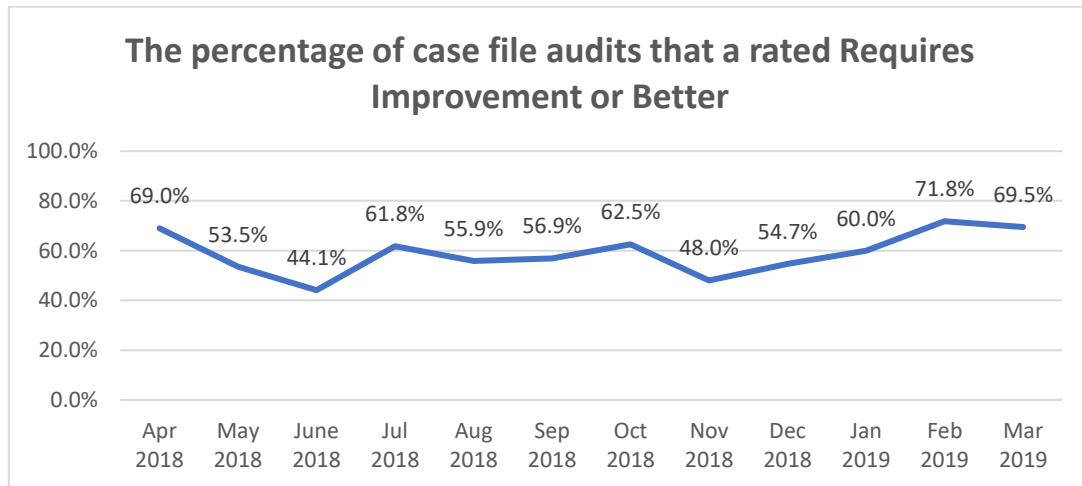
## PI15 - The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better

Target: > 55%

Tolerance: > 40%

Failure: < 40%

This is a very important indicator as it shows the progress of practice improvement across audited case files. Good performance is an indication that out assessments, plans and interventions with children and families are improving.



There is a marked improvement in this measure from January 2019 to March 2019 at an average of 68%, which is the first time we are seeing substantive and tangible improvements in practice. Our 12-month average is 60.2% (with the lowest performance in June 2018 – 44.1% and the highest performance in February 2019 – 71.8%).

## Overall

Whilst most of these indicators show that we are either meeting our targets or within the agreed tolerance, for some the trajectory is not the improvement that we would like.

Alongside understanding our performance better, our approach in the first year has been to hold managers and social workers to account through a weekly performance board. This has been successful for most teams, where we have seen marked improvement overall. However, there are a minority of teams / practitioners where performance has not improved, and for that we are providing targeted support and intervention.

We have introduced a new performance board, with Operations Managers in attendance, to address shared performance and unblock performance where there needs to be better compliance and quality.

At the end of our first year, we are in the position to recognise our challenges, and are determined to tackle 'head on' our areas of weakness. This is uncomfortable for some, but is the only way to achieve the improvements necessary. We have expected performance in some areas to 'dip', in order make sustained improvements.

## Section (d) - The Improvement Plan

We developed our first Improvement Plan directly after the report was published of the Single Inspection of November 2017. This plan was signed off and published on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2018, soon after the Trust came into force, and set out our plan for improvement within our first year and beyond. The Improvement Plan consisted of eight priority areas, each overseen by an Executive Director of SCT. These priority areas are:



Our approach to improvement in the first year of Sandwell Children's Trust has been one of **'Responding and Getting the Basics Right'**. This has been to:

- Ensuring stable leadership and robust management structures are in place
- Ensuring demand is understood and addressed through stabilising the workforce
- Ensuring governance is in place for improvement
- Ensuring frameworks are in place for Quality Assurance and Performance
- Ensuring partners are engaged on our improvement journey
- Ensuring there are clear minimum standards of practice and children are safe

The next stage for our improvement is **'Building on Strengths and Ensuring Impact'**.

The below table outlines our achievements throughout our first year in Sandwell Children's Trust.

**Table 10 – Key Milestones in SCT’s Improvement Journey 2018/19**

Period	Milestones	Outputs
By July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme and performance governance cycle established</li> <li>• Review of the Front Door by Children’s Services Advisors took place</li> <li>• Introduced additional management capacity in Operations Directorate</li> <li>• Revised communications approach with staff put into place</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Strengthened resources in the IRO service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce Strategy – ‘12 Reasons to work for Sandwell Children’s Trust’</li> <li>• External and Internal Websites for SCT</li> <li>• Front Door Acton Plan</li> <li>• Quality Assurance Framework</li> <li>• Beyond Auditing Framework</li> <li>• Direct Work Toolkit</li> <li>• Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for Assessments, PLO and Entry into Care</li> <li>• 10 Minimum Standards document for practitioners</li> </ul>
By October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media and digital marketing used</li> <li>• Review of the LADO function</li> <li>• Child Protection Plans reduced</li> <li>• Cohort of children subject to CIN plans who did not require a statutory service were closed</li> <li>• Implementation of Directors Resource Panel</li> <li>• Began a systematic review of process, policy and practice guidance across the Trust.</li> <li>• Began a review and the implementation of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements</li> <li>• Staff Conference</li> <li>• Staff Survey</li> <li>• More permanent and experienced social workers than ever before</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twitter and Instagram Handles</li> <li>• Communications Strategy</li> <li>• LADO action plan</li> <li>• Pre-proceedings and permanency action plan</li> <li>• SSCB revised Learning and Development Offer</li> <li>• Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for Child Protection</li> <li>• Production of Performance Daily Dashboards for Care Management and LA</li> <li>• New front door action plan ‘building’ on previous</li> </ul>
By January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent Directors all in place</li> <li>• Full Organisational Review of management capacity completed</li> <li>• Review of Exploitation Strategic and Operational delivery in Sandwell</li> <li>• Participation confirmed in ‘Frontline programme and consultant identified</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> cohort of children whose Care Order required revoking were done so</li> <li>• Team Manager Impact Workshops</li> <li>• LSCB led programme to implement Graded Care Profile begun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised Learning and Development Offer to all Staff (including practitioners)</li> <li>• Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for Allegations, Front Door, Child Protection, MARAC and MAPPA</li> <li>• Participation strategy</li> <li>• Revised Policies for Adoption and Fostering</li> <li>• Revised Foster Carers Handbook</li> <li>• Long term matching process</li> <li>• IRO ‘Coming into Care’ Pack</li> </ul>



Period	Milestones	Outputs
By April 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of Head of Service for Practice and Social Work Innovation</li> <li>• Strategic approach to Looked After Children group set up</li> <li>• SMBC brief review of early help provision with a view to creating a Sandwell Strategic Childrens Partnership</li> <li>• Launch of Exploitation Briefings</li> <li>• Staff Awards Evening</li> <li>• Launch of the Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership</li> <li>• Voluntary Adoption Agency Inspected</li> <li>• Independent Fostering Agency Inspected</li> <li>• SEND Partnership Event and Inspection</li> <li>• RAA transfer of adoption functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploitation action plan and Exploitation Hub</li> <li>• Safeguarding Unit Action Plan</li> <li>• CIN Action Plan</li> <li>• Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for IRO Service, Fostering, SEND, and Looked After Children</li> <li>• Fostering performance dashboard</li> <li>• Launch of new Single Assessment</li> <li>• Local Offer for Care leavers</li> </ul>

A refreshed Improvement Plan has been agreed between the Trust and Council on **27<sup>th</sup> August 2019** and can be found at **Appendix 1**.

## Section (e) - The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year

### Quality Assurance and Auditing

Alongside the work we have done in knowing ourselves better from a performance perspective, we have worked very hard to ensure we are interrogating the quality of our own practice. Learning from auditing and the resultant activity to ensure practice improvement are key to making sure the work we do is as good as it can be now and in the future.

We have a contractual obligation to audit 90 case files every three months (which is 360 every year).

In 2018/19, 634 Audits were completed, which gives a coverage of around 25% of our total cases. Over the course of 2018/19 the percentage of cases rated as Requires Improvement or Better has been variable, but has improved. On average, 60% of cases have been rated RI or better, but in the last Quarter of 2018/19 this average was 67.5%.

Themes across all case file audits have been:

#### *What is working well*

- Safeguarding at the Front Door Service is robust in terms of timeliness and quality of decision making. As a result, children at risk of immediate harm appear to be safeguarded in a timely manner.
- Conversion of contacts to referrals appears to be timely and effective at the front door. This reduces delays in front door response to children's need and improves the quality of decision making. It can therefore be said that children and families in Sandwell are largely receiving the right service at the right time.
- There has been some evidence of good practice with examples of good assessments and meaningful direct work being undertaken with children.
- Children in care and those with a Child Protection plan are seen regularly, within statutory timescales and are being seen and spoken alone to obtain their wishes and feelings.
- There is greater evidence of the Independent Reviewing Officer visiting children in placements in between their review meetings. This offers children an opportunity to share their views about their wellbeing, their understanding of their plans, and any worries they may have in terms of their living arrangements.
- Initial Child Protection Conferences and Looked After review meetings appear to be being held in good timescales. As a result, children are being provided with protection and support in a timely manner
- There is more evidence of good quality management oversight and supervisions especially in relation to children subject to Child Protection plans and children in care, although there is more to be done in this area.

#### *What we need to improve*

- We need to get better at including information from Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) or other plans within our assessments and planning processes.
- Whilst there has been an improvement in the frequency of case supervision held, the quality of this discussion needs to improve with a greater focus on planning and improvements.

- Whilst there has been a significant improvement in visits to children and gathering their wishes and feelings, the quality of this discussion and direct work needs to be lifted by making it more meaningful and pertinent to children's individual circumstances.
- Where placements are stable, permanence planning needs to be more robust and consider the child's exit from care, and a plan to ensure that this is successful for children as they approach adulthood.
- Risk assessment with our care leavers who are also young parents needs to be considerably strengthened.
- The IRO footprint can be further strengthened by IROs raising any concerns with the service in a timely manner and seeking robust resolutions.

Across the year, the QA dataset has expanded to include the outcome of various sections within the Audits, alongside the quality of the audits completed. This is a work in progress and meaningful data will be available over time. Nevertheless, this evidences that the quality of the work found in audits is gradually improving.

### **Customer Feedback / Learning from Complaints**

As a learning organisation, we are committed to ensuring that not only are we following up on individual complaints, but also gathering the themes for learning.

In 2018/19, we received 257 complaints, and answered 56% within timescales. This is an increase of 45 from the previous year (when we received 212 complaints), and an improvement in timeliness (which was 48%).

Most complaints are multi-faceted. However, the main themes from our complaints and compliments this year are:

- Poor communication, for example:
  - Not maintaining telephone or personal visit contact at stated/ agreed times/dates
  - Not responding to telephone contact from the service user
  - Unclear and ambiguous communication to service users, leaving them unsure of decisions and future actions
- Inaccuracies in Assessments
- Meetings being held without children or parents in attendance, meetings being cancelled or attendees being ill equipped.
- Children saying that that their wishes are not being listened to
- Finance, including;
  - Connected Carer / Special Guardianship / Foster Carer Allowances
  - Settling in Grants
  - Clothing Allowance
  - Pocket money
  - Loss of earnings
- Changes to placements with short notice, including:
  - Concerns around placement decision making.
  - Types of placement i.e. not meeting cultural/religious needs
- Social Worker attitudes and general behaviour:
  - Use of jargon to explain processes
  - Being late
- Unsatisfactory response from first complaint

## Surveys

### *Staff Survey*

The staff survey was undertaken in September and October 2018. Elements of this survey were like that completed by staff in 2017, to make comparisons. Compared to 2017, staff expressed more satisfaction in the following areas:

- Communication
- 'Your Job'
- Senior Management
- Their own manager / supervisor
- Pay and rewards

However, staff expressed less satisfaction in the following areas:

- Employee engagement
- Learning and Development
- Wellbeing
- Equality and Diversity

Staff were also asked about how satisfied they were on the progress of the 12 reasons. The top 3 areas of satisfaction were:

- Clear vision and purpose
- Accommodations
- Staff are well looked after

Whereas the three areas they were least satisfied with were:

- Manageable case loads
- Learning Organisation
- Competitive rewards

Representatives come together monthly to ensure that learning is shared from the whole range of sources, and is fed into whole service improvement.

## Children's Surveys

Three surveys were carried out by the participation service in 2018/19. These were:

- 1) A general survey of Looked After Children in two categories (Under 11 and Over 11). A total of 75 children responded (48 over 11 and 27 under 11). The outcome of this survey is:
  - Most children know why they have a social worker (although 15% of under 11's did not know)
  - Only 64% of the children over 11 said they 'got on ok or well' with their IRO
  - 80% of children under 11 said they see their social worker alone
  - Less than half of the young people over 11 knew the contents of their Care Plan, Personal Education Plan or their Pathway Plan.
  - Top issues for over 11's are:
    - Savings
    - Changes of social workers
    - Housing for when I leave care
    - My voice not being heard
    - Contact with my family
- 2) A survey of children placed out of borough. 41 out of 236 children (between the ages of 7 and 18 years) responded. The outcome of this survey was:
  - 100% said they feel safe
  - 83% said they like their bedroom
  - 46% of children had no information about their latest placement before they were placed there
  - 31% moved to this placement in an emergency
  - 73% say they know what a permanent home is
  - 37% said they can access after school clubs where they live
  - 24% said they can access advocacy services
- 3) A survey of 16 and 17-year-old's regarding their accommodation. 35 young people responded. The outcome of this survey was:
  - 94% feel safe and 100% feel supported
  - 97% can access education
  - 100% can gain independent living skills
  - 91% can find leisure activities that they enjoy
  - 97% know how to manage their money but 74% know how their rent is paid
  - 25% found the moving on folder useful
  - Things that are working well are:
    - All young people say they can cook, clean and use the washing machine
    - They know what support is out there and can access it
  - Some things that are not working well are:
    - Money, savings and budgeting skills
    - The availability of suitable accommodation
    - Information isn't always useful

**Section (f) - The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year**

There were no action plans or rectification plans in the Contract year 2018/19.

## Section (g) - The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections

As an organisation seeking to improve from an 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating, we are subject to the Monitoring Visit arrangements on a quarterly basis. This, in conjunction with the regulatory inspections of the Voluntary Adoption Agency and the Independent Fostering Agency, has meant that we have welcomed Ofsted inspectors a total of five times in twelve months.

Our monitoring visits have been useful to us as a barometer of our improvement across the course of the year, and Ofsted have noted this. In September 2018, 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.

After their monitoring visit in January 2019, Ofsted said:

*“Sandwell Children’s Trust knows itself well. It has a robust performance framework which can provide it with accurate information about the quality of practice and the improvements to practice and outcomes for children still required. Senior staff understand that considerable improvements still need to be made. Progress has been made in ensuring that the first response to families and children in need is timely and, in most cases, recognises risk and the scale of intervention required. However, practice is still not consistent.*

*Responses to contacts and referrals are timely. In most cases, risk is recognised and processes in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) ensure that concerns such as domestic abuse incidents are triaged and responded to quickly. Strategy meetings to agree on the immediate response where there are concerns about child protection are held mostly on the same day. However, more care is required to ensure that the right people attend these meetings to ensure that all relevant information is considered. Where these lead to further child protection enquiries, they happen quickly and result in mostly accurate decision-making about further assessment or child protection procedures.*

*Evidence of management oversight has improved since the inception of the trust, but it remains of inconsistent quality, and there is a continuing need for some managers to ensure that the rationale for decision-making is adequately recorded. The workforce is increasingly stable and there have been further reductions in the use of agency staff, with some electing to work permanently for Sandwell.”*

The Inspection of the Voluntary Adoption Agency was largely positive, A summary of the comments in this report are as follows:

- Children flourish in their adoptive families
- Matching children to their future families is well considered. There have been no disruptions.
- Children are well prepared for their new families.
- The staff team is experienced and is passionate about ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and adoptive families.
- The adoption panel is effective and promotes safe, secure and
- stable placements.

- There is good support from home-finding social workers.
- Challenges within the staff team have had a negative impact on the assessment process of prospective adopters and on the quality of the support offered to adopters and children.
- There have been significant changes in management, which have resulted in inconsistent support and supervision of staff.
- Staff recruitment and vetting processes are not thorough. Gaps exist in the recruitment practices of those staff employed through an agency.
- Training for staff is not consistent. Managers have not ensured that all staff have had adequate training to support them in their role.
- The electronic recording system is not being used effectively. This raises significant challenges for managers in getting consistent and accurate information.
- Children are not given clear information about what support to expect following adoption. They are not given information about how to contact the children’s rights director should they feel they need to.
- Members of the adoption panel have not been effectively inducted or appraised and they have not received the appropriate training to help them in their role.

The table below outlines the outcome of Ofsted’s Visits and Inspections in 2018/19:

**Table 11 – Outcome of Ofsted Inspection and Monitoring Visits**

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
<b>Monitoring Visits:</b>	<a href="#">30 May 2018</a> <a href="#">5 September 2018</a> <a href="#">29 January 2019</a>	No Judgements Given for Monitoring Visits
<b>Voluntary Adoption Agency Inspection</b>	<a href="#">8 January 2019</a>	Overall experiences and progress of service users - <b>Requires Improvement</b> How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - <b>Requires Improvement</b> The effectiveness of leaders and managers – <b>Requires Improvement</b>
<b>Independent Fostering Agency Inspection</b>	<a href="#">25 February 2019</a>	Overall experiences and progress of service users - <b>Inadequate</b> How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - <b>Inadequate</b> The effectiveness of leaders and managers – <b>Inadequate</b>

Whilst the monitoring visits do not give judgements, following each visit SCT and SMBC receive a letter from the lead inspector outlining their findings and progress we have made. These can be found by following the hyperlinks above.

As an outcome of the Independent Fostering Agency inspection in February 2019, we received three regulatory compliance notices under section 22A of the Care Standards Act 2000 that we are required to rectify by 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019 when Ofsted will visit us again to review progress. The compliance notices outline expectations related to:

8. — (1) The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to
  - (a) the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and



- (b) the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.

11. The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times.

12. — (1) The fostering service must prepare and implement a written policy which:
- (a) is intended to safeguard children placed with fostering parents from abuse or neglect, and
  - (b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.

Ofsted will undertake a full reinspection of the Independent Fostering Agency in late 2019.

The Youth Offending Service was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in August 2018, and received a judgement of 'Good', with outstanding aspects. From the foreword within the report, the Chief Inspector said:

*"At the time of the inspection, Sandwell YOS was experiencing a period of transition: the YOS was moving to new independent trust arrangements and decisions were being made about the strategic accountability of the Management Board. We found the Board could be more effective in setting the direction and strategy for the YOS.*

*Sandwell YOS supervises a disproportionately high number of black and mixed-race young people and has a high custody rate. Consultations had been undertaken with young people and innovative projects and interventions developed to better improve their engagement. From a strategic perspective, partners need to be confident that the disproportionality is not because of possible discrimination within the justice system.*

*We found the YOS to be creative in its engagement with children and young people, and it provided an excellent range of interventions to support desistance from offending. The work with court orders was good; assessments and planning that looked at a child's safety and wellbeing and their risk of harm to others were outstanding. The YOS needs to improve the reviewing of cases to ensure that these accurately reflect the changes in a child or young person's life.*

*Our inspection found that the work undertaken with out-of-court disposals required improvement to ensure that it resulted in a positive outcome for children and their families. Its work with victims also required improvement so that the victims' wishes were considered across all interventions.*

**Section (h) - Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure**

*Changes to Service Delivery Contract*

- Governance meeting dates
- Changes to service specification removing all adoption functions from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019, through the Deed of Variation.

*Changes to Support Services Agreements*

On 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019, at Operational Partnership Board, a change control was agreed between SCT and SMBC that outlined the cessation of the Support Service Agreement for Finance: Tax and VAT Advice on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

**Section (i) - Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year**

*Regional Adoption Agency*

As part of the regionalisation of adoption, SMBC entered into a separate agreement with Adoption @ Heart to deliver its adoption functions from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019, which included:

- Adoption Recruitment, Panel and Agency Decision Making
- Family Finding
- Adoption Support
- Birth Records Counselling
- Letterbox Contact
- Non-Agency Adoption

To do this from a contract perspective, a Deed of Variation was signed by the Trust and Council that effectively acted as a change control for the contract that amended the services specification.

There are no proposed changes to the Financial Mechanism or the Performance Indicators in the next contract year.

## Section (j) - The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19

There are no comments to be made about the contractual governance, save the agreed changes to OPB and SPB dates outlined in Section (h), (change controls).

**Section (k) - Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time**

There are no additional matters in this report that have been agreed by both parties.