

Sandwell Children's Trust Strategic Improvement Plan 2019 - 2022

Improving the lives of children and young people in Sandwell



Department
for Education



Sandwell
Children's Trust



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

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Foreword



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

“Sandwell Children’s Trust is now just over a year old, and the time is right to review our progress in meeting our ambitions to improve the services that we offer to the most vulnerable children and families in Sandwell. I said last year that when life gets tough for children, they deserve the best care and the best people to support them. I, along with my Board Members and Executive Leadership Team feel stronger than ever about this.

What I hope will be evident to anyone who has worked with us in the last twelve months is our unwavering dedication to making the improvements necessary within our services. Our approach has never been about quick fixes or ‘sticking plasters, rather we have sought to lay the foundations for good practice to grow and flourish. Our aims remain high, and we are confident that we can achieve our goal to be rated Good by 2022.

We have already demonstrated improvement in many of our services, which is evidenced within the feedback we have had during the Monitoring Visits by Ofsted and the outcome of Adoption and Youth Offending Inspections this year (which were ‘Requires Improvement’ and ‘Good’). Improvement journeys are rarely smooth and we have had our fair share of constructive feedback and advice from these regulatory visits and inspections, which we welcome. Importantly, the areas for improvement that are highlighted are always what we expect to hear.

Our challenge ahead is to ensure the foundations we have put into place are now built upon, and have a positive impact for children and families in Sandwell. This improvement plan will pave the way to us becoming what we set out to be, and that is an organisation that does the very best for our children and families.”

Foreword



Frances Craven – Chief Executive of Sandwell Children's Trust

“It has been a privilege to be at the forefront of fast paced improvement, change and evolution of our new organisation, which is now more than a year old. Time has flown by and we have done so much, which is why it is a good time to consolidate and refresh our improvement plan for the next phase in our efforts to become a Good service by 2022. I look forward to continuing this journey with my permanent senior leadership team and all our staff within the Trust.”

Since 1st April 2018, we have laid the foundations for improvement across our organisation within our eight priority areas. Some of the work we have done in the last 12 months includes:

- *Recognising the need to recruit, retain and recognise our staff, we have created a new workforce strategy ‘12 reasons to work for Sandwell Childrens Trust’, and all year we have been ensuring that these reasons are a reality. Although there is still some way to go, we have a much more stable workforce as a result.*
- *We have, and continue to put in place new practice standards, processes and minimum expectations across our organisation to ensure the work we do is consistent, and everyone knows what is expected of them.*
- *I am very proud of the Quality Assurance work we are doing, which includes organisation-wide learning audits, gathering learning from a wider range of sources and the ‘Beyond Auditing’ practice improvement work that has lifted practice in key areas.*
- *With a clear performance framework, we know the performance of our services and where improvements are needed, and have been able to target resource and support to those areas of most need.*

This refresh of our Improvement Plan is an opportunity to reflect on our first year, understand our successes and learn lessons where we have not yet achieved our goals; so we can find our path to becoming Good by 2022.”

Our Approach to Improvement

Responding and Getting the Basics Right

April 2018 - March 2019

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

Building on Strengths and Ensuring Impact

April 2019 - September 2020

Accelerating progress through stable management and a shared vision

Developing and implementing new working models and begin to demonstrate impact on outcomes for children and families

Involvement of partners in improvement activities

Manage risks as changes are made

Evaluate progress and refine activity

Ensure that children's needs are being consistently met

Develop impact measures for each improvement action to measure and demonstrate progress

Transforming, Embedding and Adapting

October 2020 - March 2022

Ensure improvements are working and is impacting positively on children

Taking opportunities for continuous improvement

Quality assurance and performance is kept under review

Making changes where impact is not demonstrated, but having the confidence to maintain an approach if it is working

Managing risk and improvement becomes Business as Usual

Our Approach to Improvement

Our improvement priorities from last year were brought together from a range of external sources of feedback, the majority of which are the continuing messages from Ofsted's inspections of our services and their monitoring visits. We also ensured that the priorities of Sandwell's Children's Commissioner were included and addressed. Whilst we are confident we know ourselves, the refresh of the improvement plan focusses on this alongside the feedback we have had from our three monitoring visits and three inspections (of our Youth Offending Services, Voluntary Adoption Agency and Independent Fostering Agency).

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
SIF Inspection	6 November 2017	Children who need help and protection - Inadequate Children looked after and achieving permanence - Inadequate Adoption Performance - Inadequate Experience and progress of care leavers - Requires Improvement Leadership, management and governance – Inadequate
Monitoring Visits:	30 May 2018 5 September 2018 29 January 2019 16 April 2019	No Judgements Given for Monitoring Visits
Voluntary Adoption Agency Inspection	8 January 2019	Overall experiences and progress of service users - Requires Improvement How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - Requires Improvement The effectiveness of leaders and managers – Requires Improvement
Independent Fostering Agency Inspection	25 February 2019	Overall experiences and progress of service users - Inadequate How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - Inadequate The effectiveness of leaders and managers – Inadequate

The contract / partnership between the Council and the Trust includes a performance management framework which underpins the objective to achieve an Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement by 2020 and Good by 2022. This refreshed improvement plan forms the basis of improvement activity of the Trust over the next two years with the aim of delivering our shared vision for children’s social care in Sandwell.

To ensure that the plan addresses the findings of the Ofsted inspection, actions are cross referenced and coded in a way which identifies the origin of the recommendation/priorities. For example, an **(O)** represents an Ofsted recommendation, **(OR)** repeat Ofsted recommendation (denoted in purple to highlight our key priorities) whilst a **(C)** represents the Children’s Commissioner’s six remaining priorities. Additionally, a further 15 priorities have been identified referenced within the plan with a **(S)** for SIF.

See Appendix 1 for a detailed list of Recommendations.

Priority Area		Alignment to Ofsted and Commissioner Recommendations
1	Leadership	OR1, O10, C3, C6
2	Workforce	C1, C2, C7
3	Practice	OR3, OR4, OR8, C4, S3, S6, S7, S8
4	Children Looked After	OR6, OR7, O9, OR11, OR12, O13, OR14, O15, O16, S1, S2, S4, S5
5	Exploitation	OR5, S9, S10
6	Performance and Quality Assurance	S14, S15
7	Partnership	O2, S12, S13
8	Voice and Experience of the Child	O17, S11

Ensuring Delivery

Governance

Sandwell Improvement Board

Following the departure of our Improvement Partners from Doncaster Children's Services Trust, we have a new Chair, Jane Shuttleworth. The Board will hold partners in Sandwell to account for their part in improving outcomes for children and families in the borough, of which Sandwell Children's Trust is key.

The Sandwell Children's Trust Board

The Sandwell Children's Trust Board has commented on this plan and will also play a key role in holding the executive directors to account on progress of the programme of improvement and seeking assurance that the Improvement Plan is delivering the required improvements. The Trust Board is chaired by the Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith.

The Local Authority

Both the local authority and the Trust are committed to working together in order that the required improvements are accelerated. The unique partnership requires the local authority to monitor and support the Trusts progress via regular operational and strategic partnership boards. During these meetings performance information will be examined, the Local Authority effectively holding the Trust to account on its performance.

Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) and key partners

The success of this Improvement Plan requires a strong and effective contribution from key partners. The partnership is represented by senior managers from local partners and stakeholders which include Sandwell Council's Lead Member for Children's Services as an observer. The SCSP will receive regular progress reports from the Trust as part of the partnership's statutory duty to ensure that safeguarding arrangements within the Borough are effective.

Monitoring Performance and Quality

The culture in Sandwell is one of support and challenge throughout all levels of our organisation and our partners.

The delivery of the programme of improvement will require rigorous scrutiny, monitoring and intelligence gathering to better understand the effectiveness of performance and quality of practice.

Progress against the Improvement Plan will be reported to the Improvement Board, Sandwell Children's Trust Board, SMBC and SCSP.

Reporting will include but will not be limited to:

- A performance report including progress against key indicators linked to the Improvement Plan.
- Extensive feedback on audit activity which goes 'beyond' traditional audit activity and will include themed and 'deep dive' audits and diagnostic activity. Audit activity will take place alongside practitioners on a team by team basis.
- A dedicated performance team who supports quality assurance practitioners by examining practice and producing diagnostic reports which support a learning culture.
- A robust project management methodology whereby clear goals are set, and strategic leads are held to account monthly through Workstream monitoring, and the swift management of risks and issues.

Making a Difference for Children and Families

At Sandwell Children's Trust, we serve the purpose of Improving the Lives of Children and Young People. We do this by:

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

In our relentless scrutiny of performance information and quality assurance activity, it is essential that children and young people support us and inform our improvement journey.

We will therefore ensure that the delivery of our improvements is underpinned by the engagement and involvement of children and young people via the Participation Strategy, through the corporate parenting board and other forums. Furthermore, updates to the various boards will include feedback from children, young people and their families.

Practitioners Improvement Board

The key to our success is the quality of our staff and we are determined to ensure they are engaged fully in this improvement journey. We will ensure a board is in place to support progress and provide a conduit which ensures the Improvement Board hears the voice of practitioners.

Our Eight Priorities

Our priorities have not changed since the inception of our Trust and our original improvement plan as we are confident that these are the areas we need to improve. Each of these priorities are led and driven by one of our directors, who have the relentless focus and accountability for progressing these plans. We see the voice and experience of the child as centre to our improvement, with Leadership, Management and Governance as a 'wrapper' around the remaining 6 priority areas.



What we have done since April 2018

Period	Milestones	Outputs
By July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme and performance governance cycle established • Review of the Front Door by Children's Services Advisors took place • Introduced additional management capacity in Operations Directorate • Revised communications approach with staff put into place • Leadership • Strengthened resources in the IRO service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Strategy – '12 Reasons to work for Sandwell Children's Trust' • External and Internal Websites for SCT • Front Door Acton Plan • Quality Assurance Framework • Beyond Auditing Framework • Direct Work Toolkit • Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for Assessments, PLO and Entry into Care • 10 Minimum Standards document for practitioners
By October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media and digital marketing used • Review of the LADO function • Child Protection Plans reduced • Cohort of children subject to CIN plans who did not require a statutory service were closed • Implementation of Directors Resource Panel • Began a systematic review of process, policy and practice guidance across the Trust. • Began a review and the implementation of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements • Staff Conference • Staff Survey • More permanent and experienced social workers than ever before 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter and Instagram Handles • Communications Strategy • LADO action plan that has driven more robust and timely decision making when people are working with • Pre-proceedings and permanency action plan • SSCB revised Learning and Development Offer • Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for Child Protection • Production of Performance Daily Dashboards for Care Management and LA • New front door action plan 'building' on previous

<p>By January 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Permanent Directors all in place ● Full Organisational Review of management capacity completed ● Review of Exploitation Strategic and Operational delivery in Sandwell ● Participation confirmed in 'Frontline programme and consultant identified ● 1st cohort of children whose Care Order required revoking were done so ● Team Manager Impact Workshops ● LSCB led programme to implement Graded Care Profile begun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revised Learning and Development Offer to all Staff (including practitioners) ● Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for Allegations, Front Door, Child Protection, MARAC and MAPPA ● Participation strategy ● Revised Policies for Adoption and Fostering ● Revised Foster Carers Handbook ● Long term matching process ● IRO 'Coming into Care' Pack
<p>By April 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Appointment of Head of Service for Practice and Social Work Innovation ● Strategic approach to Looked After Children group set up ● SMBC brief review of early help provision with a view to creating a Sandwell Children and Young People's Commissioning Partnership ● Launch of Exploitation Briefings ● Staff Awards Evening ● Launch of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership ● Voluntary Adoption Agency Inspected ● Independent Fostering Agency Inspected ● SEND Partnership Event and Inspection ● RAA transfer of adoption functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exploitation action plan and Exploitation Hub ● Safeguarding Unit Action Plan ● CIN Action Plan ● Revised Processes / Procedures and Practice Guidance for IRO Service, Fostering, SEND, and Looked After Children ● Fostering performance dashboard ● Launch of new Single Assessment ● Local Offer for Care leavers

Progress Overview of Recommendations

This page provides a brief overview of the progress of each of the recommendations broken down into our priority areas for improvement. RAG rating defines progress in Phase 1 (actions completed) and Phase 2 (securing the evidence of impact through quality assurance and performance).

Key		
		On Track
		Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place
		Not on track – Delayed / Risks without mitigations in place
		Not started
		Completed

Phase	Leadership		Workforce		Practice		Children Looked After (1)		Children Looked After (2)		Exploitation		Performance and QA		Partnership		Voice and Experience of the child											
		P1	P2		P1	P2		P1	P2		P1	P2		P1	P2		P1	P2										
Recommendations	OR1			C1			OR3			OR6			CN1			OR5			S14			O2			O17			
	O10			C2			OR4			OR7			CN2			S9			S15			S12			S11			
	C3			C7			OR8			O9			CN3			S10			MV5			S13			OP3			
	C6						C4			OR11			IFA1															
	MV4						S3			OR12			MV1															
	MV6						S6			O13			MV3															
	OP1						S7			OR14																		
	OP2						S8			O15																		
							MV2			S1																		
										S2																		
										S4																		
										S5																		

Priority 1 - Leadership

Strategic Responsibility: Frances Craven

Why are we focused on this?

Having strong leadership is crucial in shaping and improving services for children and families and is the catalyst to transforming and delivering high quality services for children and young people. This is why we see this as Priority 1 - all priorities will have a focus upon leadership. This is echoed by Ofsted in their annual report 2016, which states that leadership remains the single most important factor in determining the standards of help, care and protection provided. Leaders, both professional and political are the drivers for continuous sustainable improvement in order that children's services are consistently effective as the lead agency for the protection and care of children and young people and as a corporate parent.

What we will do

- Ensure leadership is visible to staff at all levels and engagement is meaningful
- Establish a culture of practice improvement to ensure that key services are making a difference for children
- Significantly strengthen the strategic children's partnership including the safeguarding partnership
- Continue to strengthen our approach to corporate parenting via tenacious scrutiny of the quality of practice and strategic performance
- Ensure that the strategic framework is embedded
- Ensure there is a culture of support and challenge with robust management

How we will do this

- Sandwell Children's Trust will continue to deliver children's social care services in Sandwell
- Engage staff and key stakeholders in developing a shared culture, vision and values
- Strengthen governance arrangements ensuring a culture of listening to the views of children and young people
- Promote a culture of professional curiosity and challenge
- Implement a workforce strategy and culture of learning and development

What will good and better look like?

- Children receive timely support and interventions because of consistent high-quality practice, with a golden thread of oversight from top level to front line
- Good practice is routinely shared and celebrated and innovation is encouraged across the whole breadth of the Trust
- Sustained improvements on key performance and quality measures
- Sandwell Children's Trust is a preferred employer and our workforce is stable
- Feedback loops from children and staff are embedded and informs service delivery and innovation

Priority 1 – Leadership

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
OR1 MV6	<p>Improve management oversight and decision-making across all services to ensure that needs and risks are fully addressed and that assessments, plans and interventions are appropriate.</p> <p>Supervision is consistently used as a tool for progressing plans and obtaining positive outcomes for children.</p>	<p>To have an established culture of practice improvement overseen by permanent leaders and managers to ensure that key services are making a difference for children in Sandwell</p> <p>Leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities to ensure compliance and quality of all work</p> <p>Staff benefit from regular high-quality supervision (including group supervision) and appraisal which focusses on staff development and wellbeing</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater percentage of Single Assessments have Management Reviews at 10, 25 and 35 days • A greater percentage of Child Protection Cases have evidence of Management Supervision within the previous 4 weeks • A greater percentage of LAC and CIN Cases have evidence of Management Supervision within the previous 8 weeks • A greater percentage of cases have evidence of Management Decision / Oversight on file in the previous 30 days • Audit findings in the category of supervision and management oversight moves towards RI and Good 	Implement any changes resulting from the review of our leadership and management structure.	July 2019	SCT Chief Executive		
			<p>Enable staff to understand their roles and responsibilities within the vision, how they connect and support the child's journey.</p> <p>Ensure the workforce knows it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to improvement.</p>	See Impact Workbook for Targets	SCT Chief Executive		
			Create and embed a programme of mentoring, coaching and training for Sandwell's leaders to have the skills, ability and leadership to drive our improvement to the next stage.	September 2019	Director of Resources HR Business Partner		
			The refreshed QA Framework is in operation across the service and is having an impact on the quality of practice across the Trust.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			All staff are afforded regular supervision and appraisal that is of good quality and addresses any developmental needs, reflection and case specific management direction.	August 2019	SCT Chief Executive		
O10	<p>Review commissioning documents to ensure that commissioning intentions are fully informed by detailed plans, to achieve those intentions.</p>	<p>Commissioning arrangements are robust and informed by service need, JSNA information which leads to a strategic plan to deliver cost effective services targeting these areas of need.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key performance of individual contracts improves • Evidence of improved value for money • Commissioning is targeted through an established evidence base 	Develop a commissioning strategy to ensure services are commissioned efficiently against local need with an agreed framework.	September 2019	Director of Resources		
C3 MV4	<p>Put in a sustainable solution to the front door to ensure that children and families receive timely assessments to the required quality, and responds appropriately to demand.</p> <p>Ensure there is a single front door approach so that children and families experience a consistently good service at the point of referral.</p>	<p>Thresholds are embedded and understood across the partnership and within the front door.</p> <p>Children receive the right level of support at the right time.</p> <p>Assessments are timely and result in an offer of support commensurate with the identified level of need.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater percentage of Contacts that are accepted as a referral are done so within 24 hours • A greater percentage of Single Assessments are completed within 25 and 45 working days • The distribution of referral outcomes become more in line with our comparators • A greater percentage of Single Assessments have evidence of Management Reviews at 10, 25 and 35 days • The percentage of Single Assessments that have the outcome of 'No Further Action' becomes more in line with our comparators • A greater percentage of Early Help Assessments are completed within timescales • A lesser percentage of children are subject to a re-referral 	Ensure that any delay in children receiving Early Help Targeted Services is minimised to ensure that children receive a timely response at the right level.	October 2019	Director of Operations Head of Service, Front Door and Targeted Early Help		
			Implement a programme of activity that ensures all referrals into children's social care or Targeted Early Help are triaged through 'Single Front Door'	October 2019	Director of Operations Head of Service, Front Door and Targeted Early Help		
			Engage partners routinely on the application of thresholds and its contribution in managing demand.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Operations Head of Service, Front Door and Targeted Early Help		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
C6	Put in place effective communication systems which connect senior management with practice and ensure that staff concerns are swiftly addressed.	<p>Create a culture of high visibility of senior managers alongside staff benefitting from meaningful feedback loops between staff and managers</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Survey shows an improvement in leadership satisfaction Feedback from staff results in tangible actions where appropriate Individual feedback from staff is known and on average is constructive and positive Practitioners Improvement Board feedback is constructive and positive 	Strengthen the role of the Principal Social Worker in order that they can strengthen the link between senior management and practice	July 2019	SCT Chief Executive	Yellow	Green
			Maintain visibility across the workforce to ensure the senior leadership team are connected to front line practice.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Senior Leadership Team	Grey	Green
			The senior leadership team continues to engage with the entire staff group in a meaningful way, giving opportunities to make suggestions, contribute to strategic planning and be part of our improvement.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Senior Leadership Team	Grey	Green
OP1	Ensure the efficient use of resources across the organisation.	<p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will have reduced our overall expenditure across all budgets We will understand and manage our demand for social workers, placements and support staff so that we work with the children who need our services most 	Ensure the efficient use of resources across the organisation.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Senior Leadership Team	Grey	Yellow
OP2	Develop and implement a robust Edge of Care Offer that prevents children from being placed in care should this be in their best interests.	<p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will have evidence that we are appropriately 'diverting' children from care, and providing them with the support to help them remain within their families We will have evidence that our Children in Care are placed appropriately 	Develop a clear invest to save business case for this area of work	September 2019	Director of Startegy	Green	Blue
			Implement new processes, resources and structures to deliver the new arrangements	February 2020	Director of Startegy	Blue	Blue

Priority 2 - Workforce

Strategic Responsibility: Dan Mortiboys

Why are we focused on this?

Having a highly committed, child focused workforce is essential in creating an environment where social work can flourish. These values alongside a shared goal of improvement are vital to our improvement journey. The impact of systemic failures over many years has led to low staff morale and barriers to recruitment and retention, which has led to the over reliance on high cost agency staffing. The impact of this is that for too long children have experienced frequent changes of social workers and delayed interventions. Change is needed, which means that we need to create and accelerate the conditions for success. We need to offer high levels of support to staff, manageable caseloads, a commitment to ongoing professional development and career progression supported by a coordinated training and development strategy.

What we will do

- Ensure our workforce is stable, skilled and as experienced as it can be
- Improve morale, confidence and job satisfaction for all staff in the Trust
- Ensure HR processes are fit for our organisation, and meet the needs of practitioners and managers
- Increase the numbers of permanent managers to provide consistency of practice and support

How we will do this

- Attract and support the development of a skilled and competent workforce through:
 - A strong ASYE offer
 - Recruitment incentives
 - Leadership Training
 - Creating a learning culture
 - Succession planning
 - Promoting Sandwell as preferred employer
- Redesign front line social work services to ensure there is sufficient management and social worker capacity to manage fluctuating demand
- Promote our vision, values and practice standards across all our workforce activity such as supervision and appraisal

What will good and better look like?

- Improved morale, confidence and skills of social workers and support staff
- Stable workforce with reduced reliance on agency staff
- Principal Social Worker is the driver for championing good practice
- The workforce shares the same goals, visions and values, and staff are ambitious for children
- Systematic audit and QA programme is seen by staff as a vehicle to support their learning and development.
- All staff have high aspirations for children and young people

Priority 2 - Workforce

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
C1 C7	<p>Increase the social care workforce to ensure that caseloads are manageable across the service.</p> <p>Strengthen the approach to attraction, recruitment and retention to make Sandwell Council an employer of choice within the region and reduce the over dependence on agency and newly qualified staff.</p>	<p>The Trust can articulate the demand for social workers at any point and shows it is able to flex its resources to meet fluctuations in demand,</p> <p>The Trust can attract and retain a skilled and competent workforce and support their development through the revised workforce strategy.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social worker vacancies reduce Social worker permanent vacancies reduce Turnover rate of social workers reduces A greater percentage of the workforce is permanent (so a lesser percentage of the workforce is interim or agency) The percentage of the workforce who are in their Assisted and Supported Year of Employment is maintained to ensure a continuous flow of new staff without overreliance A lesser percentage of staff are off work through sickness 	<p>The Trust to keep under review the current volume of work within the service in order that there is sufficient social work capacity to meet these demands.</p>	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Resources		
			<p>There is a continued focus and drive to maintain the profile and accommodate the promises made to staff as part of the workforce strategy 'the 12 reasons to work for Sandwell Children's Trust'</p>	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Resources		
			<p>Processes for 'Safer Recruitment', Clearances, Induction and Appraisals are robust and efficient</p>	June 2019	Director of Resources		
			<p>Career and professional development framework to be developed in consultation with staff and managers</p>	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			<p>Develop a Learning Hub that ensures the Trust is delivering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-and post-qualifying programmes for prospective and qualified social workers A strong leadership and management programme Programmes that support the development of good practice for social workers A comprehensive Learning and Development programme for all staff working for the Trust 	September 2020	Director of Quality and Performance Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
C2 (also refer to P1 OR1)	<p>Ensure that there is the required management capacity for appropriate oversight and direction of casework and that all staff have supervision at the required frequency.</p>	<p>The Trust has the right number of permanent managers required for the number of social workers, and they drive and deliver strengthened practice and oversight.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of permanent managers in post increases A greater percentage of social workers who have had one to one and casework supervision in the last month <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of supervision improves with more audits in this category rated as RI or better 	<p>Implement all changes resulting from the Organisational Review</p>	July 2019	Director of Resources		
			<p>Scrutinise practice in relation to supervision with regards to frequency, timeliness and quality, and ensure reflective supervision drives practice improvement and individual case direction.</p>	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			<p>A programme of training will be put in place to address critical gaps in management oversight, practice and culture.</p>	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		

Priority 3 - Practice

Strategic Responsibility: Steven Gauntley

Why are we focused on this?

The quality of practice is fundamental in improving the lives of children and their families in Sandwell. Good practice is fostered by strong leadership which develops a confident and competent workforce who place children at the centre of their work. Effective practice requires shared vision, values and goals supported by clear theoretical models alongside a skilled and knowledgeable workforce who benefit from highly effective supervision.

What we will do

- Ensure there are a clear and consistent set of procedures, processes and practice guidance and standards to ensure clear expectations and therefore consistency of practice
- Launch clear theoretical models of practice and tools for social workers
- Create an infrastructure of learning that affords social workers, managers and practitioners at all levels the opportunity for meaningful development
- Invest in Team Managers' development of their skills and knowledge so that they can support and improve front line practice
- Provide targeted support to teams through 'beyond auditing'
- Promote improved multi-agency working

How we will do this

- Develop, agree and implement a practice model, first phase concentrating on 'Doing basic things well', second, introduction of a theoretical, evidenced informed model of outcome focused practice
- Develop a 'learning hub' that is the central point of knowledge and access to learning and development for our staff, and is proactive in its offer
- Develop practical leadership and management programme for social work managers
- Review the current supervision model
- Implement learning from audit, SCR's, Peer reviews alongside feedback from children and young people

What will good and better look like?

- We are an employer of choice that offers more to practitioners in terms of support and practice development than our neighbours
- Support and protection for children is timely, practice is consistently good and effectively reduces vulnerability and risk
- Audits show good quality and timeliness of assessments, plans and interventions
- Multi-agency practice is effective at driving positive outcomes
- Children build positive relationships with their social workers and their experience is understood.
- Reduced caseloads given that children are receiving the right support at the right time

Priority 3 - Practice

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
OR3 MV2	<p>Ensure that assessments are regularly updated, and the authors rigorously consider risks and take account of children's histories, wishes and feelings, and diversity, to inform planning and provision of services.</p> <p>Pre-birth assessments are to be completed as soon as possible in order to provide support and plan interventions at the point a child is born.</p>	<p>Assessments will be of a consistently high quality and address risk rigorously, informed by research, social work methodologies and influenced by the child's voice.</p> <p>Assessments are informed by chronologies that have regard to families' social history, important events, and areas of historic risk.</p> <p>Assessments and plans evidence consideration of families' cultural needs and matters of diversity.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of Social Workers at Assessment Workshop sessions Outcomes of Audits in the category of 'Assessments' improves so that more are rated as RI or better Percentage of children with an assessment updated within six months, 12 months and over two years increases A greater percentage of Single Assessments with Management Reviews at 10, 25 and 35 days The percentage of completed assessments with the outcome 'No Further Action' becomes more in line with our comparators Average number of visits to Children during the life of the assessment increases A greater percentage of assessments are completed within timescales 	All plans for children are made with the benefit of an updated assessment	January 2020	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			Ensure all social workers receive training to improve the quality and consistency of their assessments, particularly in relation to risk.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Training and action plan to be provided for partner agencies on thresholds, risks and their contribution to assessments.	October 2019	Director of Quality and Performance in conjunction with the SSCB		
			Robust quality assurance performance monitoring, including daily performance reporting, monitoring of review points and understanding of the themes, outcomes and actions from audits.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Performance and Systems Lead Director of Quality and Performance		
OR4	<p>Improve the quality, delivery and review of plans across all service areas to meet the needs of children and ensure that they are not subject to drift and delay.</p>	<p>Children and young people experience timely and effective multi-agency help and protection through risk-based assessment, authoritative practice, planning and review that secures change.</p> <p>Team around the Family Plans, Child in Need Plans, Child Protection Plans, Care Plans and Risk Management Plans are SMART, timely and are of good quality. Social Workers and other staff working with families know what a good plan looks like.</p> <p>Plans are reviewed regularly, and alternative action is swiftly taken where the circumstances for children do not change and the risk of harm or actual harm remains.</p> <p>Plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks.</p>	All plans are SMART in their design and drive timely intervention for children and young people and benefit from robust management oversight	July 2019	Director of Quality and Performance		
			All plans are reviewed in line with minimum expectations, as part of updated assessments and where required, independently.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			All plans are developed with children and their families, and shared with them	September 2019	Director of Quality and Performance Director of Operations		
C4	<p>Ensure all children in need, children on a child protection plan and looked after children have an up to date plan focussed on outcomes and that children on caseload are visited at the required frequency by social workers.</p>	<p>Authoritative action is taken where change is not secured and the risk to children intensifies or remains.</p> <p>Staff are clear about their accountability in relation to adopting high professional standards</p> <p>Plans evidence consideration of families' cultural needs and matters of diversity.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater percentage of CIN, CP, LAC, TAF and Risk Management Plans are updated in a timely manner The quality of plans improves so that more audits in the category of 'planning' are rated RI or better Dispute resolution is used by IRO's and CP chairs proportionately and ensures that intervention for children is not delayed 	Keep under review the capacity within the IRO service to facilitate enhanced monitoring and challenge of plans by IROs between reviews	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			Where there is delay or inaction, matters are escalated appropriately, through dispute resolution.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			Ensure visits to children are routinely monitored for compliance and quality of recording.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IRO and CP Chair Caseloads are maintained in line with the IRO handbook and local expectations A greater percentage of children (CIN, CP and LAC) are visited in timescale A greater percentage of Core Group meetings are completed within timescales A lesser percentage of children subject of a Child Protection Plan have been for more than 12 months A lesser percentage of children subject of a CIN Plan have been for more than 9 months 					
OR8	Ensure that multi-agency core groups and child in need meetings are held within timescales and drive plans forward.	<p>Children and young people experience timely and effective multi-agency help and protection through risk-based multi-agency planning, authoritative practice, intervention and review, to secure safe and effective change or gather evidence to make timely decisions for children.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater percentage of Core Group and CIN Meetings are recorded and take place within expected timescales A wider range of professionals attend Core Group Meetings and CIN Meetings more frequently Audits through the SCSP demonstrates more partners involvement and influence in children's plans 	Ensure that auditing activity regularly considers scrutiny of the effectiveness of multi-agency planning and intervention.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Develop tailored performance reporting systems that target this area of practice	August 2019	Performance and Systems Lead		
			Implement a training and support programme for staff and partners on practice and planning of key multi-agency activities such as Children in Need meetings, CP conferences and Core Groups	September 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Work with the SCSP in relation to raising practice standards in this area by strengthening multi-agency audit and clear routes for escalation.	November 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation Chair of SSCB multi agency auditing sub group		
SIF6	Ensure that case recording, chronologies and genograms are of a good standard, contemporaneous and used to understand the child experience and inform decision making	<p>Ensure that case records are well written, clear, succinct, separate fact from professional judgement and evidences an understanding of children's lived experience through observation and an account of their wishes and feelings. Case records also have regard to the diverse cultural history and individual circumstances of children and their families.</p> <p>Genograms and chronologies are tools that are completed as a matter of course when seeking to understand children's needs, the extent of any risks surrounding them and protective factors to make evidence based decisions for them.</p> <p>Assessments always have regard the impact of children's naturally connected networks.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater number of Chronologies are produced A greater percentage of audit outcomes for the category of 'Case Records' are RI or better. A greater percentage of audit outcomes for the category of 'Assessments' are RI or better. Themed auditing around the use of chronologies within assessments demonstrates increased use of Impact Chronologies 	Put in place a minimum practice standards policy in relation to improving contemporaneous recording, chronologies and genograms.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			Ensure a training and development programme is available for staff and managers in this area of practice.	August 2019	Director of Quality and Performance Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			All assessments are informed by a genogram, and an impact chronology	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
SIF7	Significantly strengthen the role of the LADO in order that risk is responded to in a timely way.	Ensure that the LADO service is fit for purpose and drives a timely multi-agency response where allegations are made against people in a position of trust and through exposure to people who pose a risk to children	The work undertaken by the LADO is undertaken in a timely manner and drives a multi-agency response to complex safeguarding. The LADO ensures that this response is followed through.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
		<p>Practice themes from this activity is regularly collated for organisational learning.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LADO activity is more timely (7 timeliness measures) There is more evidence of the LADO following up safeguarding recommendations 	A framework for auditing Position of Trust Meetings, and other LADO activity is created and regular audits are undertaken to ensure the quality of this service is improved and maintained.	August 2019	Director of Quality and Performance		
SIF8	Ensure effective safeguarding arrangements are in place for children and young people at risk of Domestic Violence and people who are deemed to pose a risk to them	<p>There is a clear and robust multi-agency process for MARAC and MAPPA that results in actions for all partners. These actions are checked and reviewed to ensure they result in timely and proportionate interventions.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MARAC and MAPPA actions are effectively communicated and there is more evidence of follow up by the relevant manager. MARAC is attended by the full range of partners 	A process is created for MARAC and MAPPA that includes clear review points and checking of agreed actions across the partnership. Arrangements for assuring quality of these meetings are in place.	June 2019	Head of Service Front Door and Early Help Head of Service Care Management Police representative		
SIF3	Address capacity within IRO caseloads to ensure that they can effectively challenge weak practice or delays in progressing good quality plans.	<p>Independent Reviewing Officers are appropriately skilled and compliant with the IRO handbook in order that they are effective and challenging poor practice and advocating on behalf of the child and young person.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average caseload for IRO's and CP Conference Chairs are maintained in line with the IRO handbook and local expectations. Dispute resolution is used by IRO's and CP chairs proportionately and ensures that intervention for children is not delayed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is more evidence of reflection within IRO supervision Audit outcomes in the category of 'reviews' show more work as RI or better <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff attendance at the exploitation safeguarding hub Exploitation safeguarding hub records indicate multi agency working and appropriate plans 	Keep under review the capacity of the IRO service in order that they can fulfil the role prescribed in the IRO handbook and manage demand flexibly.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
			Enhanced training to be provided to all IRO's and CP Conference Chairs in relation to strengthening their role in effectively challenging deficits in planning and practice.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			The footprint of IROs, CP Chairs and Fostering IROs is evident within children's and carers files, and drives practice improvement on a case by case basis	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		

Priority 4 – Children in Care, Care Leavers and Permanence

Strategic Responsibility: Pauline Turner

Why are we focused on this?

This is a fundamental priority of our plan as we believe that as Corporate Parents we have a duty to make sure that that our interventions for children and young people who are looked after are based on robust assessments, clear plans and strong social work practice. Children should be fully involved in decision making in their lives. Decisions around a child's permanent placement should be made without delay, and where children can live with their family, this should involve the least statutory intervention necessary. Where children are placed permanently their plans should be reviewed regularly, are based on up to date assessments of their need, and enable them to thrive and achieve. There should be no delay in progressing these plans for children. Care leavers have the unfettered opportunity for support of a Personal Advisor, who is proactive in ascertaining need and meeting these needs through a clear Pathway Plan.

What we will do

- Improve the speed and rigour of decision making and legal processes
- Ensure that children placed in family type settings and as close to their existing communities as possible
- Increased support and rigour for children returning home safely and where appropriate
- Ensure that executive and political leadership are invested in corporate parenting, and use their influence to champion the needs of children in care
- Ensure that the Independent Fostering Agency provides good quality placements and independent challenge to children's social workers
- Ensure that there is sufficient capacity for care leavers to be afforded meaningful support from a personal advisor
- Ensure that care leavers have greater access to mental health services

How we will do this

- Ensure there are clear process in place along with practice standards to set expectations for timeliness
- Establish a robust resource panel to ensure decision making for children in care has leadership oversight
- Develop a reunification strategy that allows children to leave care and return to their families should this be a safe and appropriate option, and implement this strategy
- Training for staff in key areas to improve practice
- Ensure there is a sufficiency strategy that outlines activity to increase foster carers in the Sandwell Borough
- IRO role will be strengthened to champion and advocate on behalf of children in care
- Work with local health commissioners to agree a plan to work with our care leavers as a priority

What will good and better look like?

- Decisions about children and young people becoming looked after are made using high-quality assessments and thresholds are clear and consistently applied appropriately
- Children and young people are listened to by social workers who know them well and drive planning
- Adults working with children help them to understand and manage their early childhood experiences
- Children and young people are healthy and achieve
- Children return home when safe with the appropriate levels of support needed
- Children live in stable permanent homes and are visited regularly by social workers
- Care and pathway plans are regularly reviewed to ensure children and young people's developing needs continue to be met

Priority 4 – Children in Care, Care Leavers and Permanence

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
OR6 MV3	Ensure that permanence plans for all children looked after and those for whom adoption is being considered are clear, systematically tracked and monitored to reduce delay. Early permanence options are considered as part of children's care plans.	<p>All Looked After Children have an updated assessment of need with clear evidence of consideration of all permanence options</p> <p>Permanence decisions are made for children at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>The tracking and monitoring of permanence plans is robust, and there is tenacious oversight and challenge from managers and IRO's.</p> <p>Care plans comprehensively address the needs and experiences of children and young people. They are regularly and independently reviewed.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a greater proportion of Looked After Children with a Permanency Plan. The average length of Care Proceedings decreases. The average number of days from entering care to placement order with adopters reduces. The average number of days from Placement Order to matching a child to prospective adopters reduces. A greater proportion of audit findings in the category of 'planning' and for Looked After Children is RI or better. 	Address the backlog of permanence decisions and ensure all children have a plan for permanence and ensure there are rigorous tracking and monitoring arrangements for children subject to permanence planning that minimises delays	November 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of Service Care Management		
			Rigorously track adoption family finding and provide challenge to the Regional Adoption Agency to secure timely permanence for children with a plan of adoption	September 2019	Head of Service Care Management		
			Ensure there are arrangements in place for decision-making forums to include a Director's Resource Panel	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Operations Head of Service Care Management		
			Ensure that there is a mechanism for routinely matching children with their permanent foster carers	September 2019	Head of Service Care Management Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
O15	Improve the quality of child permanence reports in order that children and adopters have a full and accurate picture of the child's birth family and history, and understand the reasons for adoption.	<p>Child Permanence Reports will be of good or better quality for both children and adopters to fully understand their life experiences.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More Child Permanence Reports are completed within timescale in readiness for adoption panel. Dip sample of the Quality of CPR's improves. Adoption Panel is performing its QA function. 	Training is in place for staff, managers and IRO's to ensure they understand what a good Child Permanence Report looks like.	October 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Ensure there are clear arrangements for the quality assurance of Child Permanence Reports, both within Sandwell Childrens Trust and the Regional Adoption Agency, which will include a clear Quality Assurance role of Adoption Panel	October 2019	Director of Operations Head of Service, Care Management		
MV1	The purpose of legal meetings within the Public Law Outline should be clear, along with the minutes and outcomes so that social workers and parents know what their tasks and expectations are. Letters before proceedings should also provide sufficient detail for parents to know what the expectations are.	<p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal planning meetings are being held in a timely way, chaired by a solicitor Public Law Outline meetings fully involve parents and minutes are shared in a timely way Letters before proceedings are of better quality evidenced through quality assurance There is an increase in the use of pre-proceedings and a reduction emergency or short-notice applications to court 	Ensure that there are arrangements for training managers in the correct use of pre-proceedings	October 2019	Head of Service, Care Management SMBC Legal Services Manager		
			Agreed templates are in place for Public Law Outline meeting minutes and letters before proceedings	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Care Management SMBC Legal Services Manager		
			Letters before proceedings are quality assured as a matter of course	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Care Management SMBC Legal Services Manager		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
OR14	Ensure that timely and good quality life story work is developed for children to help them to understand what has happened in their lives, and that life story books and later life letters are provided at a time when children move to their adoptive family.	<p>All looked after children and young people will benefit from timely life work (direct work), life books and later life letters which help them understand their experiences as they are prepared for adoption and permanency</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Adopted Children have Life Story Books A greater percentage of Looked After Children have Life Story Books All Adopted Children have a later life letter Dip sample of life story work and later life letters show an improvement in quality 	Utilising the support and influence of the Looked After Young People's Board, ensure there is a clear policy, agreed tools, materials and minimum expectations for the completion of life work with children.	July 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			Support and training is made available for staff, managers and carers to equip them to undertake high quality life work with children	July 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			Ensure there is a priority order for the completion of historic lifes work for our Children in Care	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			Fully clear the backlog of life work	April 2020	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			Strengthen Quality Assurance Processes in this area to ensure the work being undertaken is of good enough quality	August 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
OR11	Encourage and promote education, employment and training to ensure that care leavers develop skills to assist in their independence.	<p>The number of care leavers who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) will be minimised, and there are sufficient opportunities for care leavers to be equipped with the skills to promote their independence</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lesser percentage of 16-25 Year Olds are NEET A greater percentage of care leavers are contacted every 56 days 	In conjunction with the Virtual School, Local Authority, colleges, schools, providers/carers and employers, ensure there are clear and robust support and opportunities for care leavers who are NEET	December 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of Connexions Service		
			Work with partners to ensure there is clear governance and monitoring of care leavers who are NEET so that there is a rigorous oversight of this measure.	December 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
OR12	Develop links with adult mental health services to ensure that care leavers health needs continue to be met when they move from children's services.	<p>Young people benefit from good multi-agency intervention and planning that addresses their emotional health and wellbeing, Effective transition arrangements are in place for young people moving into adulthood.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More care leavers have access to adult mental health services should they need to. 	Work in partnership with health commissioners and local NHS providers to review mental health needs of care leavers and implement improved access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and wider support	November 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Health representative Adults transitions service representative Commissioning Manager Director of Operations		
OR7	Ensure that 16 and 17-year-old homeless young people gain a full understanding of their options and the benefits of becoming looked after.	<p>Robust joint assessments between housing and children's social care ensure result in a direct offer of support that is understood by the young person.</p> <p>Advice and guidance is routinely offered for children who are 16 and 17 years old at risk of homelessness, and they know that coming into care is an option.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of 16 and 17-year-old children who are Looked After are more in line with our comparators 	Ensure all 16 and 17 year olds known to SCT, where homelessness is a feature are fully informed of their rights, have an up to date assessment of need and consideration is given as to the most suitable housing / care option.	August 2019	Head of Service, Front Door and Targeted Early Help SMBC Housing representative		
			Ensure there are joint working protocols between social care and housing and other providers to appropriately assess 16 and 17-year-olds presenting as homeless.	See Impact Workbook for Targets			
			Ensure the protocol is operational.	October 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers SMBC Housing representative		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
			Ensure relevant staff are equipped with the knowledge to be able to advise young people of their housing and care options.	August 2019	Head of Service, Front Door and Targeted Early Help Housing representative		
SIF1	Improve the educational attainment of looked after children supported by detailed and meaningful PEPs.	Children will benefit from high quality meaningful PEPs which improve educational attainment. Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase in PEP completion to ensure that all children's educational and social targets are reviewed termly An increase in educational attainment of our looked after children An increase in the quality through dip sampling of PEPs" 	Work with the Head of the Virtual School in developing and promoting high quality Personal Education Plans, with clear guidance and minimum expectations.	December 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of the Virtual School		
			Ensure that the Trust and the Virtual School and have a mechanism in place for Personal Education Plans to be Quality Assured, and that Pupil Premium is being used for the benefit of the child.	December 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of the Virtual School		
SIF2	Ensure that foster carers are clear about their delegated responsibilities and are furnished with sufficient, timely information about children in order that they can make informed decisions.	Foster carers are clear about their roles and delegated responsibilities and confidently make decisions based on detailed information about the child. Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater number of placement plans are being completed by social workers. A greater percentage of placement plans are completed before placement and at the latest within the statutory timescales More children who become looked after do so in a planned way where foster carers are able to meet their needs from day 1. 	Ensure there is a clear process and suite of documents / tools used to ensure carers are clear about their delegated responsibilities when caring for children.	September 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of Service, Care Management Head of Service, Front Door and Targeted Early Help Registered Manager Fostering Agency		
O9	Increase the number of foster carers to meet the varied needs of children looked after.	Children are matched to carers who support them living with siblings and as close to their existing communities as possible Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater number of mainstream fostering assessments are being undertaken A greater number of mainstream foster carers are approved. There is evidence that more children are matched to carers before placement There is a wide range of skills and abilities within our fostering workforce. 	Explore options for targeted marketing, block contracts, step down foster carers and other invest to save initiatives to maximise options for children and make efficiency savings.	August 2019	Director of Strategy		
			Implement any initiatives that arise from the above.	September 2020	Director of Strategy		
			Review and develop a clear sufficiency strategy to ensure SCT has a strategic plan for meeting the care needs of children	October 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Commissioning Manager Registered Manager Fostering Agency		
O13	Develop the provision of emergency accommodation to prevent care leavers and homeless young people's use of hotels.	Eradicate the use of hotel and B&B accommodation when needing to place a child or young person in emergency accommodation Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No young people will stay in a hotel or B and B 	Review the current provision of emergency accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people	August 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Commissioning Manager		
			Understand the demand for such accommodation.	August 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Commissioning Manager		
			Put in place a safe and sustainable alternative to hotel and B&B accommodation for care leavers and homeless young people.	December 2019	Director of Resources		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
SIF4	Review of all external placements and all placements with parents and S20 arrangements to ensure that children are living in homes which are safe and promote the best possible outcomes.	<p>Ensure where possible that children and young people are placed in family type settings and are as close to their existing communities as possible</p> <p>Improved range of quality and cost-effective placements where children can thrive. Increased support and rigour for children returning home safely</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer Looked After Children are subject to S20 accommodation. Fewer Looked After Children are Placed with Parents under a Care Order 	Review children who are currently subject to Section 20 to ensure it is used as appropriate and reviewed through a Legal Planning Meeting.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Care Management		
			Senior managers to implement and ensure that robust tracking and monitoring systems are in place for children who are subject to external placements, PWP and subject to S20 arrangements.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of Service, Care Management		
			Develop an implement a reunification strategy to support safe and successful return to family and Connected Persons	December 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of Service, Care Management		
SIF 5	Review the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Private Fostering arrangements.	<p>Children where possible are placed in family type settings and as close to their existing communities as possible</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater percentage of children who cease care do so through Special Guardianship Private fostering arrangements are better known and more children are monitored through this. Private fostering arrangements are assessed as safe for children. 	Ensure that Special Guardianship is being considered as a permanent option for children, and all relevant staff understand what is expected.	August 2019	Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers Head of Service, Care Management		
			Create and implement a multi-agency private fostering action plan which raises awareness of Private Fostering throughout the partnership and develops the private fostering service according to increased demand.	January 2020	Head of Service, Care Management Representative from SCSP		
CN1	Compliance Notice Regulation 11(a) - (Independent Fostering Agencies - Duty to Secure Welfare)"	<p>The Independent Fostering Agency understands the needs of all children placed with its foster carers, and that these carers are fully assessed and approved.</p> <p>The Independent Fostering Agency ensures it uses its influence to safeguard children in its foster placements.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker A greater percentage of carers are visited within expected timescales A greater percentage of carers are reviewed within expected timescales. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater proportion of assessments are completed in a timely way A greater proportion of foster carers are approved at panel within expected timescales. Children placed in interim approved placements are safeguarded, and allegations are handled in a timely and robust way. 	Ensure that the registered person prepares and implements a procedure that facilitates the rigorous and timely assessment of connected persons.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
			Ensure that clear records are kept showing decision making, and that due process has been followed at key stages in the assessment process for connected persons. These key stages include: - when temporary approval is granted; - an extension to the temporary approval, if granted at 16 weeks; - at 24 weeks; and - if the agency decision maker refuses to grant approval following recommendations made at the agency's fostering panel.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
			Ensure that the agency provides sufficient support and supervision to connected persons pending their approval. This includes supervisory visits being undertaken and recorded.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
			Ensure that all connected persons have an allocated supervising social worker.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
			Ensure that all connected persons who are approved as foster carers by the agency receive regular supervisory visits from a supervising social worker in line with the agency's policy.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
			Ensure that written exemptions are in place when required, to allow more than three unrelated children to live in the same foster home.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
			Ensure that all staff and managers understand and implement the safeguarding policy and procedure.	June 2019	Director of Operations		
CN2	Compliance Notice			June 2019	Director of Operations		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
	Regulation 12(1)(a)(b) - (Arrangements for the protection of children)"		<p>The registered manager must review any serious incidents and safeguarding concerns to identify any gaps in training, skills or knowledge for foster carers or staff. The registered manager must keep a written audit trail of any such review.</p> <p>Supervising social workers must continue to visit foster carers during and after the investigation of allegations to support the foster carer, ensure the safety of any children placed and continue to assess the ability of the foster carer to meet the needs of children.</p> <p>Foster carers must be informed of the outcomes of investigations in a timely manner in agreement with the local authority designated officer.</p> <p>Ensure that foster carer post allegation reviews proceed to panel in a timely way.</p>	<p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p>	<p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of Quality and Performance</p> <p>Director of Quality and Performance</p>		
CN3	Compliance Notice Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b) (Registered Person - General Requirements)"	<p>Staff receive the correct training and induction to undertake their duties. They are recruited in a safe way and receive adequate supervision.</p> <p>The registered manager has a clear understanding of staff and foster carers training needs and puts in place arrangements to bridge any gaps.</p> <p>There is sufficient staff to meet the demand for foster carers and placements.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Worker Caseloads are in line with expectations set out by Ofsted and comparators. All cases are allocated. Foster carer training is recorded and a clear reflection of the training they have received. 	<p>Ensure that the registered person reviews the current staffing structure and puts in place an action plan setting out clear timescales for recruiting sufficient suitably qualified, competent, experienced and permanent staff working for the purposes of the fostering service.</p> <p>Ensure that the registered person ensures that all staff, including the registered manager receive regular supervision in line with the agency's own policy.</p> <p>Ensure that all staff who have not yet received an annual appraisal do so as soon as practicable.</p> <p>Ensure that all staff carrying out fostering assessments, receive appropriate training to do so.</p> <p>Ensure that foster carers receive 6 weekly supervisions.</p> <p>Ensure that the registered person undertakes a review of all training for foster carers and has clear records that set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> which foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards, an action plan for those carers that haven't completed the training and support standards within the required timescale and how this plan will be monitored, what core training foster carers have completed, an individual development plan for each carer setting out what training they need to complete and when to complete it by, 	<p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p>	<p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of Operations Director of Quality and Performance</p> <p>Director of Operations</p> <p>Director of Operations</p>		
IFA	Recommendations from the fostering inspection February 2019.	<p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All foster carers are afforded the same payments and training offer Formal matching decisions are made by a suitable manager, and in a timely way Allegations are tracked and are progressed in a timely way, and historic allegations are recorded on carers files There is evidence that children are safeguarded whenever there has been an allegation Fostering panel decisions are timely and quality assurance demonstrates decisions are appropriate Fostering panels are held according to legislation, and are quorate 	<p>Ensure that financial and other support is provided to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child. Family and friends foster carers may require some services to be delivered in a different way, but there should be equity of provision and entitlement.</p> <p>Ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to the local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to</p>	<p>October 2019</p> <p>October 2019</p>	<p>Registered Manager IFA Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers</p> <p>Registered Manager IFA</p>		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual appraisals of panel members and chair are being undertaken and are quality assured 	<p>meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required.</p>		Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			<p>Ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. The information is retained on the confidential file, even after someone leaves the organisation, until the person reaches normal retirement age, or for ten years if this is longer.</p>	October 2019	Registered Manager IFA Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			<p>Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. This specifically relates to safer caring plans.</p>	October 2019	Registered Manager IFA Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			<p>Ensure that the fostering panel and decision-maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.</p>	October 2019	Registered Manager IFA Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			<p>Ensure that each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance.</p>	October 2019	Registered Manager IFA Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			<p>Ensure that the fostering service appoints either one or two vice chairs, being members of the fostering panel, who can act as chair if the regular chair is unable to chair a meeting or the office is vacant.</p>	October 2019	Registered Manager IFA Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		
			<p>Ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives.</p>	October 2019	Registered Manager IFA Heaf of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers		

Priority 5 –Exploitation

Strategic Responsibility: Pauline Turner

Why are we focused on this?

Exploitation is a form of child abuse and child abuse is a crime that destroys lives and affects all our communities. The national approach has been to tackle exploitation in terms of Contextual Safeguarding, and is recognised as one of the most important challenges facing local agencies today. Exploitation has a serious long term and lasting impact on every aspect of a child's life. In Sandwell, we are committed to work very closely with our partners to ensure we have a robust approach and a relentless focus on ensuring children are protected from exploitation and feel safe in their communities.

What we will do

- A strong children's safeguarding partnership across Sandwell
- Comprehensive records are held and shared between agencies to help and protect children and young people based on their individual circumstances
- That intelligence is shared between agencies to inform a tailored approach to disrupting and preventing exploitation activity within our borough
- Together with key partners we will take steps to ensure that for those who are missing or often missing there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm

How we will do this

- Ensure there is a clear and up to date exploitation strategy and operational protocols that informs service redesign
- Ensure key partners such as health and police are meaningfully engaged and invested in the development of this service
- Agreement across the partnership of key impact measures
- Develop and deliver an awareness and training programme for practitioners and partner agencies supporting children and young people vulnerable too Exploitation
- Ensure children and young people are engaged in these developments
- Learn from other children's services providers who have a proven track record of success in this area

What will good and better look like?

- Children at risk of exploitation receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them
- Local intelligence and mapping is routinely used to inform tailored disruption activity and pre-emptive targeted work
- Not only do partner agencies and key staff understand and respond quickly to potential exploitation, but so do wider agencies, businesses and organisations in Sandwell
- The work undertaken in Sandwell forms a key part of national intelligence

Priority 5 –Exploitation

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
ORS	Ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview so that risks are analysed to inform future and identify wider patterns and activity. Review with the current provider its approach to young people when arranging an interview, to ensure that refusals are kept to a minimum.	<p>For those who are missing or often missing there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm</p> <p>Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education and those at risk of exploitation receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them.</p> <p>Key partners take steps to ensure that all children, including those who are excluded from school, are safe and that for those who are missing or often missing there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater percentage of return interviews were completed within 72 hours of the child returning from a missing episode. We can understand where exploitation activity takes place, and can evidence disruption actions are reducing exploitation. 	Consult with the police and key stakeholders about how information from return interview is used to build intelligence which can be used for disruption activities.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service Front Door and Targeted Early Help	Grey	Green
			Implement new arrangements for monitoring hotspots and taking area based safeguarding actions.	August 2019	Head of Service Front Door and Targeted Early Help	Green	
			Review current commissioning arrangements in relation to the approach to young people when arranging and completing return interviews.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Operations	Grey	
SIF9	Awareness raising about child sexual exploitation needs a more focused and coordinated approach.	<p>Risks are well understood and minimised. Local authorities, schools and local police are aware of, and implement in full, the requirements of the statutory guidance for children and young people who are missing.</p> <p>Partners effectively disrupt adults engaged in Exploitation Activities</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater number of referrals relating to exploitation indicates a better awareness of this issue CSE and exploitation risk assessments are undertaken more often, and there is a trajectory of reducing risk over the long term once the baseline is understood. 	Alongside the SCSP, review exploitation training for all staff and partners to promote their awareness of the process and protocol for children and young people who are missing from home, care or education, including robust multi-agency management of risk	August 2019	Head of Service Front Door and Targeted Early Help Police representative	Green	Green
			Implement a programme of awareness raising for all staff within Sandwell Children’s Trust and across the partnership.	January 2020	Head of Service Front Door and Targeted Early Help Head of Service Youth Offending	Green	
			Create and maintain an Exploitation Champions Group to ensure organisational awareness is a continuous process and we develop a network of experts in this area	September 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation	Yellow	
SIF10	When children have been identified at risk of CSE, actions need to be progressed in a timely manner to ensure that planning is robust and risk addressed.	<p>Comprehensive records are held and shared between agencies to help and protect children and young people.</p> <p>Staff are clear about their accountabilities in relation to adopting high professional standards in relation to supporting children vulnerable to the risks associated with CSE.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MASE arrangements effectively target the most vulnerable to CSE Agency, Parent and Child attendance at MASE meetings increase. Action plans are progressed in a timely way and actions are followed up more frequently. 	CSE workspace is moved to become part of LCS	April 2020	Information Services Programme Manager	Green	Green
			Put in place a minimum practice standards policy in relation to responding to children vulnerable to exploitation.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation	Grey	
			Children experiencing or at risk of exploitation receive support from an expert multi-agency team	September 2019	Head of Service Front Door and Targeted Early Help	Green	
			MASE arrangements effectively target the most vulnerable to CSE	August 2019	Head of Service Front Door and Targeted Early Help	Green	

Priority 6 – Performance and Quality Assurance

Strategic Responsibility: Steven Gauntley

Why are we focused on this?

The children and young people of Sandwell deserve high quality support and intervention. The focus of any children's services must be to deliver high quality services that reduce risk and vulnerability and provide support interventions that create opportunities for children and young people to be safe and thrive. In Sandwell, we want to deliver excellent and effective practice which firmly places children at the centre of everything we do. We will use our Quality Assurance systems and frameworks to create a structure to enable a shift in culture to deliver high quality practice in an efficient and effective service.

What we will do

- Develop a culture of improvement that creates opportunities for reflection, learning and improvement
- High quality performance reporting at all levels to demonstrate improvement and areas for improvement
- Performance and Quality Assurance information translates to improved front line practice
- Consistently good practice that ensures children and young people experience better outcomes, which are timely and aspirational
- Performance and QA information promotes efficient and effective services

How we will do this

- Create a culture of high support high challenge
- Develop a framework for performance and QA activity with a tenacious focus on learning and improvement
- Embed the 'Beyond Auditing' framework.
- Maintain a programme of scrutiny and analysis of performance and QA activity for key stakeholders
- Involve children and young people in QA activity
- Work with partners to understand their performance and QA information
- Review and update procedures that are accessible to workers and support their development

What will good and better look like

- QA and performance activity demonstrates that we are providing consistently good practice that promotes positive outcomes for children
- Performance and QA information demonstrates efficient and effective use of resources
- The child's voice and experience is clearly heard throughout practice and is driving planning and decision making
- Workers are highly skilled and knowledgeable which manifests itself in their practice
- Workers and partners are ambitious for children

Priority 6 – Performance and Quality Assurance

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
SIF14	Managers to put in place and embed a framework for continual practice improvement.	<p>Develop a culture of improvement which creates and facilitates a range of opportunities for reflection, learning and improvement.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall performance and quality is showing a trajectory of improvement. Staff and managers attend and are prepared for performance board meetings. Teams who have had the benefit of Beyond Auditing are showing improved practice in the areas covered. Learning from a range of feedback is used as the basis of continued improvement, and feeds into learning and development. 	Learning and development hub framework will be developed and implemented.	July 2020	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			'Beyond Auditing' Framework to be developed which will undertake team based auditing and diagnostics alongside workers and teams	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Improvement Consultant		
			Promote a culture and system which facilitates a multi-agency approach to scrutinising practice	December 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Develop systems that involve children and young people in QA activity in a meaningful way.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Develop the safeguarding and quality assurance service as the engine that drives practice improvement via the coordination of QA activity, feedback from complaints and feedback from IRO activity	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Quality and Performance		
MV5	Ensure there is a consistency of approach in the auditing of work, and a shared understanding of practice quality.	<p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audits are being undertaken frequently and by a consistent group of managers Audits are being completed in a timely way to ensure enough time for 'learning' for practitioners Moderated audits show fewer 'changes' in audit judgement 	Ensure audits are being undertaken frequently and consistently by all social care managers	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			The Beyond Auditing team continues to provide targeted support to managers in their audit activity to ensure a consistent approach to auditing activity	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Ensure there is a training programme for auditors that promotes consistency	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Ensure practice guidance for auditing is in place, and auditors have a shared sense of 'what good looks like'	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Ensure that audits are moderated and feedback from moderation is used for the development of auditors.	September 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Ensure a consistency of moderation through dip sampling moderated audits	September 2019	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
SIF15	Ensure that the wealth of performance data available is supporting in identifying and addressing practice deficits	<p>Implement a system of high quality performance reporting at all levels</p> <p>Ensure that Performance and QA information translates to front line practice and is used as a critical tool in driving practice improvements</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and Managers are accessing their performance information and evidencing its use in team meetings / supervisions. Staff and Managers are preparing well for performance boards and can articulate their teams / service performance, exceptions and mitigations. 	Ensure regular performance reporting and analysis for key stakeholders is efficient and sufficient for front line staff, front line and middle managers, senior managers, the local authority, Trust and Improvement board and SCSP. Ultimately to produce more interactive performance information as live as possible.	December 2019	Performance and Systems Lead		
			Agree and implement a programme of scrutiny and analysis of performance and QA activity for staff and key stakeholders	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		

Priority 7 – Partnerships

Strategic Responsibility: Tara Malik

Why are we focused on this?

Strong and effective partnerships are critical when transforming and improving children's services. Shared visions and values alongside a joined-up approach to tackling issues is fundamental if partnership approaches are to succeed. Many of the issues that were identified by Ofsted during their inspection involved the effectiveness of partnership working. Therefore, partners will need to commit to working with children's services in making the necessary improvements that seek to drive significant improvements in practice.

What we will do

- Improvement Board will hold SCT and partners to account for their part in improving outcomes for children in Sandwell
- Agreed shared vision, values, goals and priorities to inform a partnership strategy across Sandwell's children's services
- A clear commitment from all partners to making the necessary improvements identified within the improvement plan.
- Improved multi-agency understanding, confidence and skills in critical areas of safeguarding
- The co-ordination and sharing of key information and intelligence to facilitate a better understanding of critical issues, e.g. CSE
- Collective investment across services in shared priorities and planning

How we will do this

- Engage key partners and stakeholders in developing a shared culture, vision, values and strategy for the children of Sandwell.
- Work with partners in better understanding thresholds/application to promote a clear understanding of the levels of support and response required
- Agree and implement the required level of support required by partners to drive the improvement plan
- Review/develop a multi-agency training programme that seeks to strengthen safeguarding practices

What will good and better look like?

- Audits evidence rigour in multi-agency working arrangements which significantly reduce risk and vulnerability to children
- The local profile of communities is well understood, targeted support initiatives are deployed by partners when risks emerge
- Increased confidence in local safeguarding policies and procedures
- Thresholds are understood and embedded and children receive the appropriate level of support

Priority 7 – Partnerships

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
O2	Work with the Council to support the establishment of a strategic children's partnership across Sandwell to better inform all agencies about the needs of the most vulnerable children, including those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, so that agencies work effectively with these children.	Partners and key stakeholders are engaged and confident in joint working arrangements and protocols Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance at and contribution to key boards by a wider range of partners. Strategic vision is translated into operational activity that achieves this vision. 	Establish with partners a Children and Young People's Commissioning Partnership chaired by the Council	September 2019	Director of Children Services	Green	Green
			Review of the JSNA and commissioning arrangements in order that strategic partners are informed about the needs of the most vulnerable children in Sandwell and that interventions appropriately target identified areas of need.	September 2019	Director of Children Services		
SIF12	Address with partners the issue in relation to threshold application when accessing CAMHS provision resulting delays in accessing therapeutic support.	Children and Young people receive timely support from key professionals when concerns are being raised about their emotional wellbeing. Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More children and young people known to SCT can access therapeutic support and in a more timely way. 	Work in partnership with health commissioners and local NHS providers to review mental health needs of care leavers and implement improved access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and wider support	September 2019	Director of Children Services NHS representative	Yellow	Yellow
SIF13	Work with partners to improve referral information to ensure that it is clear and sufficiently detailed and that Thresholds are understood and firmly embedded.	Partners better understand thresholds/application and support to promote a clear understanding of the levels of support and response required Improved multi-agency understanding, confidence and skills in critical areas of safeguarding Impact Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater percentage of Contacts that are accepted as a referral are done so within 24 hours The distribution of referral outcomes become more in line with our comparators The percentage of Single Assessments that have the outcome of 'No Further Action' becomes more in line with our comparators Fewer children are subject to a re-referral 	Work with the SCSP to review the current threshold document and better understand its application, and relaunch with partners.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation	Grey	Green
			Agree policy and practice with health partners to address issues in relation to late or absent referrals resulting in delayed interventions.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Front Door Services in conjunction with the SSCB		

Priority 8 – Voice and Experience of the Child

Strategic Responsibility: Steven Gauntley

Why are we focused on this?

This priority is central to the improvement plan as children's voices should thread through all the priorities. The importance of capturing and understanding children's voice and experience is fundamental in ensuring that children are effectively supported and safeguarded. It is critical that services working with children create an environment of trust to enable them to articulate their views in order that they are instrumental in informing and influencing decision making and planning. Furthermore, feedback from children and young people is essential in shaping services and is a shared value across the partnerships and a central element of practice. By putting children at the heart of everything we do this will facilitate better services, better outcomes and better futures for the children of Sandwell.

What we will do

- We will make sure children have a voice and influence in their own plans, and are informed of their rights
- We will embed a culture of co-designing services around the voice of the child and involve them at every level
- We will listen to children and young people's feedback, we will learn from their experiences and we will care about what they have to say and follow up on their feedback
- We will invest in our children and young people to ensure they have the very best opportunities
- We will ensure that our children are able to influence Sandwell's wider partnership arrangements

How we will do this

- We will be relentless in the delivery of our participation strategy, which is ambitious and aspirational
- A rigorous framework behind the strategy will deliver tangible outcomes across the service
- We will provide bespoke 'How Can I Help You' training on capturing children's voices and experiences in social work practice and embed tools for direct work with children
- We will create a role for Young Consultants, who will meaningfully contribute to service design
- We will ensure that we have processes across the Trust that capture and consider the child's voice at every opportunity
- We will continue to ensure the role of the IRO is instrumental in ensuring that the voice of the child is heard within their own care planning

What will good and better look like?

- We will be accredited as a flagship organisation under the National Youth Agency's 'Hear by Right' scheme
- Our children will tell us that they feel heard, are making their own decisions where appropriate and they know that if they give us feedback we will act on it
- Everyone within the Trust recognises their role in hearing and acting on the child's voice, and are ambitious for them
- Children benefit from a consistent social worker, who has been able to develop a meaningful relationship
- Social workers have a wide range of tools and approached to engage children and are skilled in using them

Priority 8 – Voice and Experience of the Child

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
O17	The analysis of complaints should include those made by children and a log should be kept of informal resolutions of issues of concern to children to better inform the local authority of themes and trends.	<p>We will be tenacious at improving arrangements for involving and empowering children and young people across children's services.</p> <p>Learning from children's complaints and commendations will support us in improving services.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater percentage of complaints are resolved within the statutory timescales. All children's complaints are known and are followed up by the participation team in a more timely way. Learning from complaints contributes to service design, improvement and strategic planning. 	The monitoring and tracking of complaints to be reviewed and processes put in place which ensure complaints are appropriately recorded and monitored.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Director of Strategy		
			Actions and resolution from children's complaints will be analysed with clear learning outcomes.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Complaints Manager		
			Learning from complaints to be discussed at monthly learning and development meetings where learning from QA activity and complaints information informing staff learning and development.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Complaints Manager		
			The complaints team to provide a monthly report to senior managers with analysis on the themes and resolutions to children complaints. This will be disseminated across all services to inform service delivery.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Complaints Manager		
			Strengthen the role of the IRO to ensure that they are advocating and promoting feedback and challenge supporting children and young people in resolving complaints.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation		
			Mapping exercise to be undertaken to understand how feedback is currently captured across the service.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Complaints Manager		
			Undertake a review led by children and young people in relation to how we can improve and better capture the voice of the child in practice and strategic planning.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Partnerships and Engagement Manager		
SIF11	Children need to be seen and seen alone during visits and social workers and key professionals to be equipped with the skills to undertake meaningful direct work with children and young people and participate in their reviews.	<p>Ensure that children and young people can participate in and lead their meetings where appropriate and are directly involved in their assessment and care planning arrangements.</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More children attend their reviews / meetings. Children's voice is more evident in planning for them. There is more evidence of direct work on file Audit findings in the category 'child's voice' and 'Impact on the child' improves to RI or better. 	Review the support, research, training and tools available for staff, (particularly ASYE's) in relation to supporting them to deliver high quality direct work with children.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Workforce Development Manager		
			Following the review ensure that there is a robust plan in place to address the training needs of workers undertaking direct work with children	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Workforce Development Manager		
			IRO Service in conjunction with children and young people to produce a protocol on how they will actively engage children and young people in the CP/LAC review process	See Impact Workbook for Targets	Operations Manager QAS		
			Ensure that staff working with disabled children are equipped with the skills to effectively communicate with children in innovative ways.	December 2019	Head of Service, Care Management		
OP3	Create and implement a participation strategy to ensure that children are afforded the opportunity to contribute not only to their own plans, but to all aspects of service delivery.	<p>We will have achieved the National Youth Agency 'Hear by Right' accreditation.</p> <p>We will be routinely asking questions of young people and they will tell us their views in a range of ways.</p> <p>Young people will be fully aware of their rights and opportunities.</p> <p>Young consultants programme will be fully rolled out and providing active challenge to services</p> <p>Impact Measures:</p>	Create a participation strategy in conjunction with young people across Sandwell	July 2019	Partnerships and Engagement Manager		
			Implement actions arising from the participation strategy	April 2020	Partnerships and Engagement Manager		

Ref	Area of Improvement	How will we know we have improved?	Action	Target Date	By Who	RAG Phase 1	RAG Phase 2 (Impact)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be an increased footprint of the 'Child's Voice' throughout their records. • There will be an increase in feedback from young people through formal and informal channels • We will respond to young people's feedback in an appropriate and timely manner 					

Appendix 1 – List of Improvement Areas

Ref	Ofsted Recommendation SIF 2017
OR1	Improve management oversight and decision-making across all services to ensure that needs and risks are fully addressed and that assessments, plans and interventions are appropriate. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O2	Ensure the establishment of a strategic children’s partnership across Sandwell to better inform all agencies about the needs of the most vulnerable children, including those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, so that agencies work effectively with these children.
OR3	Ensure that assessments are regularly updated, and the authors rigorously consider risks and take account of children’s histories, wishes and feelings, and diversity to inform planning and provision of services. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR4	Improve the quality, delivery and review of plans across all service areas to meet the needs of children and ensure that they are not subject to drift or delay. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR5	Ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview so that risks are analysed to inform future plans and identify wider patterns and activity. Review with the current provider its approach to young people when arranging an interview, to ensure that refusals are kept to a minimum. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR6	Ensure that permanence plans for all children looked after and those for whom adoption is being considered are clear, systematically tracked and monitored in order to reduce delay. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR7	Ensure that 16- and 17-year-old homeless young people gain a full understanding of their options and the benefits of becoming looked after. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.

OR8	Ensure that multi-agency core groups and child in need meetings are held within timescales and drive plans forward. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O9	Increase the number of foster carers to meet the varied needs of children looked after.
O10	Review commissioning documents to ensure that commissioning intentions are fully informed by detailed plans, in order to achieve those intentions.
OR11	Encourage and promote education, employment and training to ensure that care leavers develop skills to assist in their independence. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR12	Develop links with adult mental health services to ensure that care leavers' health needs continue to be met when they move from children's services. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O13	Develop the provision of emergency accommodation to prevent care leavers' use of hotels.
OR14	Ensure that timely and good-quality life story work is developed for children to help them to understand what has happened in their lives, and that life story books and later life letters are provided at the time when a child moves to their adoptive family. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O15	Improve the quality of child permanence reports in order that children and adopters have a full and accurate picture of the child's birth family and history, and understand the reasons for adoption.
O16	Ensure that the adoption panel meets its quality assurance function by regular feedback and meetings with the agency regarding the quality of social work reports and practice.
O17	The analysis of complaints should include those made by children and a log should be kept of informal resolutions of issues of concern to children to better inform the local authority of themes and trends.

Children's Commissioner Recommendations

C1	Increase the social care workforce to ensure that caseloads are manageable across the service.
C2	Ensure that there is the required management capacity for appropriate oversight and direction of casework and that all staff have supervision at the required frequency.
C3	Put in a sustainable solution to the front door to ensure that children and families receive timely assessments to the required quality.
C4	Ensure all children in need, children on a child protection plan and looked after children have an up to date plan focussed on outcomes and that children on caseload are visited at the required frequency by social workers.
C5	Address the deficits in the provision of computer equipment, business support and accommodation so that social workers are appropriately supported in high quality practice (Completed therefore no further actions required)
C6	Put in place effective communication systems which connect senior management with practice and ensure that staff concerns are swiftly addressed.
C7	Strengthen the approach to attraction, recruitment and retention to make Sandwell Council an employer of choice within the region and reduce the over dependence on agency and newly qualified staff.

Single Inspection Framework 2017 – Service Recommendations

S1	Improve the educational attainment of looked after children supported by detailed and meaningful PEPs.
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S2	Ensure that fosters carers are clear about their delegated responsibilities and are furnished with sufficient, timely information about children in order that they can make informed decisions.
S3	Address capacity within IRO caseloads to ensure that they can effectively challenge weak practice or delays in progressing good quality plans.
S4	Review of all external placements and all placements with parents, S20 arrangements to ensure that children are living in homes which are safe and promote the best possible outcomes.
S5	Review the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Private Fostering Arrangements.
S6	Ensure that case recording, chronologies and genogram are of a good standard, contemporaneous and used to understand the child experience and inform decision making
S7	Significantly strengthen the role of the LADO role in order that risk is responded to in a timely way.
S8	Ensure that actions developed at MARAC and MAPPA meetings result in timely and proportionate interventions.
S9	Awareness raising about child sexual exploitation needs a more focused and coordinated approach.
S10	When children have been identified at risk of CSE, actions need to be progressed in a timely manner to ensure that planning is robust and risk addressed.
S11	Children need to be seen and seen alone during visits and social workers to be equipped with the skills to undertake meaningful direct work with children and young people.
S12	Address with partners the issue in relation to threshold application when accessing CAMHS provision resulting delays in accessing therapeutic support.

S13	Work with partners to improve referral information to ensure that it is clear and sufficiently detailed.
S14	Managers to put in place and embed a framework for continual practice improvement.
S15	Ensure that the wealth of performance data available is supporting in identifying and addressing practice deficits

Monitoring Visit Outcomes

MV1	The purpose of legal meetings within the Public Law Outline should be clear, along with the minutes and outcomes so that social workers and parents know what their tasks and expectations are. Letters before proceedings should also provide sufficient detail for parents to know what the expectations are.
MV2	Pre-birth assessments are to be completed as soon as possible in order to provide support and plan interventions at the point a child is born.
MV3	Early permanence options are considered as part of children's care plans.
MV4	Ensure there is a single front door approach so that children and families experience a consistently good service at the point of referral.
MV5	Ensure there is a consistency of approach in the auditing of work, and a shared understanding of practice quality.
MV6	Supervision is consistently used as a tool for progressing plans and obtaining positive outcomes for children.

Fostering Compliance Notices

CN1	Regulation 11(a) - (Independent Fostering Agencies - Duty to Secure Welfare)
CN2	Regulation 12(1)(a)(b) - (Arrangements for the protection of children)
CN3	Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b) (Registered Person - General Requirements)

Fostering Inspection Recommendations

IFA 1	Ensure that financial and other support is provided to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child. Family and friends foster carers may require some services to be delivered in a different way, but there should be equity of provision and entitlement.
IFA2	Ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to the local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required.
IFA3	Ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. The information is retained on the confidential file, even after someone leaves the organisation, until the person reaches normal retirement age, or for ten years if this is longer.
IFA4	Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. This specifically relates to safer caring plans.
IFA5	Ensure that the fostering panel and decision-maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.
IFA6	Ensure that each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance.

IFA7	Ensure that the fostering service appoints either one or two vice chairs, being members of the fostering panel, who can act as chair if the regular chair is unable to chair a meeting or the office is vacant.
IFA8	Ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives.

Organisational Priorities

OP1	Ensure the efficient use of resources across the organisation.
OP2	Develop a robust Edge of Care Offer that prevents children from being placed in care should this be in their best interests.
OP3	Create and implement a participation strategy to ensure that children are afforded the opportunity to contribute not only to their own plans, but to all aspects of service delivery.