

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

**Monday 23 September, 2019 at 5.00 pm  
in Committee Room 1  
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Agenda**

(Open to Public and Press)

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Members to declare:-
  - (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
  - (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.
3. Minutes of previous meeting 22 July, 2019.
4. Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2018/19 and Improvement Plan
5. Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019 – 2020

Date of next meeting – 11 November, 2019.

**D Stevens**  
**Interim Chief Executive**

Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
Oldbury  
West Midlands

**Distribution:**

Councillors Singh (Chair);  
Councillors Preece (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Allen, Ashman, Carmichael, Chidley, Costigan, Z Hussain,  
McVittie, Phillips and Shackleton.

## Co-opted Members:-

Charlotte Ward-Lewis (Church of England Diocese representative)  
Vacant (Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative)  
Tahira Majid (Primary School Governor representative)  
Vacant (Secondary School Governor representative)

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

### **Apologies for Absence**

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

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

### **Declaration of Interests**

Members to declare:-

- (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.

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

**22<sup>th</sup> July, 2019 at 5.00 pm  
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Singh (Chair);  
Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Allen, Chidley, Z Hussain and McVittie.

**Apologies:** Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Costigan,  
Phillips and Shackleton;  
C Ward-Lewis and T Majid (Co-opted members).

**In attendance:** Chris Ward, Director of Education, Skills and  
Employment;  
Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health.

12/19 **Declaration of Interest**

Councillor Allen declared a personal interest at the meeting in relation to youth service provision as his son was an employee of Sandwell Council Youth Services.

13/19 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

14/19 **Education Services**

The Board received a presentation from the Director - Education, Skills and Employment to provide an update on Education Services in Sandwell.

The presentation highlighted the following: -

- the current structure in Education, Skills and Employment Directorate;
- the functions and key work of the three service areas:-

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- Learning Improvement included schools support commissioning, Post 16 learning and early years and childcare;
- Education Support Services included school organisation, attendance and prosecution, transport assistance, Sandwell residential education centres and business administration;
- Inclusive Learning included special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision, SEND early years, inclusion support, pupil inclusion and SEND business team.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions: -

### Learning Improvement:

- the percentage of Sandwell primary schools rated good or better by Ofsted ranges between 83% - 90% depending on the Ofsted inspection cycle and the point of the school year;
- secondary school performance was much improved and had increased from 43% to 75% of schools performance rated as good or better;
- academies do access additional support from the Local Authority, some support can be charged for, other universal services such as Special Educational Needs services were available;
- a specialist transition co-ordinator assisted school and pupil transfers, key stage 3 (KS3) transfers could cause the biggest issues for the student who were leaving a school where everyone knew everyone, into a place where they would need to settle in;
- there was an increase of new arrivals to Sandwell reported; many of these young people attended the Assessment Centre (STEPS). Many of the new arrivals to Sandwell wanted a place in the Smethwick area, which was putting a real strain on school places in the area;
- it was reported that many new arrivals to the UK seemed keen to learn and schools welcomed them;
- there were three Sandwell adult family learning centres (SAFL) in Sandwell to help with developing skills and learning. There was an interest in working with young mothers, females around the age of 30 - 40 and to focus on worklessness in Sandwell;
- there was an identified need to reduce the numbers of NEETS particularly in the age bracket 19-25;

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- there were over 98 pre-school providers delivering what children needed to prepare them for school and to get the best start in life.

**Education Support Services:**

- Sandwell Council was working closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to build sufficient school places in Sandwell. The birth rate had increased substantially in Sandwell a few years ago from 3,500 births to 5,000 per annum, this had recently levelled at 5,000 per annum, but the Council needed to build more schools to meet the requirements caused by the higher birth-rate;
- primary schools and places were more difficult to organise due to the infant class size legislation limiting children to 30 per class;
- in recent years the number of school admission appeals had increased, and it was a very busy time of the year trying to sort places for each child that suited the parents' and the children's needs. The Board was advised that high majority of parents were getting their first, second or third preference but that it was getting more difficult.
- The Government had not funded the 5% pupil place surplus that was required to ease the situation; Sandwell was nearly filling every school place in the Borough;
- the Board noted that the reputation of a school had an impact on the numbers of children that wanted to go there, or conversely, not wishing to go there. The Board was advised that the key to reducing school admissions appeals was to raise the standard of all schools to good and outstanding as it offers parents more choice;
- the specialist team that dealt with free school meals and the pupil premium had helped to draw down £14.8million of extra funding for schools and this was outstanding for a team of four people;
- the Authority also helped out with transport and uniform support; many Councils no longer provided this support;
- Older SEND children were being encouraged to travel independently and to be prepared for the transition to further education or work. The number of children transitioning to mainstream secondary schools depended on what was in their Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP), many children with autism could be managed in school and did not require a special school placement;

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- Sandwell maintained four outside education centres which had wide-ranging curriculum for younger children. Many other Local Authorities had disposed of their outdoor centres.

**Inclusive Learning:**

- Sandwell was supporting 2100 young people with EHCPs. This number had increased from 1200 in 2014 to 2100 in 2019. Consequently, the number of assessments and cost of placements had increased substantially, it was noted that one placement could cost up to £100,000;
- It was reported that the DfE was getting pressure to put more money into SEN departments;
- Sandwell Children's Trust was working alongside the Council to assist with diagnosis and needs assessment for children with SEND;
- assistance was given to young people excluded from a school or 'hard to place' to find a school place, their support needs were catered for, and they were helped back into education;
- primary school Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were temporary placements for some children, it was more difficult to manage children in Key stage 3 & 4 PRUs where pupil cases were often more complicated;
- children from PRUs were supported back into education, apprenticeships and university, success rates of these cases were monitored, and statistical data could be circulated to the Board;
- during the summer school holiday play services and some clubs had access to some school premises and facilities, but generally school premises were closed to community and other use.

The Board noted that the Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life was carrying out work relating to Care Leavers and that Education Services were working more closely with health care providers at the earliest opportunity to identify and work with pre-school children. Early identification of dyslexia and autism would enable EHCPs to be put in place for when children started in primary schools.

**Resolved** that the Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life be invited to a future meeting to present an update on her work priorities.



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15/19

**Child Health Services**

The Board received a presentation from the Director of Public Health which gave an overview of Child Health Services in Sandwell. She presented case studies to highlight what was working well in the Borough and to discuss what was not going well. The Board welcomed the reported high immunisation take up rate and that Sandwell had a lower than national average number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The Board heard that Sandwell had significantly higher than national average rates of child poverty, child obesity and social emotional and mental health needs in the secondary school population. Three quarters of Public Health spend was spent on the following:

- children's health;
- services and initiatives such as health visitors;
- maternity services;
- school readiness;
- clubs providing meals during school holidays;
- sexual health services;
- emotional support and wellbeing.

The services were making life more manageable for the children who had challenges in life and at home and the Board welcomed that young people were responding and showing good results in relation to improved self-esteem and self-confidence.

The Board was pleased to hear that a recent BBC programme 'Women's Hour' had spotlighted the work happening in Sandwell as national best practice and many more affluent local authorities were looking at what was happening in Sandwell as good practice.

The Board noted that often teachers did identify issues with young people in classrooms but that they needed more help in schools to be able to deal with wellbeing and mental health matters. The normal position would be for a school to report or refer an individual to mental health services for assessment.

The Board was advised that Sandwell was developing a Well Being Charter Mark which, although resource intensive, was really cost effective. The Director advised that it was unusual for a psychologist to be working closely with the schools, but that this was ground breaking work in Sandwell and it was recognised nationwide as good practice. The scheme had been running for one year, 93 schools

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were currently engaged with the programme and the others would be taking part soon. The Well Being programme was considered to be good practice, with elements coming from the Green Paper already contained in the programme.

The Board noted that some children in Sandwell were known not to attend school because they were being bullied by others for a variety of reasons. The period poverty campaign #GirlCodeSandwell was an example of how Sandwell schools were working to inform, support and help provide sanitary products for girls in schools. The Board noted that the programme was run by young people for young people, schools loved it, all schools had received a box with products that were replenished by donations. The aim was to provide free products to those that needed them and improve health education and awareness. The Council was also working with partner organisations such as Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals Foundation Trust to roll out the programme in Sandwell.

The Board noted that the SHAPE Programme was a corporate programme that had been in operation since December 2014. Initially the programme gave young people a voice and sought the views of young people in everything that Sandwell did - staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing. Since establishment, SHAPE had engaged with 25% of the population of 0-25 year olds and had engaged with 54% of primary schools, 94% of secondary schools and 57% of pupil referral units and special schools. The Board noted that the SHAPE forum met most Thursday nights and members highlighted that they wanted to attend a SHAPE meeting and to invite SHAPE members to a scrutiny meeting. The SHAPE programme was more than a consultation vehicle and that regular events and awareness sessions were arranged to educate and inform young people and that there were opportunities for young people to get involved.

The Board highlighted the need to promote the work they carried out through press releases and social media posts.

**Resolved**

- (1) that The Director of Public Health make arrangements for Scrutiny Board Members to visit the SHAPE forum and meet young people;

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- (2) that representatives of SHAPE be invited to attend a Scrutiny Board meeting to present its work programme.


(Meeting ended at 6.20 pm)

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**REPORT TO**

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

**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2019**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2018/19 and Improvement Plan
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Joyce Underhill, Lead Member, Best Start in Life
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Lesley Hagger <a href="mailto:Lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk">Lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk</a> 0121 569 8338

**DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That :**

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

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

## **2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030**

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

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

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

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

#### **4 THE CURRENT POSITION**

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

#### **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

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

#### **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.**

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

#### **7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

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

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

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

## **10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

## **11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

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

## **12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

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

## **13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

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

## **14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

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

**15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

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

**16 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 None

**17 APPENDICES:**

17.1 Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2018/19

17.2 Sandwell Improvement Plan

**Lesley Hagger**  
**Executive Director of Children's Services**





2018/19

## Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review



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- 49 **Section (h)** any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure;
- 50 **Section (i)** any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year;
- 51 **Section (j)** the contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance); and
- 52 **Section (k)** such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.

## Foreword

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

## Executive Summary

Sandwell Children's Trust went live in April 2018 as a new and distinct legal entity commissioned to provide children's social care services in Sandwell on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services, and has the aim of providing 'Good' services to our children and families' by 2022.

### Financial Context

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Improvement

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

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

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

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

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

### *Priority 1 - Leadership*

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

### *Priority 2 - Workforce*

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

### *Priority 3 - Practice*

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

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

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

### *Priority 5 - Exploitation*

- A greater understanding and more comprehensive infrastructure for tackling exploitation

### *Priority 6 –Quality Assurance*

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

### *Priority 7 – Partnership*

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

### *Priority 8 – Voice of the Child*

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

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

### **External Inspections**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Introduction

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

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

- Section (a)** the Trust's performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (b)** demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (c)** the Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (d)** the Improvement Plan (where applicable);
- Section (e)** the thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year;
- Section (f)** the outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (g)** the outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections;
- Section (h)** any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure;
- Section (i)** any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year;
- Section (j)** the contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance); and
- Section (k)** such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Our referrals

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

In 2018/19:

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

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

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

### Our children in Sandwell Children's Trust

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

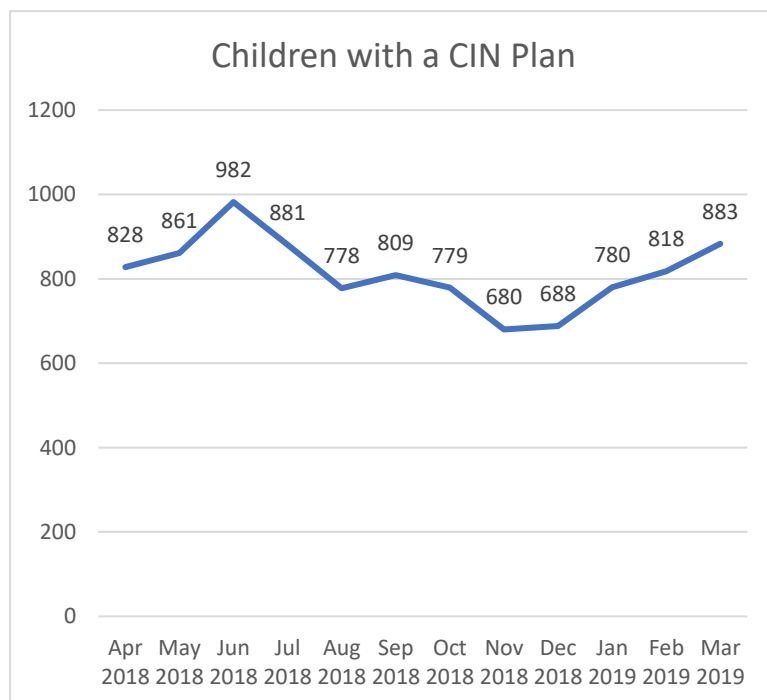
**Table 1 – Comparison with Statistical Neighbours**

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

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

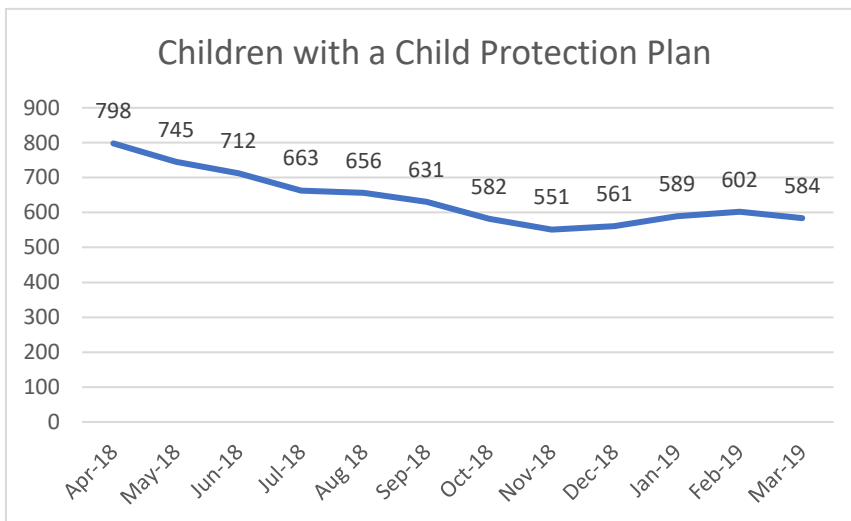
#### Children in Need

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

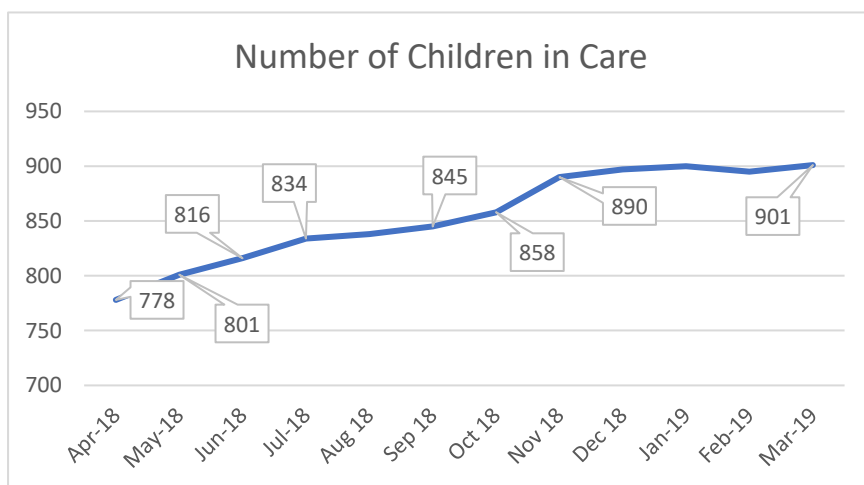


### Children with a Child Protection Plan

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



### Children in Care



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

### Demand for Staff

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

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

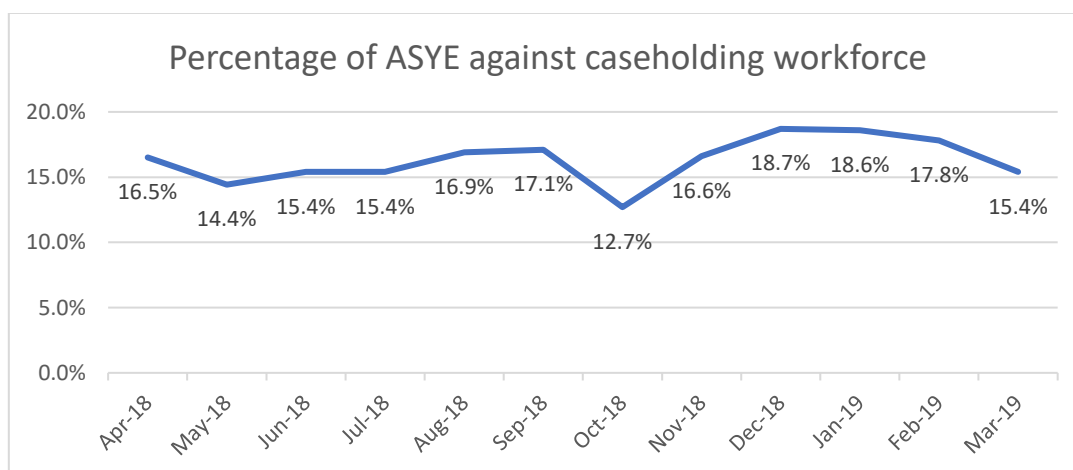
There are a range of models we can use to determine how many social workers we need to work with our families, some more complex than others. However, in conjunction with SMBC, we have a very simple calculation for this, which is:

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

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

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

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



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

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

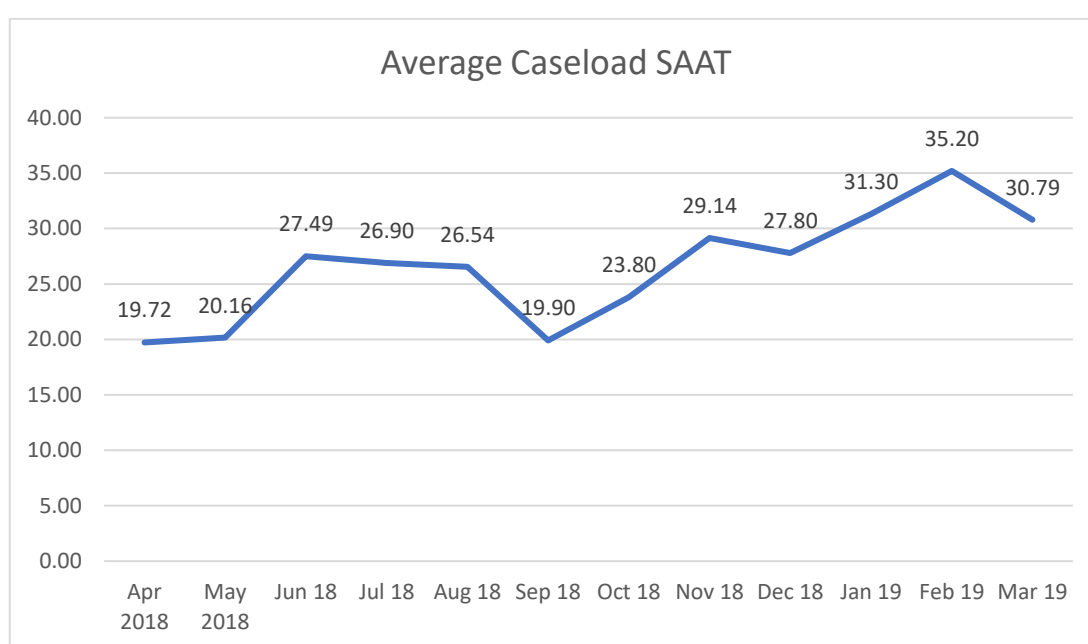
	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19
Total Social Workers	211.89	214.89	202.29	201.29	206.29	204.83	204.83	205.19	218.69	220.69	218.69	227.69
Total ASYEs	35	31	31	31	35	35	26	34	41	41	39	35
% Total ASYEs	16.5%	14.4%	15.4%	15.4%	16.9%	17.1%	12.7%	16.6%	18.7%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

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

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

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

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



**Table 3– Average Caseload SAAT**

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

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

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

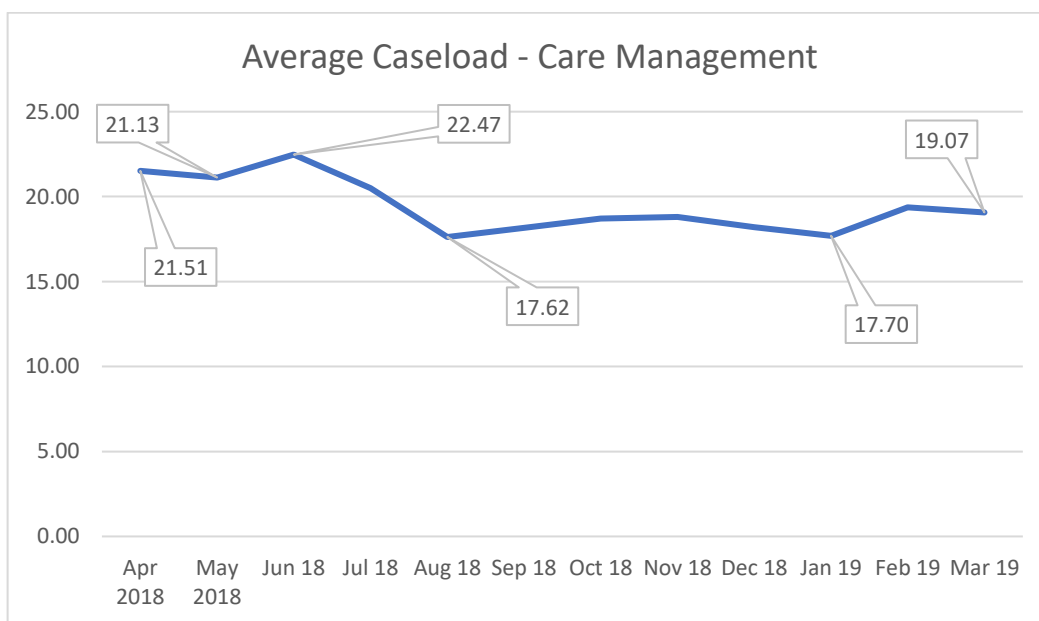
- It is expected that as the service improves, more single assessments will be completed within 25 working days where possible. Reducing the length of time assessments are open will reduce the number of cases on average.

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

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

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

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



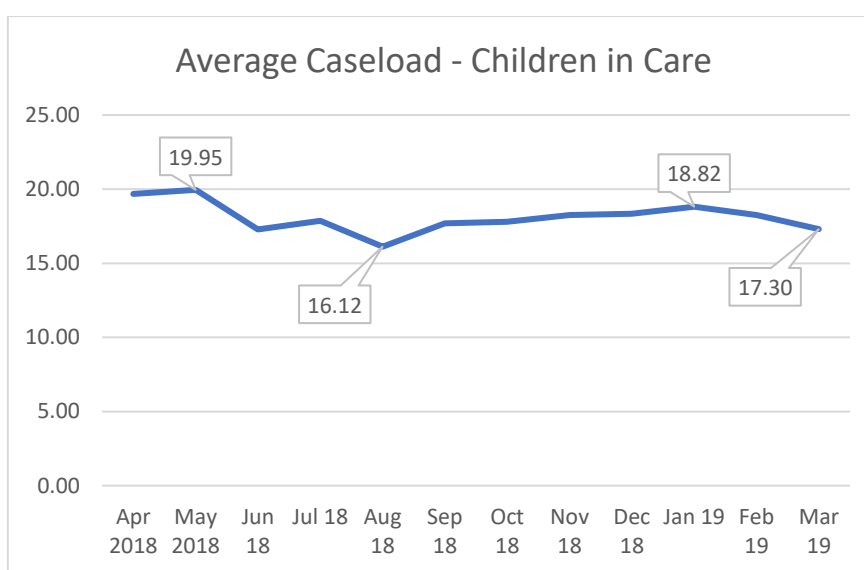
**Table 4 – Average Caseload Care Management and Children with Disabilities**

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

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

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

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



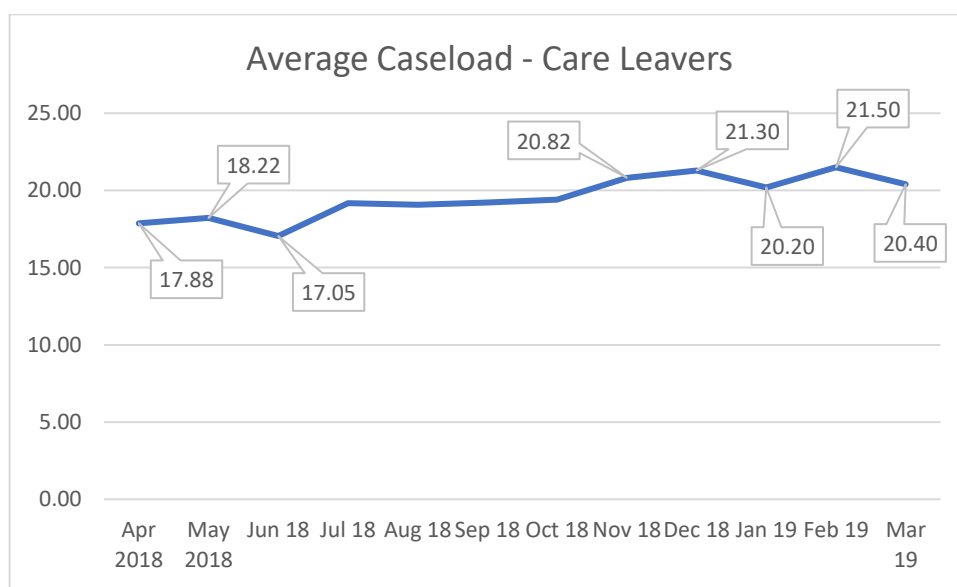
**Table 5 – Average Caseload Children in Care Team**

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



## Care Leavers

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



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

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

### *Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Invest to Save:

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

### Growing the Market:

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

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

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

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

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

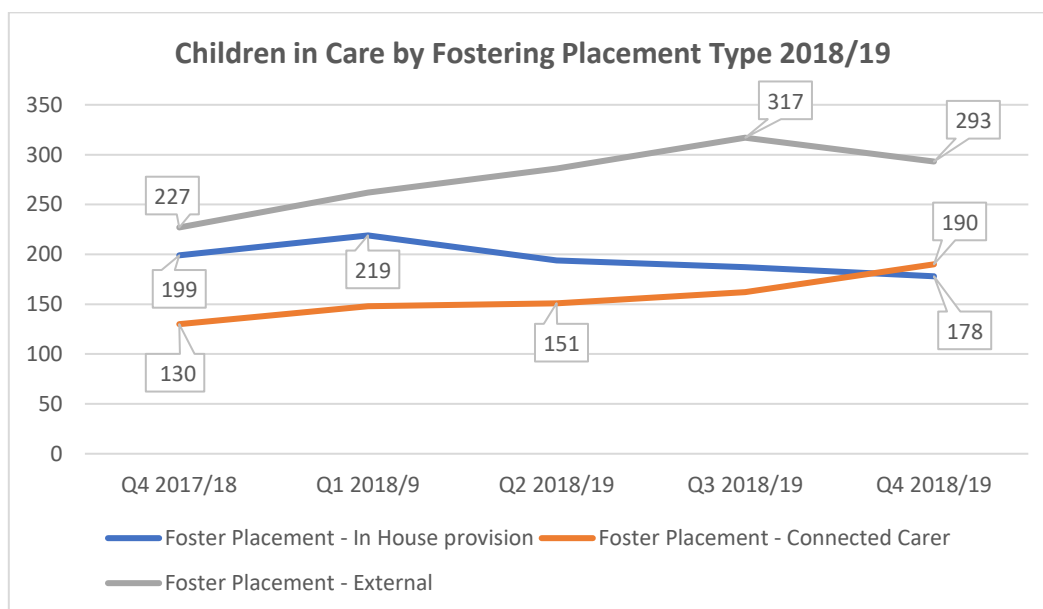
From a financial perspective, the following outlines our expenditure against budgets for Children in Care placements. It is clear to see that our demand for these placements has led to overspending in this area against our budgets.

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

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

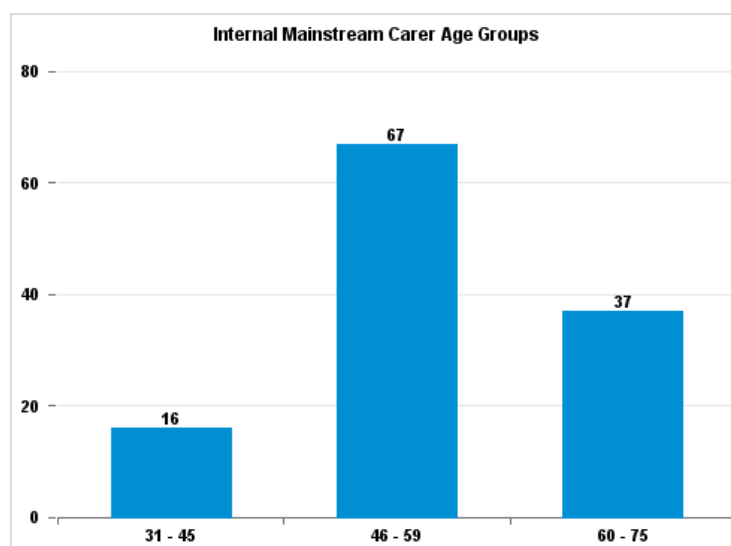
### Approved Foster Carers

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



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

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



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

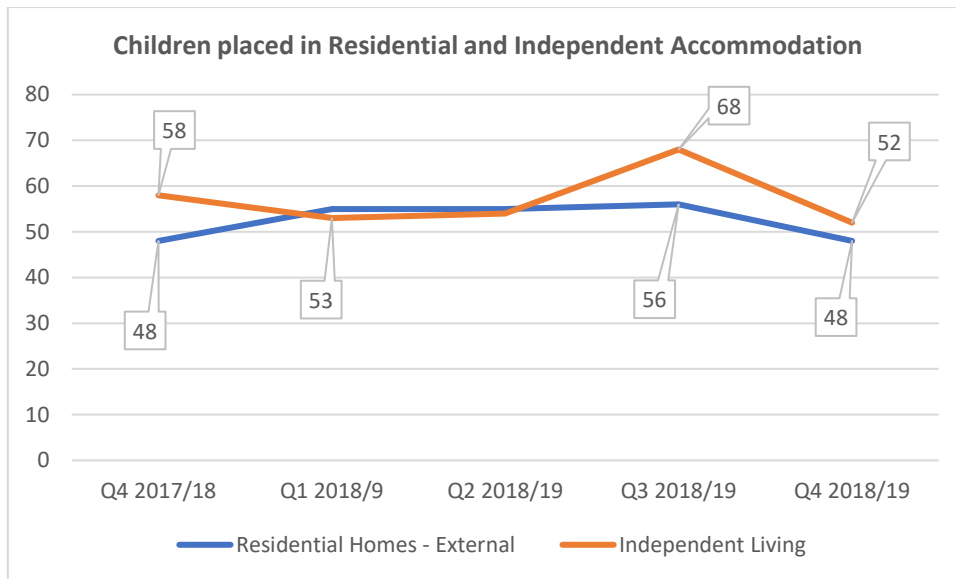
#### *Residential Placements*

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

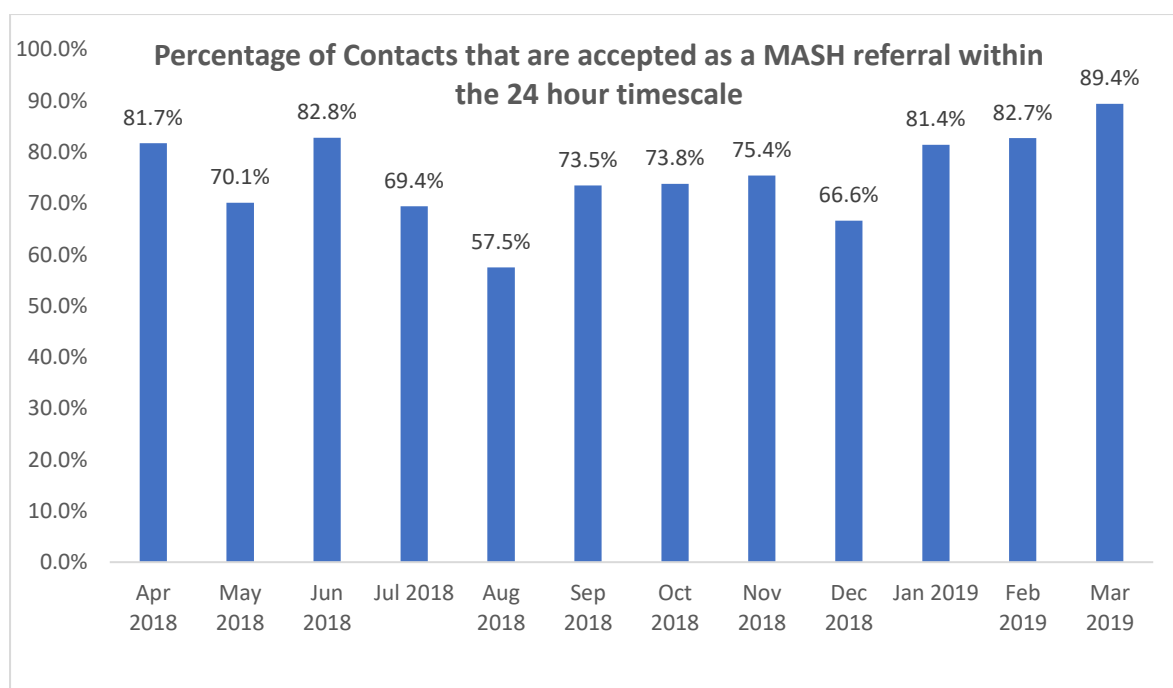
### PI1 - The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours

**Target: > 75%**

**Tolerance: > 65%**

**Failure: < 65%**

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



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

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

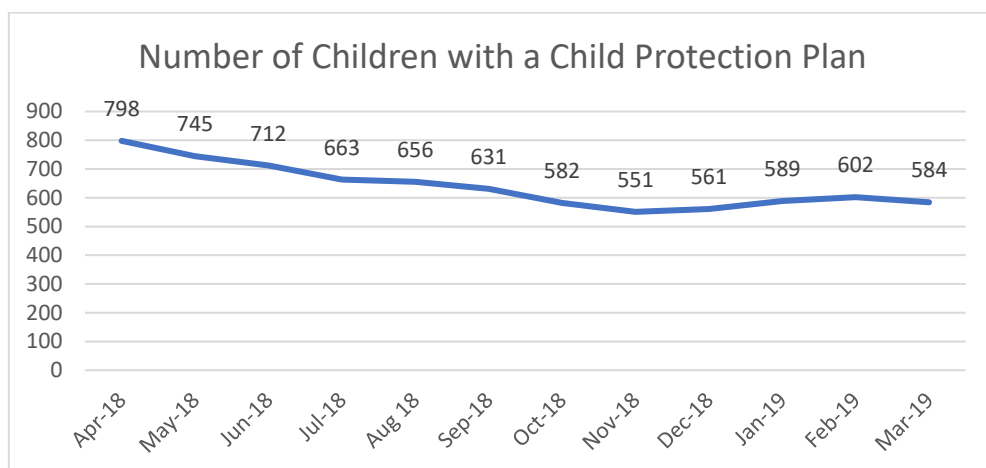
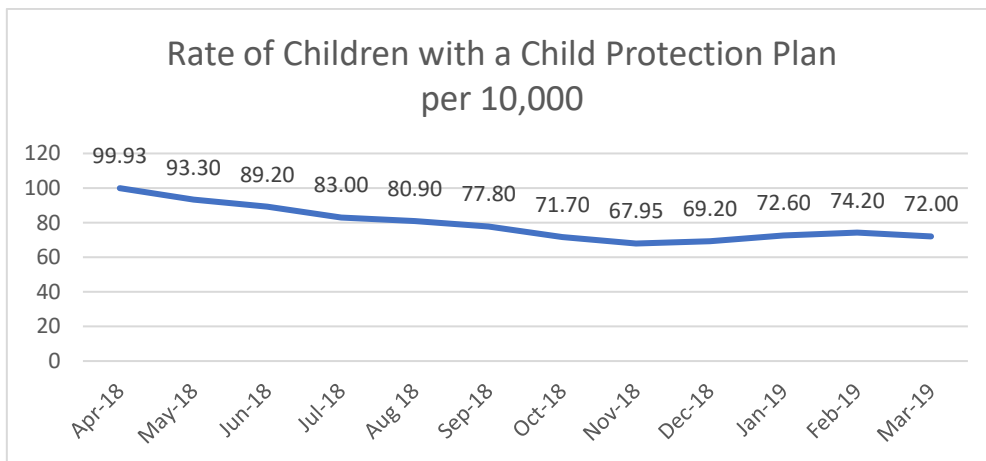
**Target: < 65 children per 10,000**

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

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

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

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



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



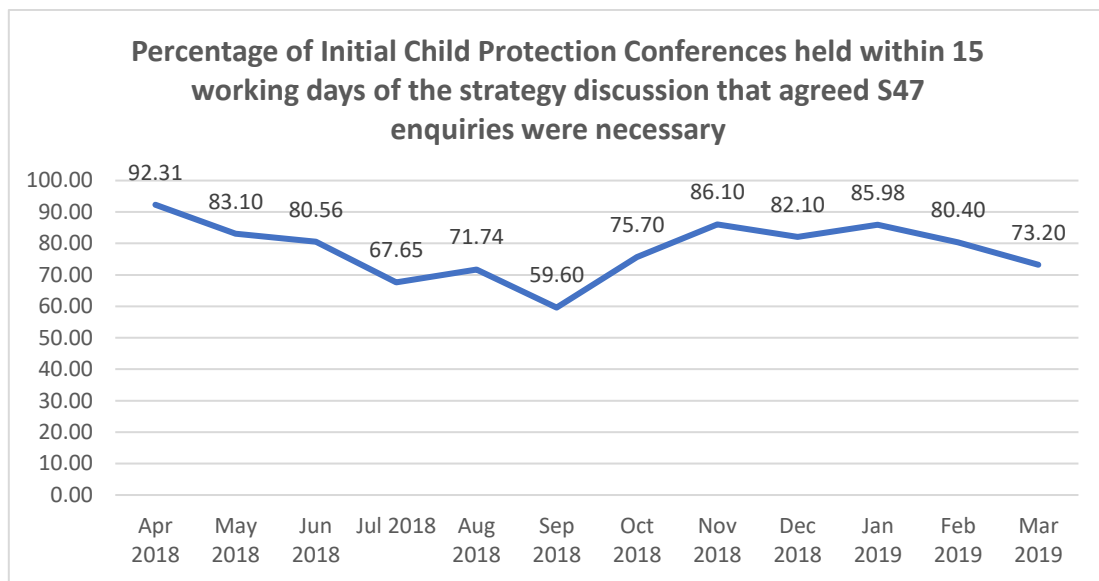
**PI3 – The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary.**

**Target: > 80%**

**Tolerance: >65%**

**Failure: < 65%**

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



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

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

**Target: > 85%**

**Tolerance: >75%**

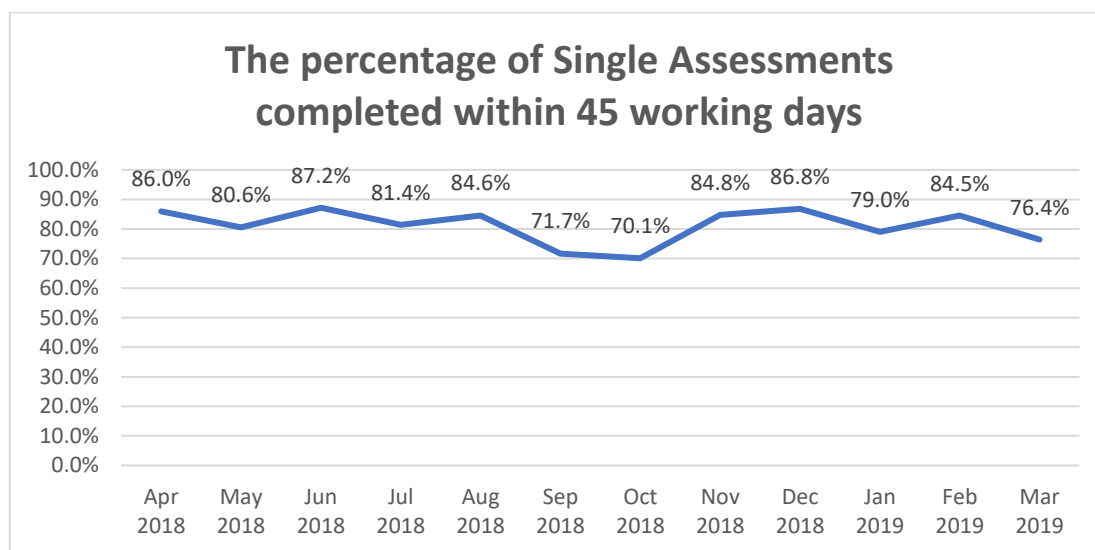
**Failure: < 75%**

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

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

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

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



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

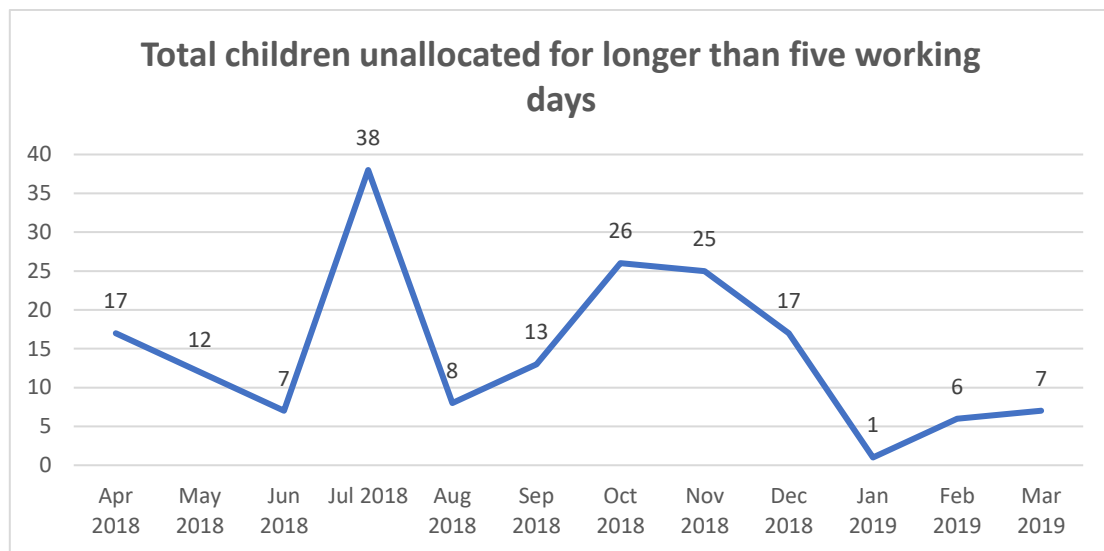
## PI5 - The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days

**Target: < 10**

**Tolerance: <30**

**Failure: >30**

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



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

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

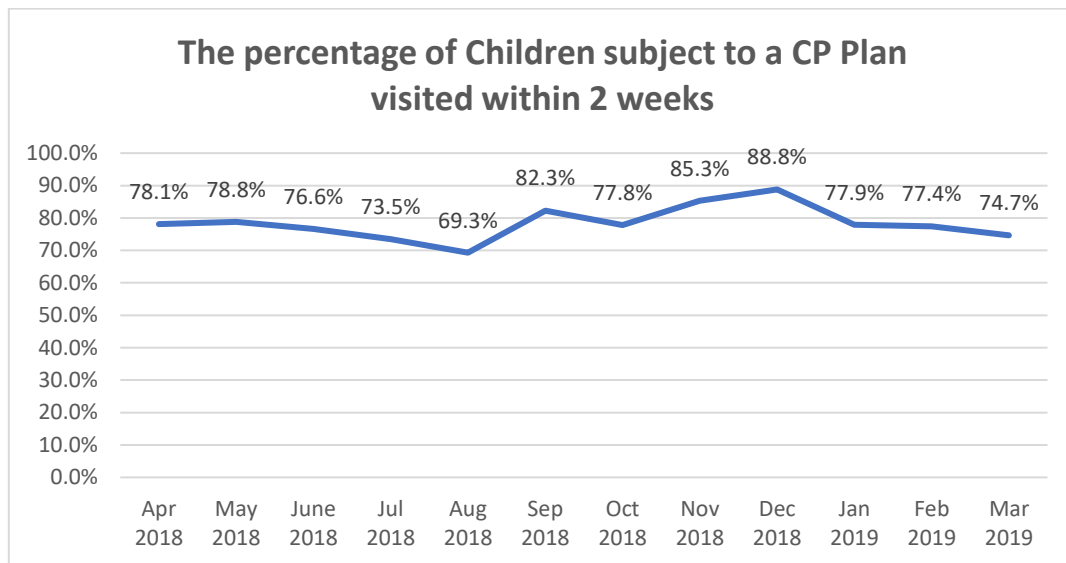
## PI6 - The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks

**Target: > 80%**

**Tolerance: >70%**

**Failure: < 70%**

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



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

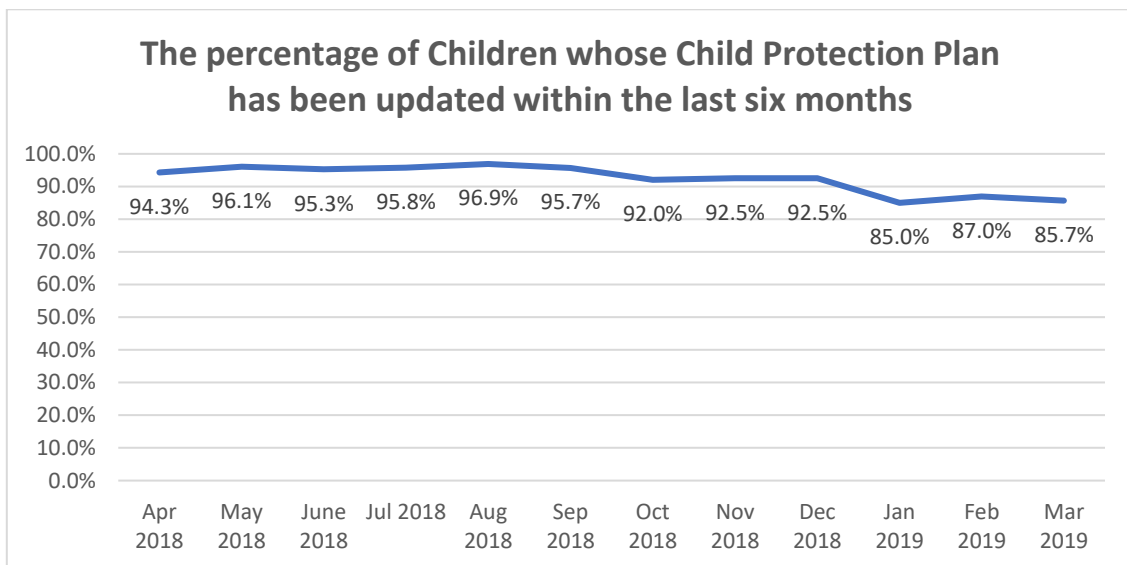
**PI7- The percentage of Children whose Child Protection Plan has been updated within the last six months**

**Target: > 95%**

**Tolerance: >85%**

**Failure: < 85%**

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



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

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

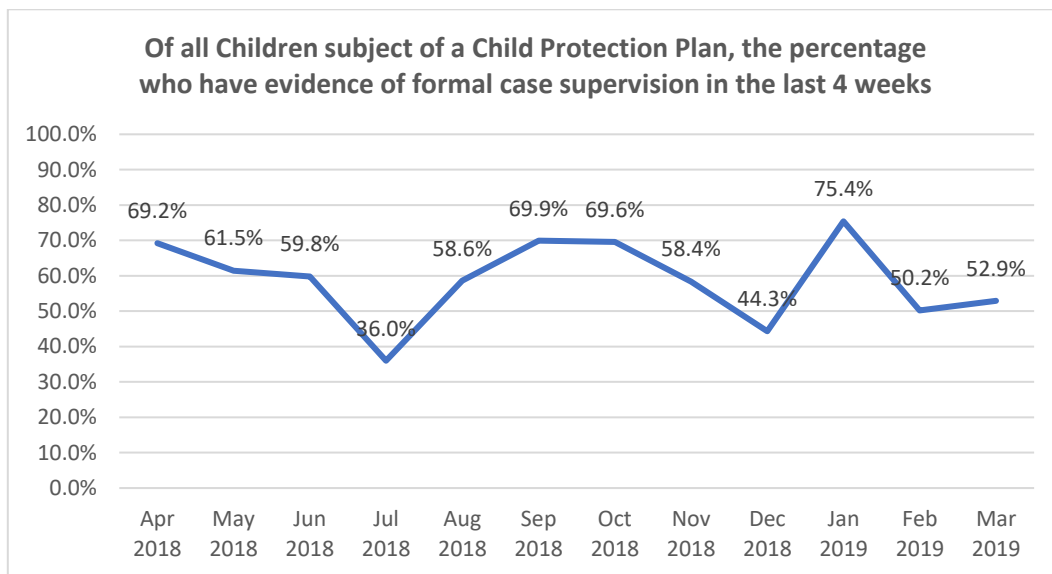
**PI8 – Of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the percentage who have evidence of formal case supervision within the previous 4 weeks**

**Target: > 65%**

**Tolerance: >50%**

**Failure: < 50%**

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



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

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

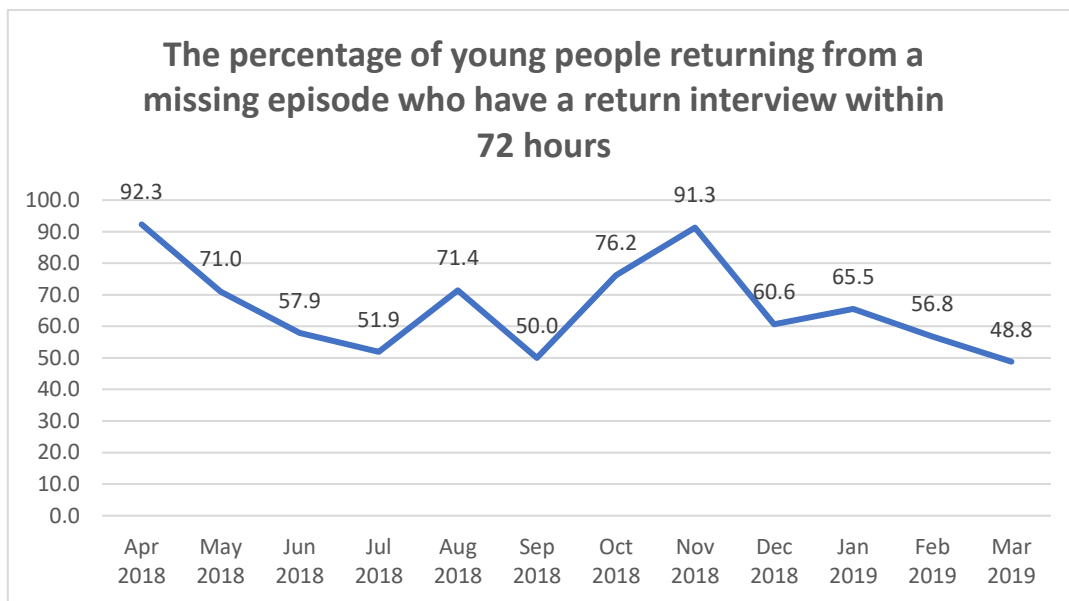
**PI9 - The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours**

**Target: > 70%**

**Tolerance: > 50%**

**Failure: < 50%**

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



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

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

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

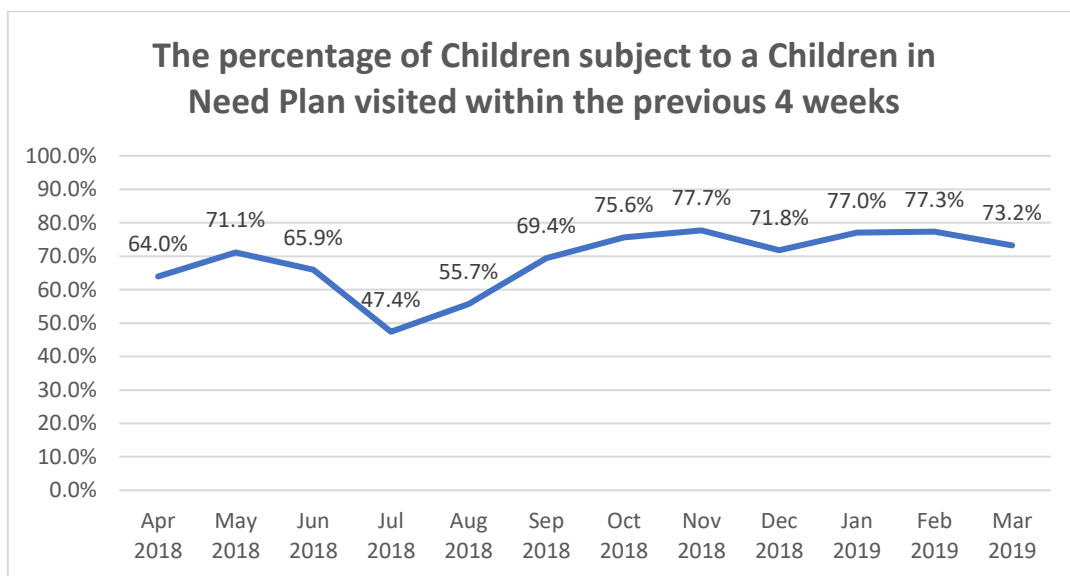
**PI10 - The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks**

**Target: > 73%**

**Tolerance: > 58%**

**Failure: < 58%**

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



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



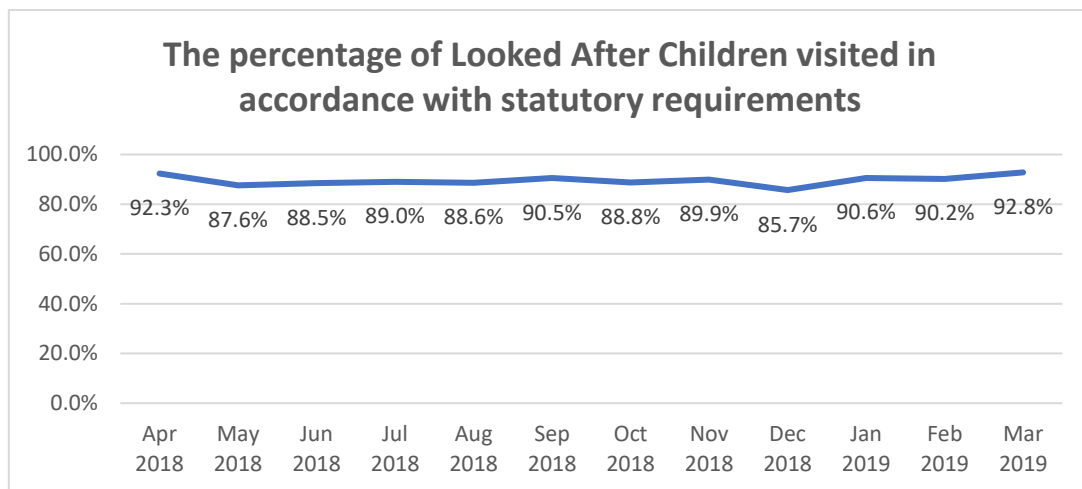
## PI11 – The percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements

**Target: > 90%**

**Tolerance: > 80%**

**Failure: < 80%**

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



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

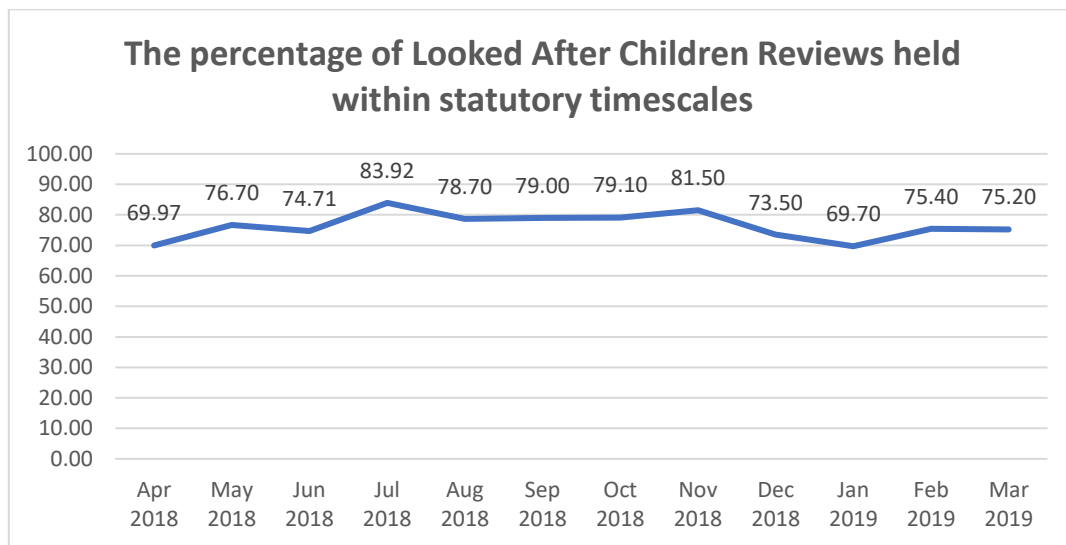
## PI12 - The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales

**Target: > 80%**

**Tolerance: > 70%**

**Failure: < 70%**

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



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

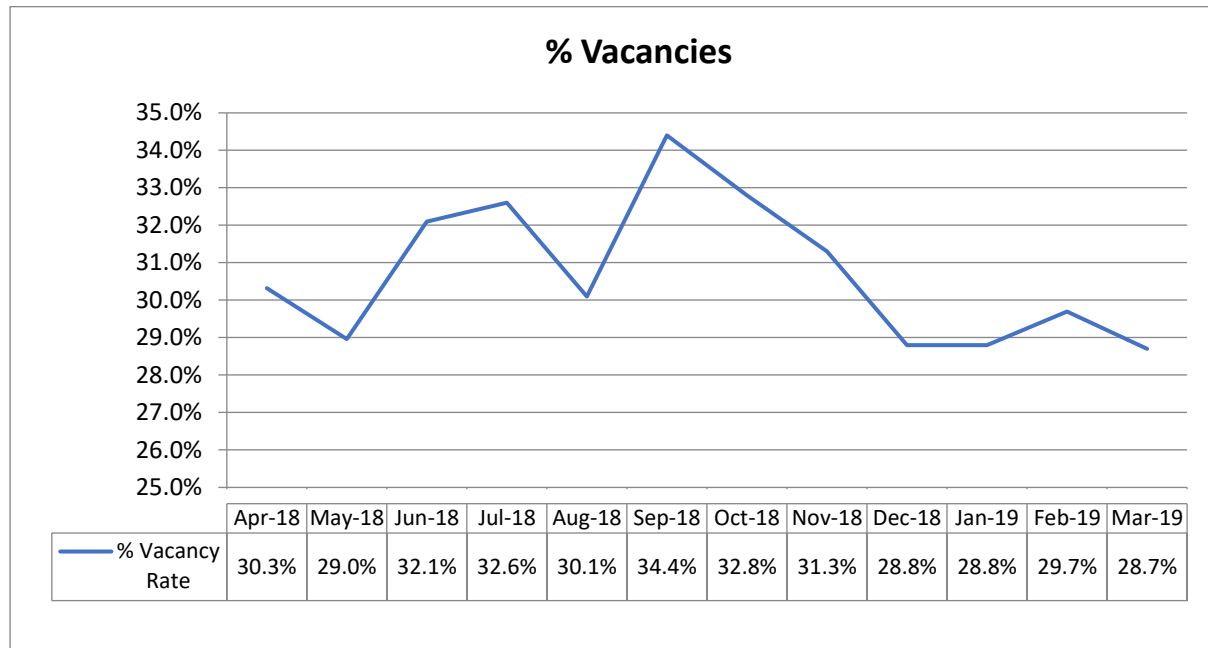
### PI13 - The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers

**Target: < 32%**

**Tolerance: <37%**

**Failure: > 37%**

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



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

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

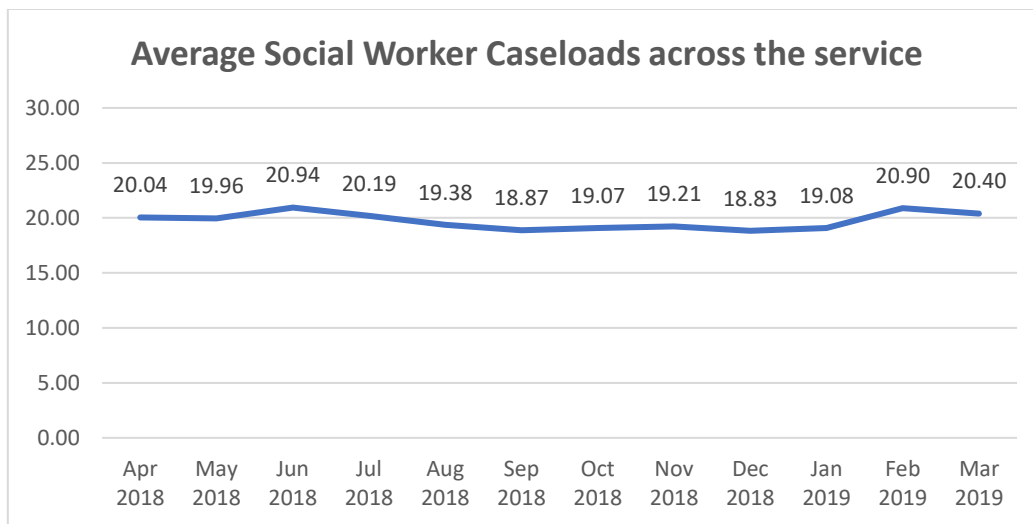
## PI14 - Average caseloads across the service

Target: < 18.5

Tolerance: <23%

Failure: > 23%

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



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

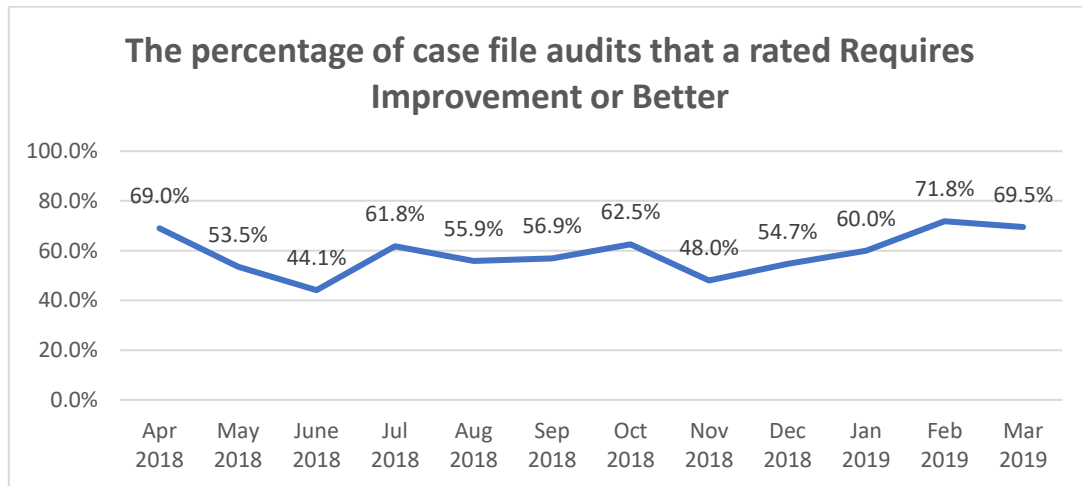
## PI15 - The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better

Target: > 55%

Tolerance: > 40%

Failure: < 40%

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



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

## Overall

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

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

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

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

## Section (d) - The Improvement Plan

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

### Quality Assurance and Auditing

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

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

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

Themes across all case file audits have been:

#### *What is working well*

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

#### *What we need to improve*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Surveys

### *Staff Survey*

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

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

However, staff expressed less satisfaction in the following areas:

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

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

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

Whereas the three areas they were least satisfied with were:

- Manageable case loads
- Learning Organisation
- Competitive rewards

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

## Children's Surveys

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our monitoring visits have been useful to us as a barometer of our improvement across the course of the year, and Ofsted have noted this. In September 2018, Ofsted noted improvements in the culture of the organisation, the focus of the leadership team and improvements in staff morale. Other feedback was that the quality of practice is too variable, with assessments and plans lacking rigour and interventions not timely enough. Ofsted positively recognised that the Trust continues to develop its understanding of frontline practice, through performance management, quality assurances and our direct involvement in services.

After their monitoring visit in January 2019, Ofsted said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Changes to Service Delivery Contract*

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

### *Changes to Support Services Agreements*

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

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

*Regional Adoption Agency*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# 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

# Document Control

<b>Organisation</b>	Sandwell Children's Trust	<b>Owner</b>	Sandwell Children's Trust Chief Executive
<b>Title</b>	Sandwell Improvement Plan	<b>Subject</b>	Improvement Plan
<b>Filename</b>	Sandwell Improvement Plan Refresh	<b>Protective marking</b>	ILO

<b>Date of Last Review</b>	<b>July 2019</b>
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Revision date	Editor	Version	Description of revision
23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2019	Chris Yates	1.0	Full Refresh of the Improvement Plan resulting in a brand-new document

Document distribution	Date Distributed
Sandwell Children's Trust Chair	
Sandwell Children's Trust Board	
Sandwell Children's Trust EMT	
SMBC Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services	
Lead Member for Children's Services	
Ofsted	
Chair of the Improvement Board	

Approver	Date Approved
Sandwell Children's Trust Chief Executive	
Sandwell Children's Trust Board	
Sandwell Improvement Board	

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## Foreword



**The Right Honourable Jacquie 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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
<b>SIF Inspection</b>	<a href="#">6 November 2017</a>	Children who need help and protection - <b>Inadequate</b> Children looked after and achieving permanence - <b>Inadequate</b> Adoption Performance - <b>Inadequate</b> Experience and progress of care leavers - <b>Requires Improvement</b> Leadership, management and governance – <b>Inadequate</b>
<b>Monitoring Visits:</b>	<a href="#">30 May 2018</a> <a href="#">5 September 2018</a> <a href="#">29 January 2019</a> <a href="#">16 April 2019</a>	No Judgements Given for Monitoring Visits
<b>Voluntary Adoption Agency Inspection</b>	<a href="#">8 January 2019</a>	Overall experiences and progress of service users - <b>Requires Improvement</b> How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - <b>Requires Improvement</b> The effectiveness of leaders and managers – <b>Requires Improvement</b>
<b>Independent Fostering Agency Inspection</b>	<a href="#">25 February 2019</a>	Overall experiences and progress of service users - <b>Inadequate</b> How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected - <b>Inadequate</b> The effectiveness of leaders and managers – <b>Inadequate</b>

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



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

# 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	On Track	On Track	C1	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	OR3	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	OR6	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	CN1	On Track	On Track	OR5	On Track	On Track	S14	On Track	On Track	O2	On Track	On Track	O17	Completed	On Track	
	O10	On Track	Not started	C2	On Track	On Track	OR4	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	OR7	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	CN2	Completed	On Track	S9	On Track	On Track	S15	On Track	On Track	S12	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	S11	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	On Track	
	C3	On Track	On Track	C7	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	OR8	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	O9	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	CN3	Completed	On Track	S10	On Track	On Track	MV5	On Track	On Track	S13	Completed	On Track	OP3	On Track	On Track	
	C6	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	On Track				C4	Completed	On Track	OR11	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	IFA1	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place													
	MV4	On Track	On Track				S3	Completed	On Track	OR12	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	MV1	On Track	On Track													
	MV6	On Track	On Track				S6	Completed	On Track	O13	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	MV3	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place													
	OP1	Completed	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place				S7	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	OR14	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place																
	OP2	On Track	Not started				S8	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	O15	On Track	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place																
							MV2	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	S1	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place																
										S2	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place																
										S4	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place																
										S5	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place	Not on track – Risks with mitigations in place																

# 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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater percentage of Single Assessments have Management Reviews at 10, 25 and 35 days</li> <li>A greater percentage of Child Protection Cases have evidence of Management Supervision within the previous 4 weeks</li> <li>A greater percentage of LAC and CIN Cases have evidence of Management Supervision within the previous 8 weeks</li> <li>A greater percentage of cases have evidence of Management Decision / Oversight on file in the previous 30 days</li> <li>Audit findings in the category of supervision and management oversight moves towards RI and Good</li> </ul>	Implement any changes resulting from the review of our leadership and management structure.	July 2019	SCT Chief Executive		
			Enable staff to understand their roles and responsibilities within the vision, how they connect and support the child's journey.	See Impact Workbook for Targets	SCT Chief Executive		
			Ensure the workforce knows it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to improvement.				
			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	Review commissioning documents to ensure that commissioning intentions are fully informed by detailed plans, to achieve those intentions.	<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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key performance of individual contracts improves</li> <li>Evidence of improved value for money</li> <li>Commissioning is targeted through an established evidence base</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater percentage of Contacts that are accepted as a referral are done so within 24 hours</li> <li>A greater percentage of Single Assessments are completed within 25 and 45 working days</li> <li>The distribution of referral outcomes become more in line with our comparators</li> <li>A greater percentage of Single Assessments have evidence of Management Reviews at 10, 25 and 35 days</li> <li>The percentage of Single Assessments that have the outcome of 'No Further Action' becomes more in line with our comparators</li> <li>A greater percentage of Early Help Assessments are completed within timescales</li> <li>A lesser percentage of children are subject to a re-referral</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff Survey shows an improvement in leadership satisfaction</li> <li>Feedback from staff results in tangible actions where appropriate</li> <li>Individual feedback from staff is known and on average is constructive and positive</li> <li>Practitioners Improvement Board feedback is constructive and positive</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will have reduced our overall expenditure across all budgets</li> <li>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</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> <li>We will have evidence that our Children in Care are placed appropriately</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social worker vacancies reduce</li> <li>Social worker permanent vacancies reduce</li> <li>Turnover rate of social workers reduces</li> <li>A greater percentage of the workforce is permanent (so a lesser percentage of the workforce is interim or agency)</li> <li>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</li> <li>A lesser percentage of staff are off work through sickness</li> </ul>	<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	Grey	Yellow
			<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	Grey	
			<p>Processes for 'Safer Recruitment', Clearances, Induction and Appraisals are robust and efficient</p>	June 2019	Director of Resources	Yellow	
			<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	Grey	
			<p>Develop a Learning Hub that ensures the Trust is delivering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-and post-qualifying programmes for prospective and qualified social workers</li> <li>A strong leadership and management programme</li> <li>Programmes that support the development of good practice for social workers</li> <li>A comprehensive Learning and Development programme for all staff working for the Trust</li> </ul>	September 2020	Director of Quality and Performance Head of Service, Practice and Social Work Innovation	Green	
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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of permanent managers in post increases</li> <li>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"> <li>Quality of supervision improves with more audits in this category rated as RI or better</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Implement all changes resulting from the Organisational Review</p>	July 2019	Director of Resources	Green	Green
			<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	Grey	
			<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	Grey	

## 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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance of Social Workers at Assessment Workshop sessions</li> <li>Outcomes of Audits in the category of 'Assessments' improves so that more are rated as RI or better</li> <li>Percentage of children with an assessment updated within six months, 12 months and over two years increases</li> <li>A greater percentage of Single Assessments with Management Reviews at 10, 25 and 35 days</li> <li>The percentage of completed assessments with the outcome 'No Further Action' becomes more in line with our comparators</li> <li>Average number of visits to Children during the life of the assessment increases</li> <li>A greater percentage of assessments are completed within timescales</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater percentage of CIN, CP, LAC, TAF and Risk Management Plans are updated in a timely manner</li> <li>The quality of plans improves so that more audits in the category of 'planning' are rated RI or better</li> <li>Dispute resolution is used by IRO's and CP chairs proportionately and ensures that intervention for children is not delayed</li> </ul>	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"> <li>IRO and CP Chair Caseloads are maintained in line with the IRO handbook and local expectations</li> <li>A greater percentage of children (CIN, CP and LAC) are visited in timescale</li> <li>A greater percentage of Core Group meetings are completed within timescales</li> <li>A lesser percentage of children subject of a Child Protection Plan have been for more than 12 months</li> <li>A lesser percentage of children subject of a CIN Plan have been for more than 9 months</li> </ul>					
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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater percentage of Core Group and CIN Meetings are recorded and take place within expected timescales</li> <li>A wider range of professionals attend Core Group Meetings and CIN Meetings more frequently</li> <li>Audits through the SCSP demonstrates more partners involvement and influence in children's plans</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater number of Chronologies are produced</li> <li>A greater percentage of audit outcomes for the category of 'Case Records' are RI or better.</li> <li>A greater percentage of audit outcomes for the category of 'Assessments' are RI or better.</li> <li>Themed auditing around the use of chronologies within assessments demonstrates increased use of Impact Chronologies</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LADO activity is more timely (7 timeliness measures)</li> <li>There is more evidence of the LADO following up safeguarding recommendations</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MARAC and MAPPA actions are effectively communicated and there is more evidence of follow up by the relevant manager.</li> <li>MARAC is attended by the full range of partners</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average caseload for IRO's and CP Conference Chairs are maintained in line with the IRO handbook and local expectations.</li> <li>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"> <li>There is more evidence of reflection within IRO supervision</li> <li>Audit outcomes in the category of 'reviews' show more work as RI or better                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff attendance at the exploitation safeguarding hub</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>Exploitation safeguarding hub records indicate multi agency working and appropriate plans</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a greater proportion of Looked After Children with a Permanency Plan.</li> <li>The average length of Care Proceedings decreases.</li> <li>The average number of days from entering care to placement order with adopters reduces.</li> <li>The average number of days from Placement Order to matching a child to prospective adopters reduces.</li> <li>A greater proportion of audit findings in the category of 'planning' and for Looked After Children is RI or better.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More Child Permanence Reports are completed within timescale in readiness for adoption panel.</li> <li>Dip sample of the Quality of CPR's improves.</li> <li>Adoption Panel is performing its QA function.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal planning meetings are being held in a timely way, chaired by a solicitor</li> <li>Public Law Outline meetings fully involve parents and minutes are shared in a timely way</li> <li>Letters before proceedings are of better quality evidenced through quality assurance</li> <li>There is an increase in the use of pre-proceedings and a reduction emergency or short-notice applications to court</li> </ul>	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		

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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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Adopted Children have Life Story Books</li> <li>A greater percentage of Looked After Children have Life Story Books</li> <li>All Adopted Children have a later life letter</li> <li>Dip sample of life story work and later life letters show an improvement in quality</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lesser percentage of 16-25 Year Olds are NEET</li> <li>A greater percentage of care leavers are contacted every 56 days</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More care leavers have access to adult mental health services should they need to.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percentage of 16 and 17-year-old children who are Looked After are more in line with our comparators</li> </ul>	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		

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			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.  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An increase in PEP completion to ensure that all children's educational and social targets are reviewed termly</li> <li>An increase in educational attainment of our looked after children</li> <li>An increase in the quality through dip sampling of PEPs"</li> </ul>	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.  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater number of placement plans are being completed by social workers.</li> <li>A greater percentage of placement plans are completed before placement and at the latest within the statutory timescales</li> <li>More children who become looked after do so in a planned way where foster carers are able to meet their needs from day 1.</li> </ul>	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  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater number of mainstream fostering assessments are being undertaken</li> <li>A greater number of mainstream foster carers are approved.</li> <li>There is evidence that more children are matched to carers before placement</li> <li>There is a wide range of skills and abilities within our fostering workforce.</li> </ul>	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  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No young people will stay in a hotel or B and B</li> </ul>	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		

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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.	Ensure where possible that children and young people are placed in family type settings and are as close to their existing communities as possible	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		
		Improved range of quality and cost-effective placements where children can thrive. Increased support and rigour for children returning home safely	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		
		<b>Impact Measures:</b>	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.	Children where possible are placed in family type settings and as close to their existing communities as possible	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		
		<b>Impact Measures:</b>	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)"	The Independent Fostering Agency understands the needs of all children placed with its foster carers, and that these carers are fully assessed and approved.  The Independent Fostering Agency ensures it uses its influence to safeguard children in its foster placements.  <b>Impact Measures:</b>	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 policy 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		
			Children placed in interim approved placements are safeguarded, and allegations are handled in a timely and robust way.				
CN2	Compliance Notice		Ensure that all staff and managers understand and implement the safeguarding policy and procedure.	June 2019	Director of Operations		



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	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"> <li>Social Worker Caseloads are in line with expectations set out by Ofsted and comparators.</li> <li>All cases are allocated.</li> <li>Foster carer training is recorded and a clear reflection of the training they have received.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>which foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards,</li> <li>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,</li> <li>what core training foster carers have completed,</li> <li>an individual development plan for each carer setting out what training they need to complete and when to complete it by,</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>All foster carers are afforded the same payments and training offer</li> <li>Formal matching decisions are made by a suitable manager, and in a timely way</li> <li>Allegations are tracked and are progressed in a timely way, and historic allegations are recorded on carers files</li> <li>There is evidence that children are safeguarded whenever there has been an allegation</li> <li>Fostering panel decisions are timely and quality assurance demonstrates decisions are appropriate</li> <li>Fostering panels are held according to legislation, and are quorate</li> </ul>	<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>		

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual appraisals of panel members and chair are being undertaken and are quality assured</li> </ul>	<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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater percentage of return interviews were completed within 72 hours of the child returning from a missing episode.</li> <li>We can understand where exploitation activity takes place, and can evidence disruption actions are reducing exploitation.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater number of referrals relating to exploitation indicates a better awareness of this issue</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MASE arrangements effectively target the most vulnerable to CSE</li> <li>Agency, Parent and Child attendance at MASE meetings increase.</li> <li>Action plans are progressed in a timely way and actions are followed up more frequently.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall performance and quality is showing a trajectory of improvement.</li> <li>Staff and managers attend and are prepared for performance board meetings.</li> <li>Teams who have had the benefit of Beyond Auditing are showing improved practice in the areas covered.</li> <li>Learning from a range of feedback is used as the basis of continued improvement, and feeds into learning and development.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audits are being undertaken frequently and by a consistent group of managers</li> <li>Audits are being completed in a timely way to ensure enough time for 'learning' for practitioners</li> <li>Moderated audits show fewer 'changes' in audit judgement</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff and Managers are accessing their performance information and evidencing its use in team meetings / supervisions.</li> <li>Staff and Managers are preparing well for performance boards and can articulate their teams / service performance, exceptions and mitigations.</li> </ul>	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  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance at and contribution to key boards by a wider range of partners.</li> <li>Strategic vision is translated into operational activity that achieves this vision.</li> </ul>	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.  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More children and young people known to SCT can access therapeutic support and in a more timely way.</li> </ul>	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  <b>Impact Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater percentage of Contacts that are accepted as a referral are done so within 24 hours</li> <li>The distribution of referral outcomes become more in line with our comparators</li> <li>The percentage of Single Assessments that have the outcome of ‘No Further Action’ becomes more in line with our comparators</li> <li>Fewer children are subject to a re-referral</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A greater percentage of complaints are resolved within the statutory timescales.</li> <li>• All children’s complaints are known and are followed up by the participation team in a more timely way.</li> <li>• Learning from complaints contributes to service design, improvement and strategic planning.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More children attend their reviews / meetings.</li> <li>• Children’s voice is more evident in planning for them.</li> <li>• There is more evidence of direct work on file</li> <li>• Audit findings in the category ‘child’s voice’ and ‘Impact on the child’ improves to RI or better.</li> </ul>	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><b>Impact Measures:</b></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"> <li>• There will be an increased footprint of the 'Child's Voice' throughout their records.</li> <li>• There will be an increase in feedback from young people through formal and informal channels</li> <li>• We will respond to young people's feedback in an appropriate and timely manner</li> </ul>					

## 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 <b>(Completed therefore no further actions required)</b>
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.

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

**23 September 2019**

<b>Subject:</b>	Presentation of the Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019/2020
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Joyce Underhill - Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life
<b>Director:</b>	Director – Education, Skills and Employment – Chris Ward
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Sara Baber Lead Officer for Early Years Sara_baber@sandwell.gov.uk Sally Dowie Data Management Officer FIS Sally_dowie@sandwell.gov.uk

### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **That Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board:**

1. Consider the 9 recommendations of the Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency report 2019-2020, now submitted as appendix 1.
2. Any observations or comments be referred to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and taken into account when the report is considered for approval by Cabinet.

#### **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Board is requested to consider the 9 recommendations of the Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency report 2019-2020 (appendix 1 attached).
- 1.2 The Children and Families Act 2014 states that local authorities should report annually to Elected Council Members on how they are meeting

their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.

- 1.3 The Childcare Act 2006 gives local authorities a key role in shaping the childcare market in their area. Working with providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors, the local authority will look to create a strong, sustainable and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of parents. It focuses in particular on sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare that is responsive to parents' needs.
- 1.4 Section 6 of the 2006 Act gives local authorities a duty of securing, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the provision of childcare (whether or not by them) is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area in order to enable them to:
  - a) take up, or remain in, work, or
  - b) undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.
- 1.5 Local authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, geographical division and date of publication.
- 1.6 The Department for Education publishes annual Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for local authorities. The June 2018, document which is available at:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/718179/Early\\_education\\_and\\_childcare-statutory\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf)
- 1.7 States what the 2019-2020 Childcare Sufficiency Report should include:
  - A specific reference to how they are ensuring there is sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of: disabled children, children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit, children with parents who work irregular hours; children aged two, three and four taking up early education places; school age children and children needing holiday care.
  - Information about the current and projected supply and demand of childcare for age ranges of children, and the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision; and
  - Details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed.

- 1.8 Subject to the Cabinet Report being endorsed, the Director - Educations, Skills and Employment will develop and implement a Childcare Strategic Action Plan for 2019-2020.
- 1.9 The Childcare Strategic Plan will be monitored by the Early Years Strategic Group and progress will be reported termly to The Director of Education, Skills and Employment Extended Departmental Management meeting.

## **2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION**

- 2.1 The Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019-2020 supports the Council's Ambition: Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families. The report assesses the gaps in early education and childcare across the borough.
- 2.2 The findings of the Childcare Sufficiency Report provide an opportunity to deliver Early Help to our most disadvantaged families who are most at risk of poor outcomes in Sandwell, through the recommendations children will be able to access good quality early education and childcare.
- 2.3 Support for families to achieve better outcomes for their children and themselves by ensuring childcare and early education is available to allow parents to remain in or return to employment/training.
- 2.4 Support access to positive activities including holiday play schemes and after school activities.
- 2.5 Ensure that children and young people are safeguarded and have improved outcomes by supporting early education and childcare providers to access training, advice and support regarding health and safety and child protection issues.

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Childcare Sufficiency report 2019/20 is due to be presented to the Cabinet on 9th October 2019 and any comments or observations from this Scrutiny Board meeting will be submitted to Cabinet at the meeting.
- 3.2 The Childcare Sufficiency Report (appendix 1) was undertaken between May and June 2019 by the Data Management Officer and Family Information Service Manager.
- 3.3 Demographic data was provided by Public Health.

- 3.4 Supply of childcare places were extracted from the Local Authority Open Objects database.
- 3.5 Quality data was extracted from the Local Authority Open Objects database and feedback from the Quality Early Years Team.
- 3.3 Gaps were identified against demographic data and supply of childcare.
- 3.6 The report is based on findings for Sandwell overall and for the 24 wards.
- 3.7 The findings have been used to develop the below 9 recommendations.

#### 4 THE CURRENT POSITION

Sandwell's Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019-2020 is attached as Appendix 1. The following 9 recommendations arising from the findings of the report, are:

1. To continue to support childcare providers to deliver high quality, sustainable provision.
2. Aim to improve the quality of the providers which are judged by Ofsted as Requires Improvement or Inadequate by working intensively with them and in particular those that deliver early education funded places.
3. To extensively market and promote the Family Information Service Hub and the help available with childcare costs to families across Wednesbury.
4. To work with schools and existing providers in Tividale and Wednesbury South ward to address the need for more holiday provisions.
5. To work with the school that has no access to out of school care: Hanbury in Greets Green and Lyng ward (before school club)
6. There is a sufficiency of places for the 2 year old offer. However, in most areas there is a need to increase the take up of the free early learning for 2 year olds using a wide range of direct and indirect marketing as well as extensive outreach.
7. There is a sufficiency of places for the universal 15 hours entitlement. However, monitoring the take up of 15hr places in the maintained sector (schools) may be necessary to gauge the impact of the take up of the 2 year old offer and 30 hours on school nursery provisions.
8. To monitor the termly take up of 30 hours for 3 and 4 year olds against the places available, prioritising the wards where the take up exceeds number of places: Bristnall, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Greets Green and Lyng, Newton, Rowley and Wednesbury South and where the

surplus places is minimal in Cradley Heath and Old Hill. Currently some neighbouring wards have capacity which could meet additional demand. Additional capacity could be achieved by encouraging existing and any new providers to offer funded places flexibly.

9. To prioritise the following wards identified as having more than one childcare gap: Greet Green and Lyng and Wednesbury South to increase access to childcare in these wards.

## **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 In order to satisfy the legislation detailed below, Childcare Providers, schools and internal teams were consulted and their information contributed to the Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019/2020.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 The Childcare Sufficiency Report assesses the supply of childcare places against the demand for childcare places and identify any gaps. Findings are developed into recommendations.
- 6.2 There are no other alternative options.

## **7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 This area of work is a statutory duty funded through Target Funding.
- 7.2 Capacity to achieve the recommendations of the Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019-2020 falls within the remit of staff within the Quality Early Years Team and Family Information Service and the recommendations have been taken into consideration.

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The Childcare Act 2006 –The Local Authority has strategic responsibility to plan, support and commission childcare and should only provide childcare directly if no other person is willing to do so or it is appropriate for the local authority to do so.
- 8.2 The Childcare Act 2006 - Local Authorities must secure the free minimum amount of early year's provision for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents want it and to assess the sufficiency of childcare and to secure sufficient childcare.
- 8.3 The Education Act 2011 gives parents of disadvantaged two year olds a new right to free early year's education and care.

- 8.4 The Children and Families Act 2014, states that local authority should report annually to Elected Council Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.
- 8.5 The Department for Education published in June 2018, the Early Education and Childcare Statutory guidance for local authorities. This document also addressed changes with regards to securing sufficient childcare.

## 9. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.6 An Equality Impact Assessment screening has been carried out. However, a full assessment is not required for the purposes of this proposal.

## 9 **DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 There are no specific data protection implications arising from the content of this report. The report focusses on statistical data.

## 10 **CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from the content of this report.
- 10.2 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with - to identify and assess any significant risks associated with this decision/project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks. Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that no significant risk has been identified.
- 10.3 Risk is continuously monitored through the Early Years Strategic Group, to ensure we meet the needs of children and their families.
- 10.4 If the Cabinet Report is not approved and the action plan not developed, then the local authority would fail to meet its obligations under the Childcare Act 2006 and could fail to deliver the 9 recommendations from the findings of the Childcare Sufficiency Report.

## 11 **SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

- 11.1 Capacity to achieve the recommendations of the Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019-2020 falls within the remit of staff within the Quality Early Years Team and Family Information Service and the recommendations have been taken into consideration.



## **12 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

12.1 A sufficient supply of high quality early years and childcare places:

- enables young children to access safe early learning and play opportunities
- enables school aged children to access positive activities including holiday play schemes, before and after school activities
- supports parents to return to or remain in employment/training
- ensures that children and young people are safeguarded and have improved outcomes by supporting early education and childcare providers to access training, advice and support regarding health and safety and child protection issues.

## **13 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

13.1 The Local Authority have a duty to secure sufficiency of childcare, so far as is reasonable practicable.

13.2 If providers in the Private and Voluntary Sector ceased providing early learning and care, then the Local Authority would need to consider what is 'reasonable practicable' and decide if providing services itself, may have accommodation implications for the provisions of such services.

## **14 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

14.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 states that local authorities should report annually to Elected Council Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents.

14.2 The 2019-2020 Childcare Sufficiency Report has been developed based on the June 2018 Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance.

14.3 The supply of childcare places has been assessed against the potential demand for places and the findings have been formulated into the above 9 recommendations.

## **15 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/718179/Early\\_education\\_and\\_childcare-statutory\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf)

16 **APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1 – Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019/20

**Chris Ward**  
**Director – Education, Skills and Employment**

# Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report

## 2019 – 2020



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## INTRODUCTION

The Childcare Act 2006 gives local authorities a key role in shaping the childcare market in their area. Working with providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors, the local authority will look to create a strong, sustainable and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of parents. It focuses on sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare that is responsive to parents' needs.

The Department for Education published a revised Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for local authorities in June 2018, this document also addressed changes with regards to securing sufficient childcare:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/718179/Early\\_education\\_and\\_childcare-statutory\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf)

To secure sufficient childcare places, local authorities should:

Consider what is 'reasonably practicable' when assessing what sufficient childcare means in their area and:

- The state of the local childcare market; including the demand for specific types of providers in a locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists.
- The state of the local labour market including the sufficiency of the local childcare workforce.
- The quality and capacity of childcare providers and childminders registered with a childminder agency, including their funding, staff, premises, experience and expertise.
- Encourage schools in their area to offer out of hours childcare from 8.00am to 6.00pm
- Encourage existing providers to expand their provision and new providers to enter the local childcare market.
- Encourage providers to take a sustainable business approach to planning and signpost providers to resources to support them.

Report annually to Elected Council Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.

Local authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, geographical division and date of publication. However, the report should include:

- A specific reference to how they are ensuring there is sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of disabled children, children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit, children with parents who work irregular hours, children aged two, three and four taking up early education places, school age children, and children needing holiday care.
- Information about the current and projected supply and demand of childcare for particular age ranges of children, and the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision.
- Details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed.

This report is Sandwell's sixth annual Childcare Sufficiency Report for Elected Council Members and will be made available and accessible to parents and includes the information required as outlined above.

Sandwell's fifth annual Childcare Sufficiency Report (CSR) was completed and published in July 2018. A Childcare Strategic Action Plan (CSAP) was developed based on the recommendations of the CSR. The plan was monitored by the Early Years Strategic Group; achievements against the actions are detailed later in the report.

Upon the completion and approval of this report, a CSAP will be developed, implemented and monitored termly by the Early Years Strategic Group. If relevant, outstanding actions from the previous CSAP will be included.

## **Aims and Objectives**

### Aims

To provide a report on how Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is securing Sufficiency of Childcare.

To develop a Childcare Strategic Action Plan from the findings of the report and to include any relevant actions outstanding from the previous Childcare Strategic Action Plan.

### Objectives

The Childcare Sufficiency Report will:

1. Provide sufficiency of childcare by wards using the following data:
  - a) analysis of demographic data
  - b) supply of childcare places in relation to children with special educational need and disabilities (SEND), low income families, children with parents who work irregular hours, school age children, holiday provision and places available for 2,3 and 4 year olds.
2. Provide an indication of quality and affordability of childcare across the borough.
3. Provide an update on the recommendations of the previous CSR.

## **Methodology**

In undertaking the Childcare Sufficiency Report several research methods were adopted:

- Demographic data was provided by Public Health and from the Office for National Statistics.
- Quality data was provided from the Family Information Service database and from the Quality Early Years Team.
- Supply of childcare data was provided by the Family Information Service, a snapshot of the data held was taken in the spring term of 2018.
- The data for Early Education for 2, 3 and 4 year olds was taken from the local authority Capita One database and from a survey with childcare providers and schools.

## **The Strategic Context for Childcare Sufficiency**

The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities in England to ensure a sufficiency of childcare or working parents, parents studying or training and for disabled children.

Section 6, of the 2006 Act gives local authorities a duty of securing, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the provision of childcare (whether by them) is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area to enable them to:

- (a) Take up, or remain in, work, or
- (b) Undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

Section 7, of the 2006 Act gives them a related duty to secure free early years provision for pre-school children of a prescribed age.

Section 11 of the 2006 Act places a duty on local authorities to undertake a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA).

Section 12 places a duty on local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents relating to the provision of childcare, services or facilities that may be of benefit to parents and prospective parents, children and young people, something that is strengthened in the Childcare Act (2016).

The Education Act 2011 gives parents of disadvantaged 2 year olds a new right to free early years education and care.

The Children and Families Act 2014, states that local authorities should report annually to elected Council Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.

The Childcare Act of 2016 places a duty on local authorities to secure 30 hours free early years education and care for eligible working parents of 3 and 4 year olds.

The focus of childcare sufficiency is on supporting working parents/carers and those studying or training to do so, and supports a number of other policy priorities, including:

Child Poverty - Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential - The Government's Social Mobility Policy 2017, reasserts a commitment to tackle child poverty at its source. Affordable childcare supports families to work or train. Good quality pre-school supports children's development, aids transition between home and school and improves school readiness.

Supporting Economic Well-being - There are clear links between the Social Mobility Policy and supporting parents into work through the Work Programmes, Help to Work schemes and flexible support through Jobcentre Plus. These schemes rely upon the availability of good quality, affordable childcare. For some families, this need may be satisfied through informal childcare arrangements, but many families may not have access to informal childcare.

Supporting Children's Centre remit - The core purpose of children's centres is to improve the outcomes for young children and their families. Part of the children's centres role is to work with childcare providers offering free funded places to ensure that families who need it can access integrated support. The childcare market supports children's centres by signposting families to services and identifying where early intervention may be required.

## ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE THE 2018 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY REPORT

The 2018 CSR recommendations were developed into an action plan. The table below provides an update against the recommendations from 1 September 2018 to 31 July 2019.

Recommendations	Progress
1. Provide support to childcare providers to deliver high quality early learning and childcare.	<p>The childcare providers continue to receive a wide range of support including 988 support visits and termly Private, Voluntary and Independent provider (PVI) meetings. 338 providers contacted the team for information advice and guidance. 6 childminder briefing sessions were delivered to those interested in setting up childminder businesses. 220 training sessions were delivered to practitioners with 3265 delegates attending.</p> <p>(This recommendation is ongoing as it underpins the support to providers to achieve/ maintain quality provisions)</p>
2. Support to funded settings which are graded Requires Improvement (RI) or Inadequate	<p>The number of funded settings has increased from 218 to 220. In March 2019 84% were rated Outstanding or Good. Only 4 are graded Requires Improvement or Inadequate, intensive work with these providers is being undertaken to ensure that they improve their Ofsted grading.</p> <p>(This recommendation is ongoing as it ensure that specific support is provided to improve the quality of funded providers when required)</p>
3.To increase the number of pre-schools in Tipton and childminders in Wednesbury to provide more choice and flexibility	<p>There is 1 additional childminder in Wednesbury registered with a childminding agency. A survey of Wednesbury parents didn't identify childminders as a need. The number of pre-schools in Tipton remains the same, however no parent has expressed a need for more pre-schools over the last 3 years.</p> <p>(This recommendation is achieved)</p>
4.To encourage the take up of Childcare Element of Tax Credit in Wednesbury	<p>23 Outreach events took place in Wednesbury which promoted help with childcare costs. A survey of Wednesbury parents identified that help with childcare cost remains an issue. Extensive marketing of the FIS hub <a href="https://fis.sandwell.gov.uk">https://fis.sandwell.gov.uk</a> will be undertaken in the area.</p> <p>(This recommendation will be carried forward)</p>
5. To work with schools and local providers in Wednesbury South ward to address the need for more holiday provisions	<p>The need for more holiday provision remains unresolved.</p> <p>(This recommendation will be carried forward)</p>
6. To encourage new and existing childcare providers in Friar Park, Langley, Wednesbury North, Wednesbury South and West Bromwich Central wards to deliver childcare for children whose parents work irregular working hours pattern.	<p>All wards now have at least 1 provider offering irregular working hours</p> <p>(This recommendation has been achieved)</p>
7. To encourage the schools and local providers to	<p>No new before and after school provision has become available for these schools.</p>

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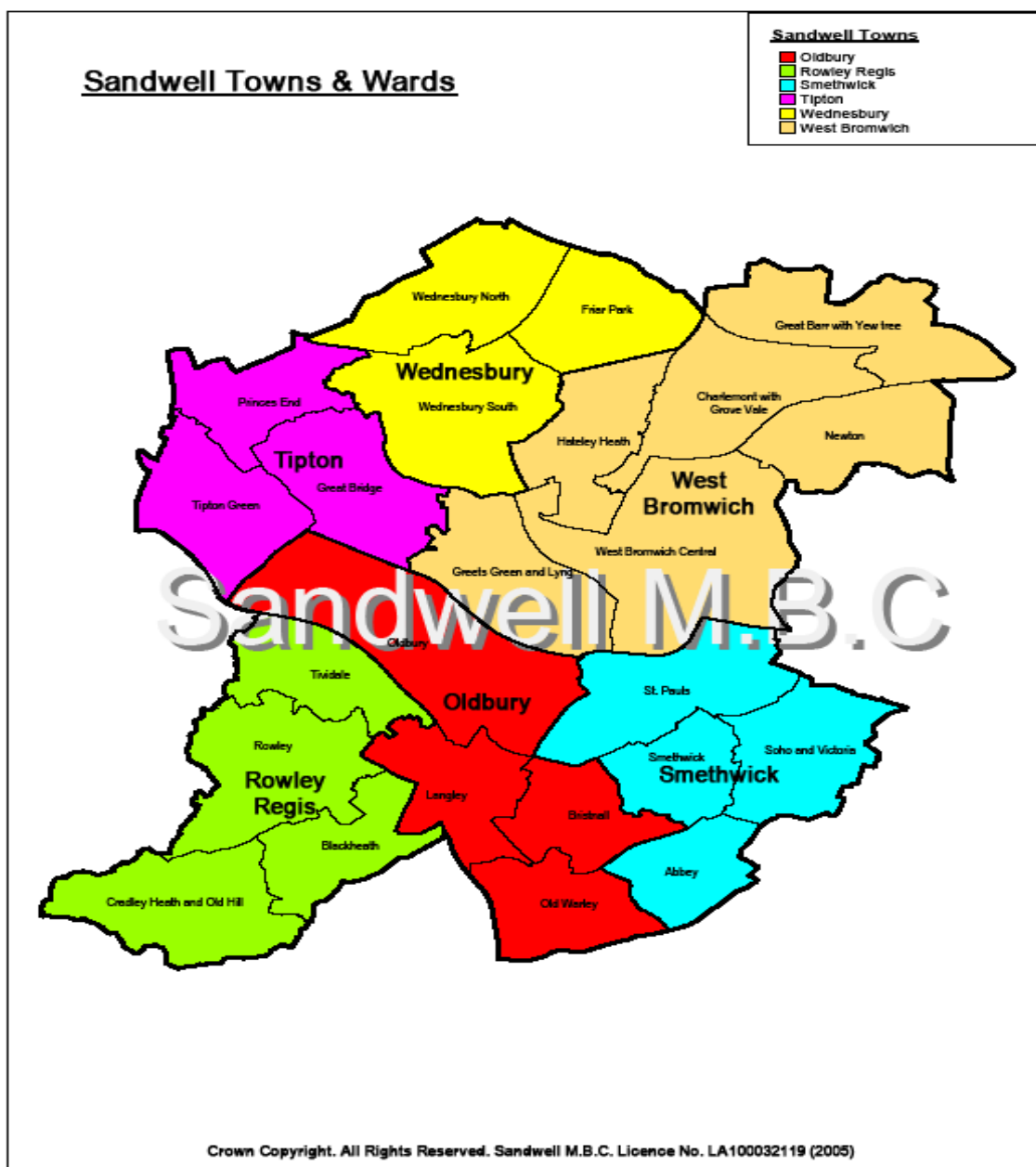
provide out of school care to Jubilee Park (before and after school) and St Martin's (after school)	(This recommendation will be carried forward)
8. To market and promote the 2-year-old offer in the following wards Abbey, Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Friar Park, Greets Green and Lyng, Hateley Heath, Langley, Newton, Princes End, St Pauls, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria, Tividale, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South to increase the take up.	<p>Extensive indirect marketing has been undertaken. 184 outreach events took place across the in the wards mentioned. Regular weekly sessions took place in the 4 Job Centre Plus Offices engaging with parents who were being transitioned to Universal credit the identified wards</p> <p>There were 5 FIS planned events which families from across the borough attended.</p> <p>The take up of the 2 year old entitlement across Sandwell has increased from 65% last year to 66% this year.</p> <p>(This recommendation will be carried forward as it underpins the 2 year old offer and outreach will continue to target the wards where take up could be improved)</p>
9. To termly monitor the take up of 3 and 4-year olds 15 hour funded places in Bristnall, Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Langley, Wednesbury South and West Bromwich Central wards as there may be a need for more places.	<p>The number of places in these wards has changed:</p> <p>Bristnall increased from 274 to 454  Cradley Heath and Old Hill increased from 255 to 314  Great Barr with Yew tree increased from 246 to 302  Langley increased from 254 to 296  Wednesbury South increased from 135 to 155  West Bromwich Central increased from 335 to 377</p> <p>(This recommendation is achieved)</p>
10. To termly monitor the take up of 30 hour places against the demand for places to ensure that there are sufficient places to meet the needs of parents in the following wards: Bristnall, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Wednesbury South and West Bromwich Central.	<p>The number of places for these wards has changed:</p> <p>Bristnall now has an additional 24 places  Great Barr with Yew Tree has an additional place  Wednesbury South has not changed  West Bromwich Central has an additional 8 places</p> <p>(This recommendation will be carried forward with regards to Wednesbury South, Great Barr with Yew Tree as well as any other gaps identified in this report)</p>
11. To prioritise the wards which have been identified as having multi-childcare needs to reduce the barriers to accessing childcare: Bristnall, Cradley Heath, Friar Park, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Great Bridge, Langley, Wednesbury North, Wednesbury South and West Bromwich Central.	<p>Irregular working hours is resolved in the following wards that previously had none; Friar Park, Langley, Wednesbury North, Wednesbury South and West Bromwich Central.</p> <p>Increase in the number of 15 hr places in Bristnall, Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Langley, Wednesbury South and West Bromwich Central.</p> <p>Bristnall and West Bromwich Central have additional 30 hours places. There have been no complaints from parents unable to find 30 hours funded places.</p> <p>A survey of Wednesbury parents took place and there were no significant concerns regarding finding suitable childcare. Promotion of the FIS hub and information on help with childcare costs would be beneficial to the area.</p> <p>(This recommendation will be amended based on the gaps identified in this report.)</p>

## SANDWELL SUB AREAS - WARDS

Sandwell is made up of 6 towns and 24 wards. For this report analysis of the sufficiency of

Towns	Wards
Oldbury	Oldbury, Langley, Bristnall and Old Warley
Rowley Regis	Tividale, Rowley, Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Old Hill
Smethwick	St Pauls, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria, Abbey
Tipton	Princes End, Great Bridge, Tipton Green
Wednesbury	Wednesbury North, Wednesbury South, Friar Park
West Bromwich	Greets Green and Lyng, West Bromwich Central, Newton, Hateley Heath, Charlemont with Grove Vale, Great Barr with Yew Tree

childcare will be undertaken at ward level.



## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SANDWELL**

The 2017 mid-year estimates show that Sandwell has 325,460 residents, a rise of 14.4% since 2001. This compares with a rise of 12.2% in England & Wales. This increase reverses the declines in the 1980s and 1990s. Under 5's now make up 7.5% of Sandwell's population (24,286). The proportion of lone parent households (with dependent children) has increased from 8.0% in 2001 to 9.0% in 2011.

The ethnic makeup of Sandwell has seen extensive changes since 2001. 65.8% of Sandwell residents now classify themselves as being of White British origin, and a further 4.1% are of Other White origin (which includes Irish and Gypsy Travellers). 30.1% of Sandwell's population are from other ethnic backgrounds.

In 2011, 66% of Sandwell residents aged between 16 and 74 were economically active, compared with 69.7% in England & Wales. Sandwell's profile of economically active residents is similar to England & Wales in terms of full and part-time employees, and full-time students. However, only 6% of Sandwell's economically active 16-74 year olds are self-employed, compared to 9.7% for England and Wales. 7.3% of the economically active population in Sandwell aged between 16 and 74 were unemployed, compared with 4.4% in England & Wales. This group includes those who had never worked (1.6% of those aged 16-74), and those who reported long-term unemployment (3.2% of those aged 16-74).

A smaller proportion of employed residents aged 16 to 74 in Sandwell worked 49 hours or more per week than nationally (8.9% compared with 13.2% in England & Wales). A larger proportion worked 31 to 48 hours (62.4% compared with 57.7% in England & Wales).

### **Child Poverty**

According to HMRC figures, in August 2016, 25.6% of children in Sandwell were living in what is considered "relative" poverty. This represents 21,370 dependent children, of which 18,495 (86.5%) are under 16 years of age. Child Poverty in Sandwell was 0.7 percentage points higher in 2016 (25.6%) than 2015 (24.9%). The gap with the national and regional levels increased slightly to 8.6% and stayed the same at 5.4% respectively.

Sixteen Sandwell wards had higher child poverty rates in 2016 than 2015 and eight were lower. Three wards had a lower rate than England (17.0%); Abbey (16.7%), Newton (16.8%) and Old Warley (16.2 %).

## Percentage of Children in Relative Poverty in Sandwell 2008-2016 by ward

COMPARATORS	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change 08-16	Change 15-16
England	20.9%	21.3%	20.6%	20.1%	18.6%	18.0%	19.9%	16.6%	17.0%	-3.9%	0.4%
West Midlands	23.3%	24.0%	23.3%	22.7%	21.2%	20.7%	23.2%	19.5%	20.2%	-3.1%	0.7%
Sandwell	30.8%	31.6%	30.4%	29.6%	27.6%	26.9%	29.5%	24.9%	25.6%	-5.2%	0.7%
Sandwell Wards											
Abbey	19.2%	20.9%	19.6%	19.5%	18.3%	18.4%	20.6%	18.3%	16.7%	-2.5%	-1.6%
Blackheath	27.1%	29.8%	27.2%	26.7%	23.8%	21.7%	24.3%	22.0%	22.8%	-4.3%	0.8%
Bristnall	24.0%	25.0%	23.8%	25.2%	23.8%	24.0%	24.1%	21.0%	23.1%	-0.9%	2.1%
Charlemont with Grove Vale	18.0%	21.3%	18.4%	19.4%	19.5%	19.4%	21.9%	20.7%	21.3%	3.3%	0.6%
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	28.1%	28.5%	29.1%	27.1%	25.3%	25.1%	28.5%	23.0%	25.5%	-2.6%	2.5%
Friar Park	40.3%	40.6%	38.6%	34.6%	33.5%	34.2%	33.1%	30.4%	30.6%	-9.7%	0.2%
Great Barr with Yew Tree	18.9%	21.0%	20.4%	19.5%	19.0%	18.7%	21.4%	17.9%	18.9%	0.0%	1.0%
Great Bridge	30.3%	31.8%	30.7%	30.9%	29.1%	27.3%	29.1%	24.6%	26.7%	-3.6%	2.1%
Greets Green and Lyng	35.7%	36.0%	34.5%	32.5%	32.4%	29.9%	35.5%	27.6%	30.2%	-5.5%	2.6%
Hateley Heath	35.2%	37.5%	34.8%	35.3%	33.5%	30.8%	33.4%	29.3%	30.2%	-5.0%	0.9%
Langley	30.0%	29.9%	31.9%	30.9%	31.3%	31.5%	32.8%	29.1%	28.3%	-1.7%	-0.8%
Newton	17.5%	19.2%	19.4%	19.5%	19.8%	19.5%	20.3%	17.3%	16.8%	-0.7%	-0.5%
Old Warley	18.6%	20.8%	19.7%	19.2%	19.4%	18.2%	20.0%	16.3%	16.2%	-2.4%	-0.1%
Oldbury	30.7%	30.1%	27.7%	28.8%	26.3%	25.5%	27.4%	22.7%	22.4%	-8.3%	-0.3%
Princes End	40.8%	43.3%	42.2%	42.5%	38.7%	39.9%	38.2%	36.6%	35.3%	-5.5%	-1.3%
Rowley	30.3%	31.5%	31.5%	30.4%	29.9%	28.6%	31.3%	27.3%	28.0%	-2.3%	0.7%
St Pauls	40.5%	37.7%	35.8%	34.0%	28.1%	28.3%	33.6%	26.5%	26.8%	-13.7%	0.3%
Smethwick	36.0%	35.9%	35.0%	32.7%	30.5%	29.5%	33.8%	27.8%	28.0%	-8.0%	0.2%
Soho and Victoria	48.1%	45.1%	42.2%	40.1%	35.8%	35.2%	39.8%	31.2%	32.0%	-16.1%	0.8%
Tipton Green	31.9%	32.7%	30.9%	29.5%	26.6%	24.4%	30.2%	24.3%	26.1%	-5.8%	1.8%
Tividale	27.3%	29.1%	27.5%	26.7%	24.4%	24.2%	24.2%	20.0%	22.9%	-4.4%	2.9%
Wednesbury North	32.5%	32.1%	31.5%	30.9%	27.7%	26.5%	33.0%	25.1%	26.0%	-6.5%	0.9%
Wednesbury South	25.4%	28.0%	27.1%	27.1%	25.3%	25.3%	24.8%	22.2%	21.8%	-3.6%	-0.4%
West Bromwich Central	27.6%	27.2%	28.6%	26.8%	24.2%	24.1%	28.2%	24.0%	23.0%	-4.6%	-1.0%

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

## Child and Working Tax Credits – NI 118 Take Up of Formal Childcare

According to HMRC figures for 2016/17, the take up of the childcare element of the tax credit was 12.0% in Sandwell compared to England at 14.3%. The take up in Sandwell represents only 2,300 families. England take up levels of the childcare element of tax credits stayed the same (14.3%) whilst Sandwell fell slightly last year (12.4% to 12.0%).

## Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics Finalised Awards 2016-17 (HMRC)

The latest data for 2016/17 is at the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level, rather than ward. Sandwell is made up of 186 LSOAs.

- 62 LSOAs (33.3%) in Sandwell have a take up of the childcare element which is above the England level.
- 6 LSOAs have a take up rate of 25% or above - five are in West Bromwich town and one is in Smethwick town.
- The lowest take up is in a LSOA within Smethwick town (1.9%).
- Ten LSOAs have a take up of below 5% - 4 are in Smethwick town, 3 in Wednesbury town, 2 in West Bromwich town and one in Rowley Regis town.

At a town level, take up is highest in Oldbury, with 53.3% of LSOAs within the town having a take up above the national level. Take up is lowest in Wednesbury town – where 87.5% of LSOAs have take-up levels below the national level. Smethwick has the greatest range of take up by LSOA (both the highest and the lowest take up by LSOA are within the town), but this may just reflect Smethwick being the second largest town.

Town	No. of LSOAs	Minimum NI 118 at LSOA	Maximum NI 118 at LSOA	LSOAs above England Level		LSOAs below England Level	
				No.	%	No.	%
Oldbury	30	7.8%	24.3%	16	53.3%	14	46.7%
Rowley Regis	31	4.8%	24.1%	11	35.5%	19	61.3%
Smethwick	32	1.9%	41.9%	9	28.1%	23	71.9%
Tipton	24	5.5%	18.1%	4	16.7%	19	79.2%
Wednesbury	24	3.4%	16.0%	3	12.5%	21	87.5%
West Bromwich	45	4.4%	30.2%	19	42.2%	26	57.8%
<b>SANDWELL</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>41.9%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>65.6%</b>

## Disability

The 2011 Census showed that there were approximately 2,627 0-15 year olds with either a long-term health problem or a disability.

The wards with the highest number of 0-15 year olds with their day to day activities affected are; Smethwick (156) followed by Soho & Victoria (151) and Princes End (150)

The wards with the lowest number of 0-15 year olds with their day to day activities affected are; Charlemont with Grove Vale (63) followed by Abbey (66) and Newton (72)

	All Ages	Total 0-15	Day-to-day activities limited a lot	Day-to-day activities limited a little	Total with day to day activities affected
Wards (2011)					
Abbey	11,752	2,198	18	48	66
Blackheath	12,292	2,446	29	58	87
Bristnall	12,151	2,512	35	54	89
Charlemont with Grove Vale	11,964	2,097	24	39	63
Cradley Health and Old Hill	13,565	2,735	46	68	114
Friar Park	12,625	2,852	54	79	133
Great Barr with Yew Tree	12,597	2,615	48	52	100
Great Bridge	12,962	2,740	47	59	106
Greets Green and Lyng	11,769	2,773	47	81	128
Hateley Heath	14,227	3,231	56	70	126
Langley	12,969	2,596	37	63	100
Newton	11,558	2,210	27	45	72
Old Warley	11,915	2,263	27	54	81
Oldbury	13,606	3,047	55	64	119
Princes End	12,981	3,000	58	92	150
Rowley	11,784	2,513	39	74	113
St Pauls	14,226	3,776	65	83	148
Smethwick	14,146	3,215	66	90	156
Soho and Victoria	15,042	4,211	69	82	151
Tipton Green	12,834	2,878	41	67	108
Tividale	12,616	2,754	47	65	112
Wednesbury North	12,682	2,665	48	63	111
Wednesbury South	12,510	2,350	41	59	100
West Bromwich Central	13,290	2,557	36	58	94
Sandwell Total	308,063	66,234	1,060	1,567	2,627

2011 Census: Long term health problem or disability

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## Findings:

- The 2017 mid-year estimates show that Sandwell has 325,500 residents. Under 5's now make up 7.5% of Sandwell's population (24,286).
- In 2016 eight Sandwell wards had lower child poverty rates than 2015 and sixteen wards were higher.
- Three wards; Abbey (16.7%), Newton (16.8%) and Old Warley (16.2%) had a lower poverty rate than England (17.0%).
- The lowest take up of the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credits is in Wednesbury town, where 87.5% of LSOAs have take-up levels below the national level.
- The wards with the highest number of 0-15 year olds with their day to day activities affected by a disability are Smethwick, Soho & Victoria and Princes End.

## QUALITY OF CHILDCARE

Sandwell Quality Early Years and Childcare Team provide information, advice, support and training to the early years and childcare workforce. In order to develop or create high quality childcare it is essential that there is a well-trained, qualified, professional early years and childcare workforce to understand the needs of the most vulnerable children and families who access 2, 3 and 4 year old funded childcare places.

Information, Advice and Support includes the following:

- Early Years & Childcare sector career options
- Setting up childcare provision
- Sustainability of childcare provision
- Funding opportunities
- Short course training programme
- Child Protection/ Safeguarding concerns
- Ofsted registration and inspection

### Childcare Training

The Early Years Educator (EYE) qualification has impacted on Level 3 qualified practitioners. Practitioners are required to achieve functional skills at level 2 for both English and Maths, if they are unable to achieve this, practitioners will not be counted in ratios as a Level 3 member of staff. The Early Years Workforce Strategy identifies that Ofsted results and improved outcomes for children are linked to a highly qualified workforce. The Government are proposing to have Specialist Graduates and clearer childcare career pathways.

Demand for places for 30 hour funded provision for 3 and 4 year olds continues to increase, this has resulted in the demand for level 3 qualified practitioners. The Government identified that the early years and childcare workforce needs to be fit for purpose continually updating their knowledge and skills to ensure children reach a Good Level of Development (GLD).

We continue to receive requests to financially support practitioners in obtaining full and relevant level 3 qualifications as well as accessing higher level qualifications.

The results of Sandwell's 2018 Census identified that 78% of practitioners/ Childminders working within 2, 3 and 4 year old funded provision are Level 3 qualified and 5% of the workforce have achieved a level 6 qualification which includes QTS, Early Years Professional Status or Early Years Teacher Status.

Childminder briefing sessions are delivered to provide information to persons interested in self-employment, the session provides a brief overview of home based childcare and supports recruitment and retention of our childcare workforce in Sandwell. Childminder Briefing sessions continue to be well attended as people assess their career options. The Childminder workforce is integral for their flexibility and unique services offered to working parents/ carers across Sandwell.

There has been a 12% reduction in home based child carers (Childminders) from 155 in 2014/15 to 137 in 2018 (Information obtained July 2018), our information has identified that this was partly due to career progression. 84 home based child carers are registered in Sandwell to deliver 2, 3 and 4-year-old funded places.

A termly online training programme is produced to support the quality of teaching practices, raise awareness of how to manage and adhere to mandatory safeguarding requirements and support the ongoing development and sustainability of early years and childcare provision. The training programme is produced in partnership with the Inclusion Support Early Years (ISEY)

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Team, Play Service and Sandwell MBC Health and Safety. Training is delivered by internal/ external local support agencies and professional training providers.

All training reflects the local and national changing needs of the Statutory and PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent) Early Years and Childcare sector. This enables providers to fulfil their legal duties as detailed in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, Ofsted registration and inspection and Local Authority requirements.

The training is available to Schools, Children Centres, Full Day Care Nurseries, Pre-Schools, Out of School provision, Childminders and Foster Carers. Charges are applied in accordance with the type and size of organisations, providers can purchase training packages to help them financially plan their staff development. Child Protection and SEND remain key priorities and are currently provided free of charge in partnership with Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) and ISEY.

The original Graduate Leader Fund initiative provided opportunities for full day care settings to upskill employees in order for them to access Level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications. 80 practitioners including childminders originally accessed the Graduate Leader initiative.

Sandwell has previously offered Level 4 progression modules focusing on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and supporting the most vulnerable 2-year olds, since 2010 Sandwell has provided 13 modules at Level 4. Sandwell Quality Early Years and Childcare Team will continue to provide further Level 4 modules in accordance with current projects.

Sandwell's early years recruitment web pages attract numerous people considering childcare careers.

## **Quality Improvement**

Sandwell Quality Early Years Team provide ongoing support to new and established early years and childcare provision. Support visits are undertaken to Ofsted early years registered providers who are graded Inadequate and Requires Improvement. Other providers in Sandwell who are graded Good and Outstanding receive termly visits from the Local Authority area QTS and can request support directly from the Funding, Workforce and Development Team.

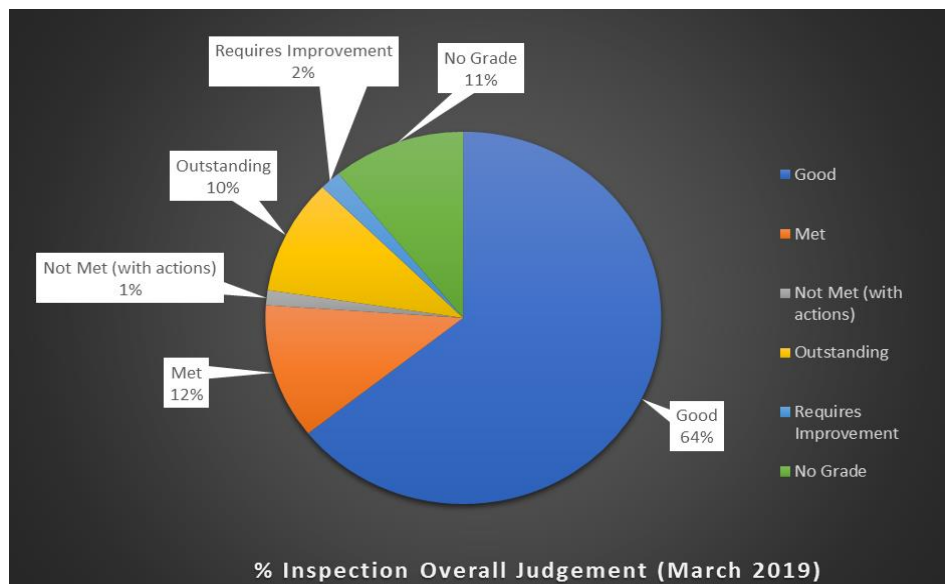
New providers are supported from the point in which they make an enquiry about setting up a childcare provision, the proposed provision will receive advisory site visits and recruitment support. Once the early years and childcare provider is Ofsted registered they can apply to access funded places.

2, 3 and 4 year old funded providers receive regular funding monitoring audits to ensure all children and families eligible for 2, 3 and 4 year old 15 or 30 hour places are accessing places in accordance with the Local Authority and DfE funding requirements. The Local Provider Agreement outlines the expectations of the DfE and Sandwell Local Authority in delivering high quality funded provision for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

Quality support is monitored as part of termly or intensive support visits to providers in accordance with Ofsted inspection outcomes, Local Authority Safeguarding concerns and local data indications identifying gaps in children's development.

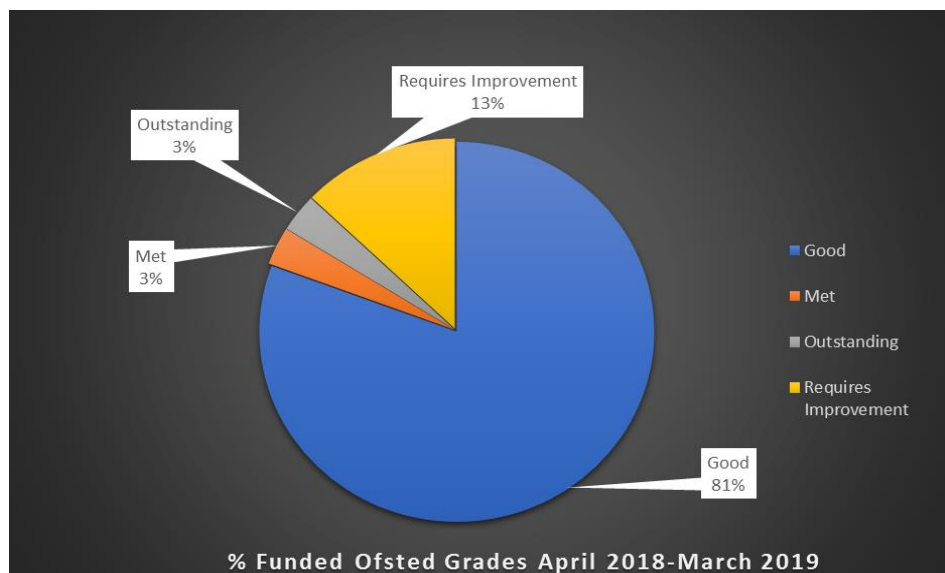
## Ofsted Inspections

In March 2019, analysis of the data held in the Family Information Service (FIS) database (Open Objects) indicated that the Ofsted grades for providers were 23 outstanding, 148 good, 4 requires improvement, 27 met and 3 not met providers. Although there are 322 childcare services on the Family Information Service database, Ofsted inspects a provider which may operate more than one type of childcare service on the same site. There are also providers on the database which are not yet due for an Ofsted inspection. See Appendix 1 - local, regional and national data for Ofsted Early Years Inspections August 2018



## Funded Settings Inspection

Ofsted inspected 31 providers that offer 3 and 4 year old funded places between April 2018 and March 2019 and 84% were rated as good or outstanding



## Equality and Inclusion

The Quality Early Years and Childcare Team engage with childcare settings to promote and embed equality of opportunity into practice, as part of their legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Quality Early Years and Childcare Team support this by delivering a range of training

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programmes. Where required they will also support settings with one to one support, advice and guidance, identifying and delivering a range of training sessions to support with this. The team also work with the sector through network meetings, social media and other forms of communication to ensure information is accessible. The outcome is to support good quality practices and embed equality of opportunity as part of this process.

The Early Years Foundation Stage sets the standards that all early years' providers must meet to ensure equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported. Equalities in the early years and childcare sector are audited through OFSTED reports, and the local authority targets. These audits have highlighted that a significant amount of settings will continue to require support and appropriate training to embed equality and inclusion in all aspects of their childcare settings.

Department for Education guidance published in November 2014, expect schools/childcare providers to promote British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

The Department also published The Prevent Duty in June 2015 which provides advice and guidance for schools and childcare providers, on how to deal with people being drawn into acts of potential terrorism. This is incorporated into the equality training programmes we offer to support practitioners to deliver their duties.

### **Grant Funding**

The Local Authority still provides funding to settings who need sustainability support. This is limited and based on an assessment process relating to quality and including Ofsted judgements. The funding is an application process which is administered through our Early years Grant Panel which was established to assess grant applications received from childcare providers.

### Sustainability and Holiday Play schemes

The local authority has also made grant funding available to childcare providers to help them to provide holiday play schemes and/or new childcare places including out of school provision to meet the needs of working parents and parents and carers that are returning to work, education or training. Funding is also available for providers experiencing sustainability issues and for start-up of new provision in areas identified as having childcare gaps.

During April 2018 to March 2019 the local authority supported 3 Childcare providers who were experiencing sustainability issues and 15 holiday providers to deliver places at 19 play schemes over the school holiday periods.

### **Findings:**

- Childcare practitioners in Sandwell have continued to receive advice and support with training and entry into gaining qualifications.
- Childcare providers have continued to receive quality improvement support.
- The majority of funded providers (84%) that have been inspected by Ofsted in the last year have been rated as good or outstanding.
- Just over 74% of all providers are rated as outstanding or good.

## CHILDCARE IN SANDWELL

The FIS maintain a database which contains comprehensive and up to date information on childcare provision across the borough. All 94 primary schools were contacted to update their details with regard to before and after school activities as well as holiday provision.

Information held in the FIS database, school's data and a survey of childcare and early years providers are used to assess the supply of childcare across the borough.

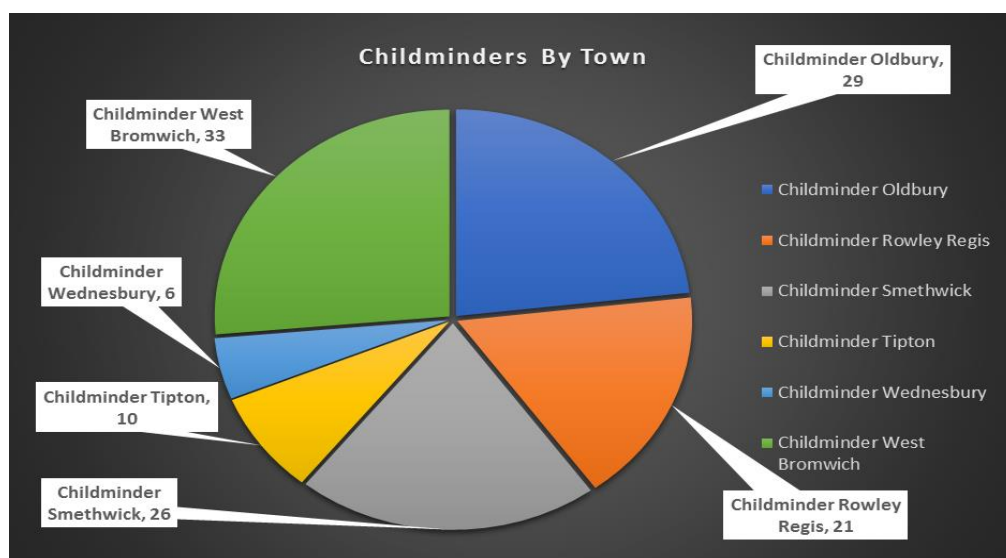
### Childcare Provisions 0-5 years

There are 125 childminders, 77 day nurseries and 13 pre-school playgroups.

In addition, there are also 16 school site nurseries offering 2 year old funded places. These providers offer a total of 5544 full time childcare places for 0-5-year olds (Please note that for some 2,3 and 4 year olds, one funded full-time place may be counted as 2 part time places). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2017 mid-year estimates indicated that the 0-4-year-old population in Sandwell was 24286. There are also 4720 early education places in the maintained day nursery sector which gives us a total of 10264 places and would make the ratio 1:2.

Historically, it is unlikely that a child would start nursery any earlier than 6 months old and most 4 years old are in a reception class. Therefore, this would indicate that there is adequate 0-5 provision at a borough level.

However, further analysis of childcare providers was undertaken which showed that at town level there are only 6 childminders in Wednesbury and 10 childminders in Tipton which is significantly less when compared to the other towns in Sandwell.



### Wednesbury Survey

Historically, Wednesbury Town has been identified as having various childcare gaps which have not been resolved. However, the Family Information Service has not received complaints/concerns from families and partners within the town. With this in mind, it was decided to undertake a survey for Wednesbury to obtain the views of the families in the area.

Between October 2018 and January 2019, a survey was undertaken across Wednesbury which looked at parents use of childcare. The survey was widely publicised, and parents had the opportunity to complete online or a paper version. 119 parents responded.

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Of those parents who said they were working or studying, 77% don't use formal childcare  
 Of those that use formal childcare, their preferred choice was a day nursery.  
 35% use family and friends for their childcare needs.  
 83% were aware of the free funded childcare offers.  
 75% indicated that they have not found lack of childcare to be a barrier to working or studying.

The survey indicated that parents in the area are high users of informal childcare (family and friends). However, extensive marketing and promotion of the Family Information Service website and the help available with childcare costs would be beneficial to families.

### **Funded Places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds**

The criteria for free funding for 2 year olds (15 hours) and 3 and 4 year olds hours (30 hours) free entitlement are available at: [www.sandwell.gov.uk/freechildcare](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/freechildcare).

In April 2019, there were 12,160 funded childcare and early years places being offered by 263 early years and childcare providers (including the maintained sector).

	Schools	PVI's	Childminders	Total
2 year olds places	78	1776	121	<b>1975</b>
3 and 4 year olds (15hrs)	4720	3140	114	<b>7974</b>
3 and 4 year olds (30hrs)	482	1611	118	<b>2211</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5280</b>	<b>6527</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>12160</b>

### Free funding for 2 year olds

The Department for Education (DfE) provided a list of eligible families with 2 year olds for the academic year September 2018, this figure is approximately 2,101. In Summer term 2019 (April), there were 1406 (67% of DfE figures) children accessing free funding for two year olds places. The number of children accessing has increased by 2% from the previous academic year take up of 65%. Nationally the take up is decreasing. Anecdotally this is likely due to the 30 hours offer.

For the academic year September 2018, the DfE figures for eligible children is 2,118 approximately 44% of the birth data (4782). In April 2019, there were 182 providers offering 1969 places for 2 year olds. The number of providers has increased by 6%.

**Based on the 2018/19 take up there are sufficient places boroughwide for 2019/20.  
 Extensive marketing and promotion is required to increase take up.**

### 3 and 4 Year Olds Universal Entitlement (15 hours free funding)

All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of free funding from the term following their third birthday until they start in Reception Class in the September following their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. Therefore, some children will access up to 5 terms of early education.

For the academic year September 2018, there were 7536 eligible children. In summer term (April 2019), there were 7183 children accessing universal 3 and 4 year old funded places. The take up for universal entitlement for the academic year September 2018 is 95.3%.

For the academic year September 2019, the birth data indicates that there are 7514 3 and 4 year olds across the borough who are eligible for the universal entitlement. In April 2019, there were 263 providers delivering 7974 places for 3 and 4 year olds (15hrs). The number of providers has increased by 7% on the previous year.

**Based on the 2018/19 take up there are sufficient places boroughwide for 2019/20.**

### 3 and 4 year olds Extended Entitlement (30 hours free funding)

The 30 hours free funding came into effect in September 2017 and is aimed at working families. Families who are eligible for free 30 hours are issued with a code from HMRC. In Summer term (April 2019), the DfE reported that there were 2018 codes valid for Sandwell. Sandwell validated 1855 codes. In the summer term, (April 2019) there were 1846 children accessing a place. This is an increase of approximately 19% (1499) on April 2018.

In April 2019, there were 215 providers offering 2211 childcare and early learning places for the extended entitlement (30 hours). The number of providers offering 30 hours has increased by 17%. There are no figures available for the number of children eligible for 30 hours, as there are no data sets that indicates how many 3 year olds are in families which meet the criteria for the 30 hour funding. However, there has been no feedback or complaints from parents that they are unable to find suitable childcare and early learning places for the 30 hours.

**Based on the 2018/19 year take up there are sufficient places boroughwide for 2019/20.**

### **School Age Provisions**

#### Before school provision

86 of the 94 schools indicated that they provide breakfast clubs either themselves or through a private provider on the school site. 7 of the 8 other schools have access to community providers. 1 school has no access to before school provision (Hanbury).

#### After school provision

There are 70 registered out of school care providers either on school site or in the community providing 3726 childcare places. All 94 schools offer either registered out of school care or after school activities in school or with community providers.

#### School Holiday Provision

There are 52 holiday providers providing 2346 childcare places across the borough. There are also an additional 9 holiday clubs/activities that are provided by schools; the number of places that the schools provide is not available. Tividale and Wednesbury South are the only wards that have no holiday provisions.

### **Vacancies**

185 out of 322 (57%) Ofsted registered childcare providers (excluding before school clubs), indicated that they have at least 1 vacancy. Tividale (100%), Friar Park (89%) and Tipton Green (88%) has the greatest % of vacancies. Langley has the lowest % of vacancies (25%).

Bristnall has the greatest number of providers with vacancies (20) and Wednesbury South has the lowest number of providers with vacancies (2).

### **Irregular Working Hours**

Of the 202 childcare providers (childminders and day nurseries), 162 indicated they would be able to offer flexible childcare for working parents. 64% of Childminders and 36% of Day Nurseries would be able to offer childcare for parents working irregular hours.

All wards have providers offering irregular hours.

## Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Provision

Of the 322 childcare services (excluding before school clubs) 271 (84%) have indicated that they would care for children with SEND. All wards have providers that would care for children with SEND, however the number of SEND providers has increased by 71 (26%) from 2018

The Inclusion and Early Years' Service works with providers to support children to integrate into childcare and early settings. They also administer the Inclusion Support Grant and the High Blocks Grant which enables children with SEND to have one to one support in a setting depending on the child's level of need.

There are also 17 short break services for children with a diagnosis / Education Health Care Plan who can access these services.

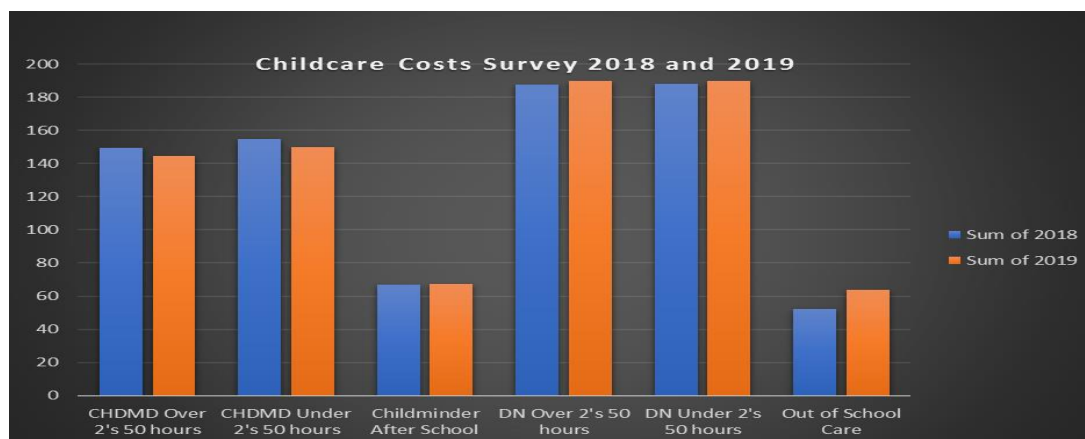
## Affordability

The FIS database holds information on the average weekly cost of childcare, the information below is based on those providers in Sandwell who have indicated their childcare cost:

Type of provision	Average weekly costs (part time place = 25hrs)	Average weekly cost full time = 50hrs
Childminders = under 2's	£75	£150
Childminders = over 2's	£72.25	£144.50
Day nurseries= under 2's	£95	£190
Day nurseries= over 2's	£94.97	£189.95
Out of school care		£63.63
Childminder after school		£67.50

Source: FIS database December 2018

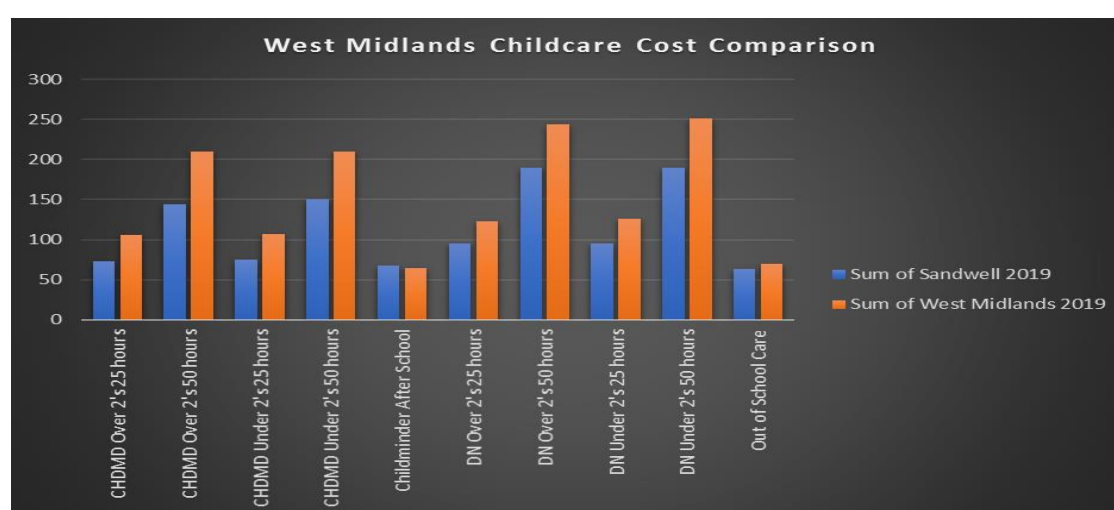
The cost of full time childminder places for under 5's has decreased by 3% from the previous survey in 2017. The cost of day nurseries places has increased by 1% from the previous survey. The cost of out of school care has increased both in after school's provisions and with childminders who provide after school care.



The Family and Childcare Trust undertook a childcare cost survey in December 2018, data from Family Information Services across the West Midlands region shows the average cost as:

Type of provision	Average weekly costs (part time place = 25hrs)	Average weekly cost full time
Childminders = under 2's	£106.46	£210.28
Childminders = over 2's	£106.11	£209.50
Day nurseries= under 2's	£125.87	£251.81
Day nurseries= over 2's	£123.37	£244.30
Out of school care		£69.34
Childminder after school		£64.29

Source: Family and Childcare Trust Annual Childcare Costs Survey, 2018



The above data shows that the average cost of childcare for the 0-2 age range for both part time and full time places is significantly lower in Sandwell than the rest of the West Midlands.

The average cost for out of school care is slightly lower than the rest of the West Midlands.

### Holiday cost

In March 2019, the average holiday cost in Sandwell was £101.00 per week

The Family and Childcare Trust undertook a Holiday Childcare Survey in May 2018, data from Family Information Services across the West Midlands shows the average weekly holiday costs was £125.90

Holiday childcare cost in Sandwell remains significantly lower than the rest of the West Midlands.



**Findings:**

- For the 0-5 age range, there is 1 place to every 5 children (1:5 ratio) this indicates that there should be sufficient childcare across the borough to meet this age range. When the early learning places are added this ratio becomes 1:2
- A survey of parents identified that Wednesbury would benefit from extensive marketing and promotion of the Family Information Service Hub. Promotion of the help available with childcare costs to families across Wednesbury also needs to take place.
- Based on DfE figures 44% of 2 year olds are eligible for free funding for 2 year olds.
- The number of children accessing free early funding for 2 year olds has increased from 65% to 67%
- 1 school in Greets Green and Lyng ward (Hanbury) has no before school club.
- There is no holiday provision in Tividale and Wednesbury South wards.
- 57% of childcare providers indicated that they currently have at least 1 vacancy, this has reduced from 70% last year.
- 84% of childcare providers indicated they would care for a child with SEND. All wards have providers who would care for children with SEND.
- Overall, the cost of childcare in Sandwell is significantly lower than the West Midlands

**Gaps Identified:**

- To extensively market and promote the Family Information Service Hub and the help available with childcare costs to families across Wednesbury.
- 1 school in Hateley Heath ward (Hall Green) may require both before and after school club, whilst Hanbury may require before school club.
- Reddal Hill and St Martin's may also require after school clubs.
- There may be a need for more holiday provision in Tividale and Wednesbury South.

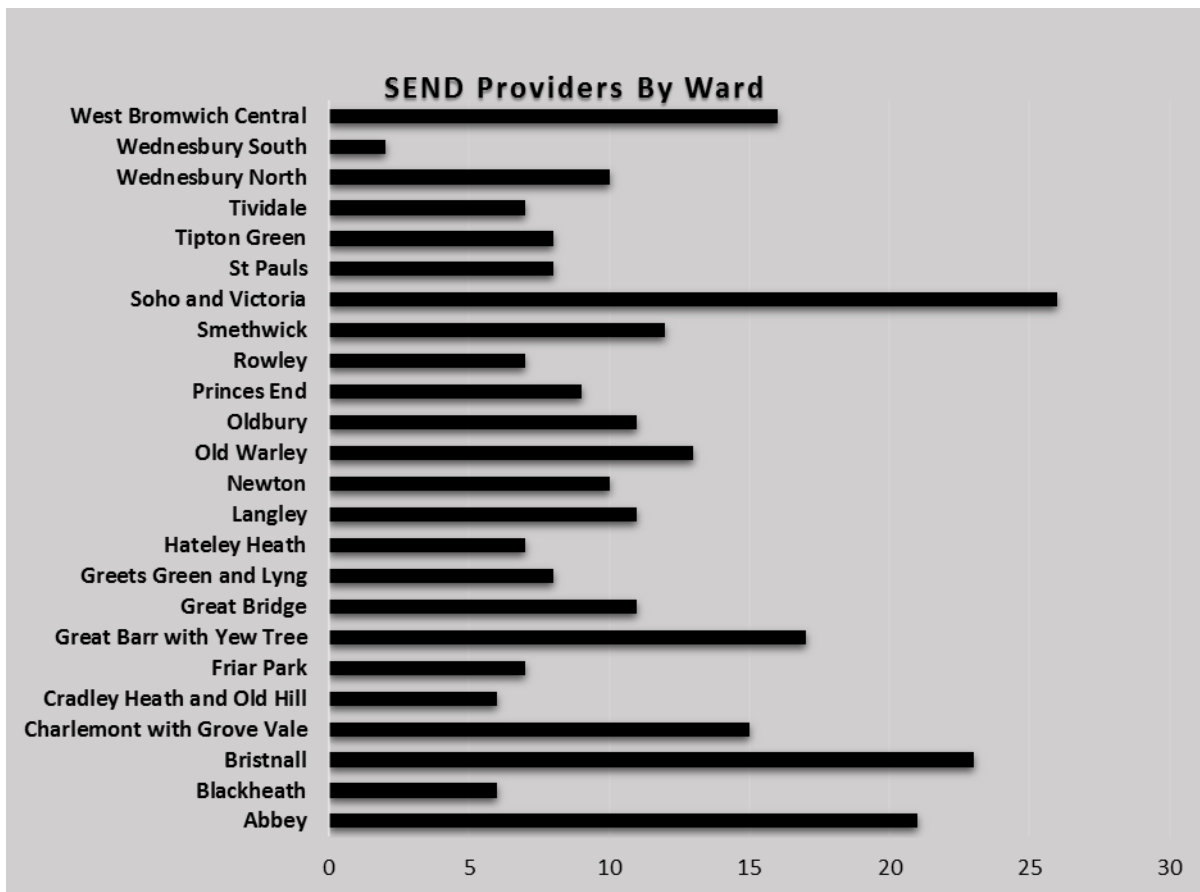
## SUFFICIENCY OF CHILDCARE PLACES BY WARD

This section will look at the following by ward:

- Number of providers who indicated that they would care for children with additional needs
- Number of providers who indicated that they would be able to provide childcare for children whose parents work irregular working patterns
- Childcare places 0-5 Years olds including free funding for 2, 3 and 4 Year Olds
- Childcare for school aged children including school holidays

### Childcare for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The table below shows the number of providers who offer care for children with additional needs. There is no data available for the number of children who have additional needs and would require childcare. The FIS monitors the request for childcare for children with additional needs and works with the Inclusion Support Early Years Services to support them to access childcare and early learning.

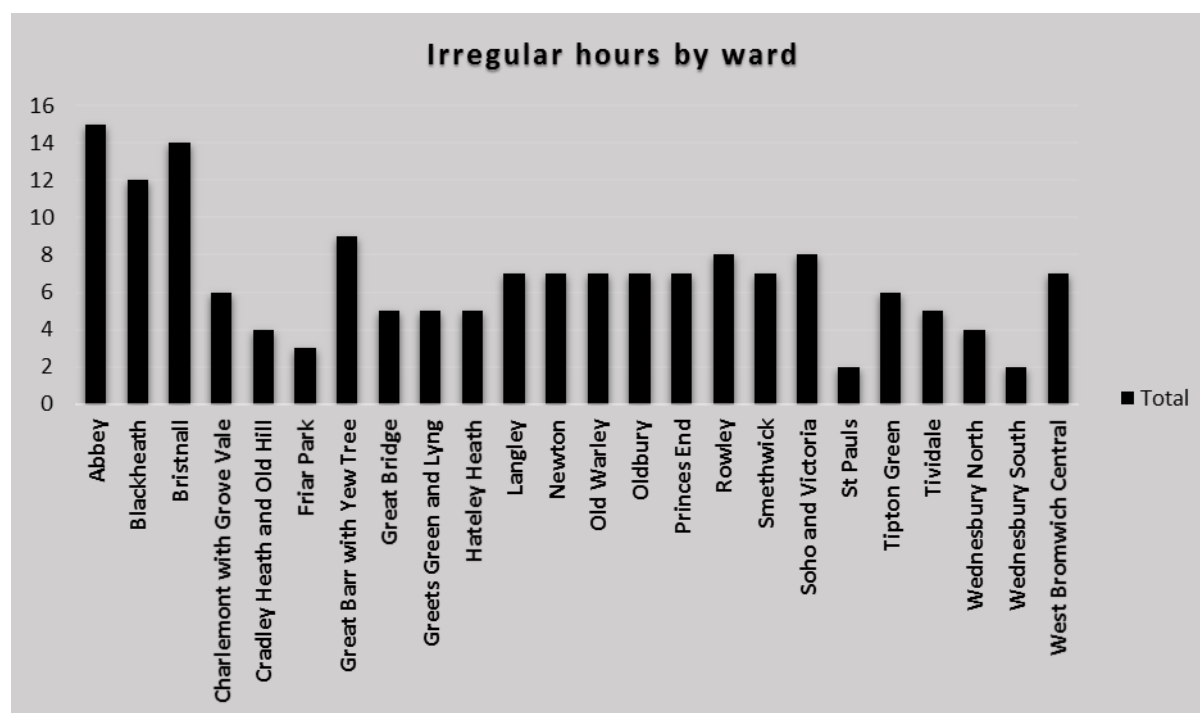


### Key Findings:

- All wards have SEND providers

## Childcare Places for Irregular Working Hours

This table shows the number of providers who provide care for children whose parents work irregular working patterns. There is no data available for the number of children whose parents work irregular working hours. The FIS monitors the request for childcare for irregular working patterns and work with individual families to identify providers who can meet the needs of the families.



### Findings:

- All wards have childcare providers offering irregular working hours.

## Childcare Places 0-4 Years Old, Free Funding for 2, 3 and 4 Year Olds

- **Table 1** shows number of children and number of childcare places for aged 0-4 by ward. The ratio of number of children to funded places available. A Ratio of higher than 1:2 (Sandwell ratio) is assessed further by looking at vacancy levels in each ward.
- **Graph 1** shows supply and demand for free funding for 2 year olds. The number of eligible children is obtained from DfE data for academic year September 2019-July 2020. To assess if a gap exists between those 2 year olds eligible for funding and those taking up a funded place, the figure for current take up is obtained from Early Years. In wards where there are more eligible 2 year olds than places available, overall funded places (including 3 and 4 year old places) and places in neighbouring wards is assessed. A marketing strategy will be developed to increase take up.
- **Graph 2** shows supply and demand for 3 and 4 year old universal entitlement (15 hours) The number of eligible children is obtained from birth data. To assess if a gap exists between those 3 and 4 year olds eligible for funding and those taking up a funded place, the figure for current take up is obtained from Early Years. In wards where there are more eligible 3 and 4 year olds than places available, overall funded places (including 2 year old places) and places in neighbouring wards is assessed. A marketing strategy will be developed to increase take up.
- **Graph 3** shows supply and demand for free funding for 3 and 4 year olds extended entitlement (30 hours). There is currently no data available for the number of families eligible for 30 hours funding for 3 and 4 year olds. Supply and demand can only be measured by looking at the number of funded places for 3 and 4 year olds in each ward and the number of children accessing places during the academic year 2018-19. Neighbouring wards are assessed if a gap is identified.

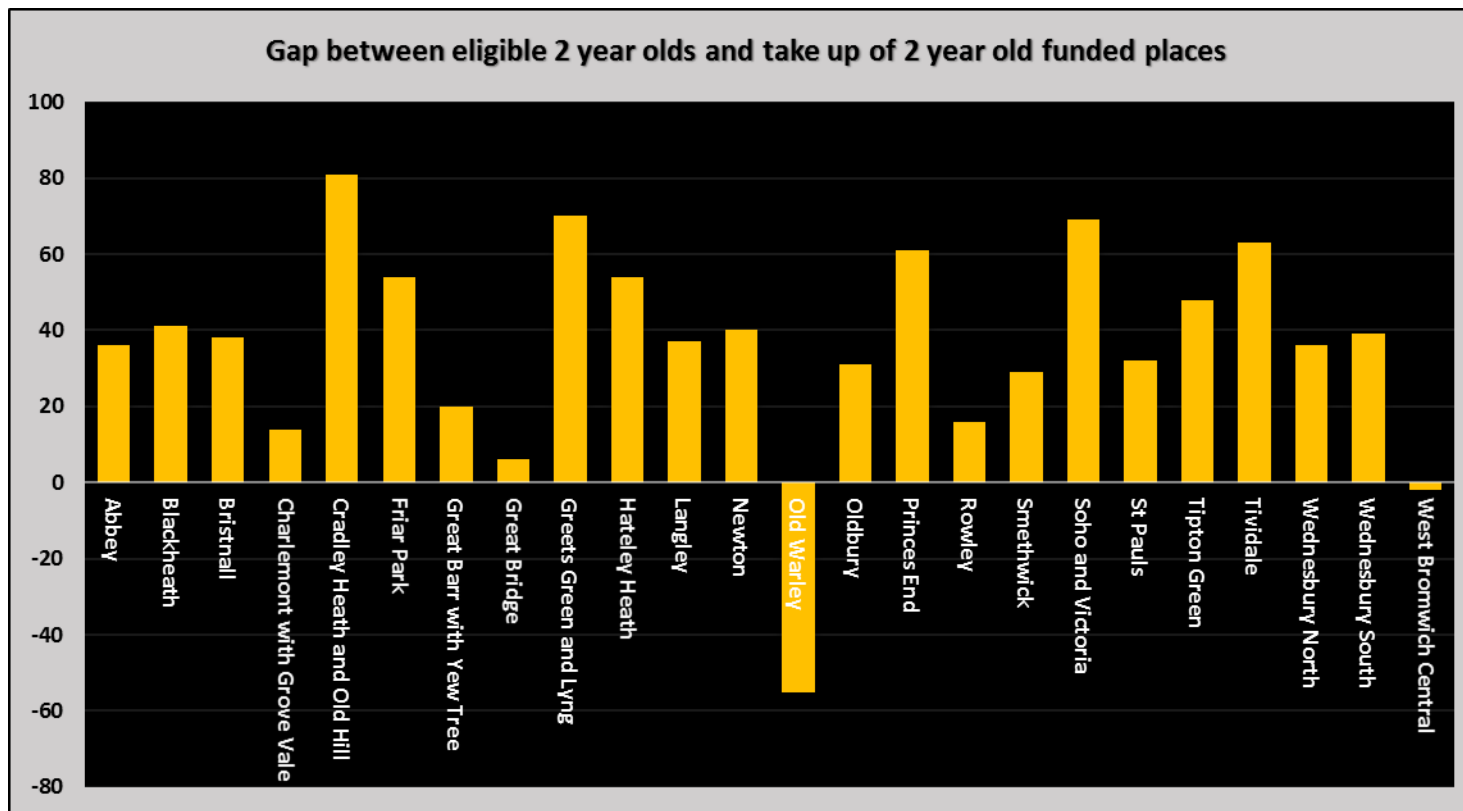
**Table 1** Childcare places for 0-4 year olds

Ward	Estimated CHDMD Places	Estimated DN places	Estimated PG Places	Estimated MSN Places	Estimated Places 0-4 years	Birth 0-4	Ratio of Children to 1 estimated 0-4 place in Sandwell (Sandwell benchmark 2:1)
Abbey	84	211	60	208	563	1020	2:1
Blackheath	77	153	0	120	350	888	2:1
Bristnall	78	315	0	208	601	828	1:1
Charlemont with Grove Vale	43	101	96	134	374	792	2:1
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	12	100	0	224	336	1003	3:1
Friar Park	24	87	48	256	415	981	2:1
Great Barr with Yew Tree	60	199	16	156	431	861	2:1
Great Bridge	12	261	25	320	618	979	2:1
Greets Green and Lyng	18	110	0	242	370	1146	3:1
Hateley Heath	30	60	0	224	314	1091	3:1
Langley	60	136	0	180	376	950	2:1
Newton	48	102	0	150	300	776	2:1
Old Warley	42	74	124	104	344	759	2:1
Oldbury	27	277	0	320	624	1337	2:1
Princes End	28	99	0	182	309	1033	3:1
Rowley	36	171	20	138	365	804	2:1
St Pauls	12	141	70	164	387	1271	3:1
Smethwick	24	180	30	254	488	1201	2:1
Soho and Victoria	36	329	44	296	705	1723	2:1
Tipton Green	12	195	0	160	367	1134	3:1
Tividale	60	106	0	190	356	921	2:1
Wednesbury North	18	227	0	260	505	923	2:1
Wednesbury South	0	136	0	60	196	826	4:1
West Bromwich Central	18	382	0	190	590	1077	2:1

CM= Childminders; DN = Day Nurseries; PG = Pre-school Playgroup; MSN= Maintained School Nursery

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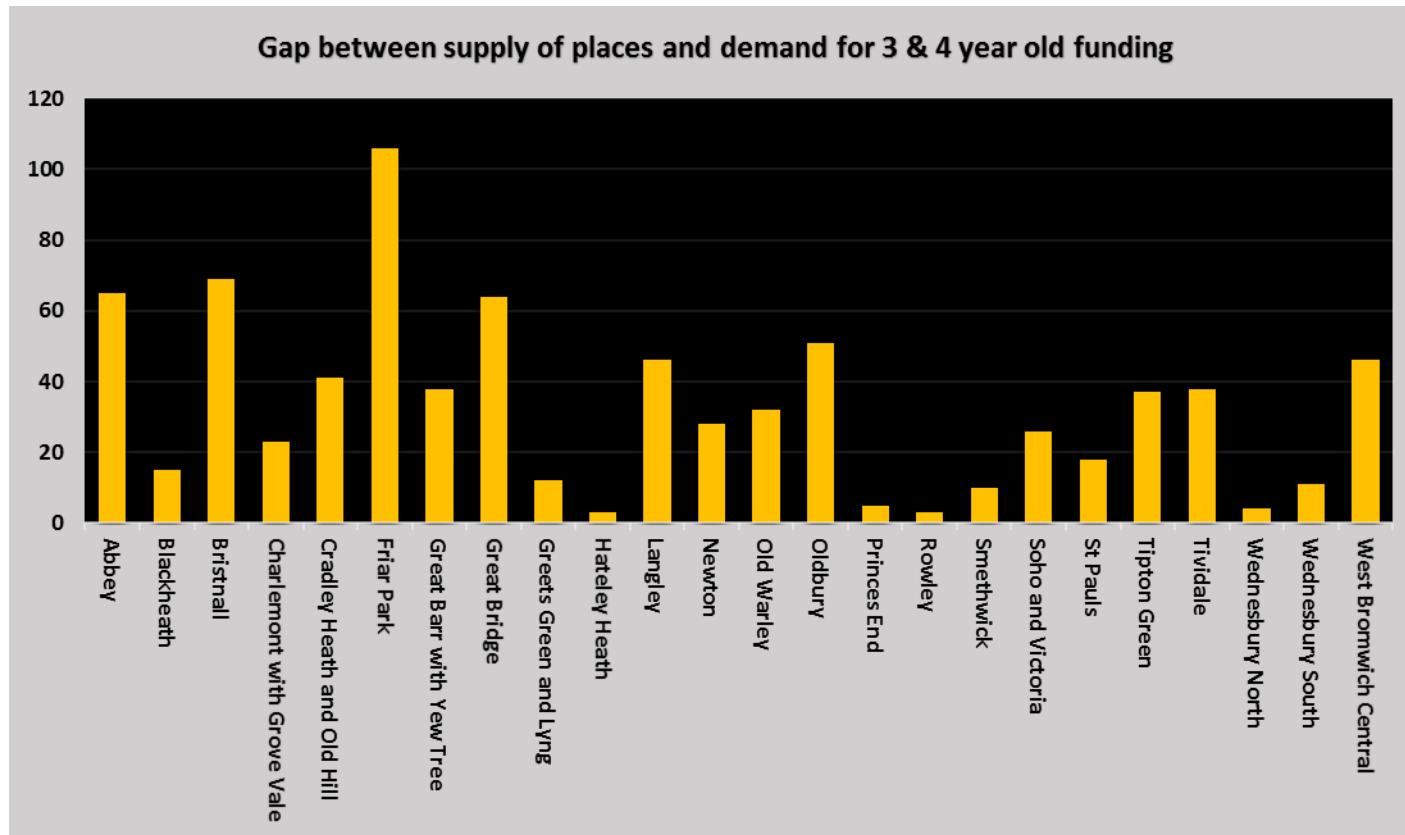
**Graph 1** Gap between 2 year old eligibility and take up of funded places in each ward



There are 6 wards where no gap exists – Charlemont with Grove Vale, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Great Bridge, Old Warley, Rowley and West Bromwich Central.

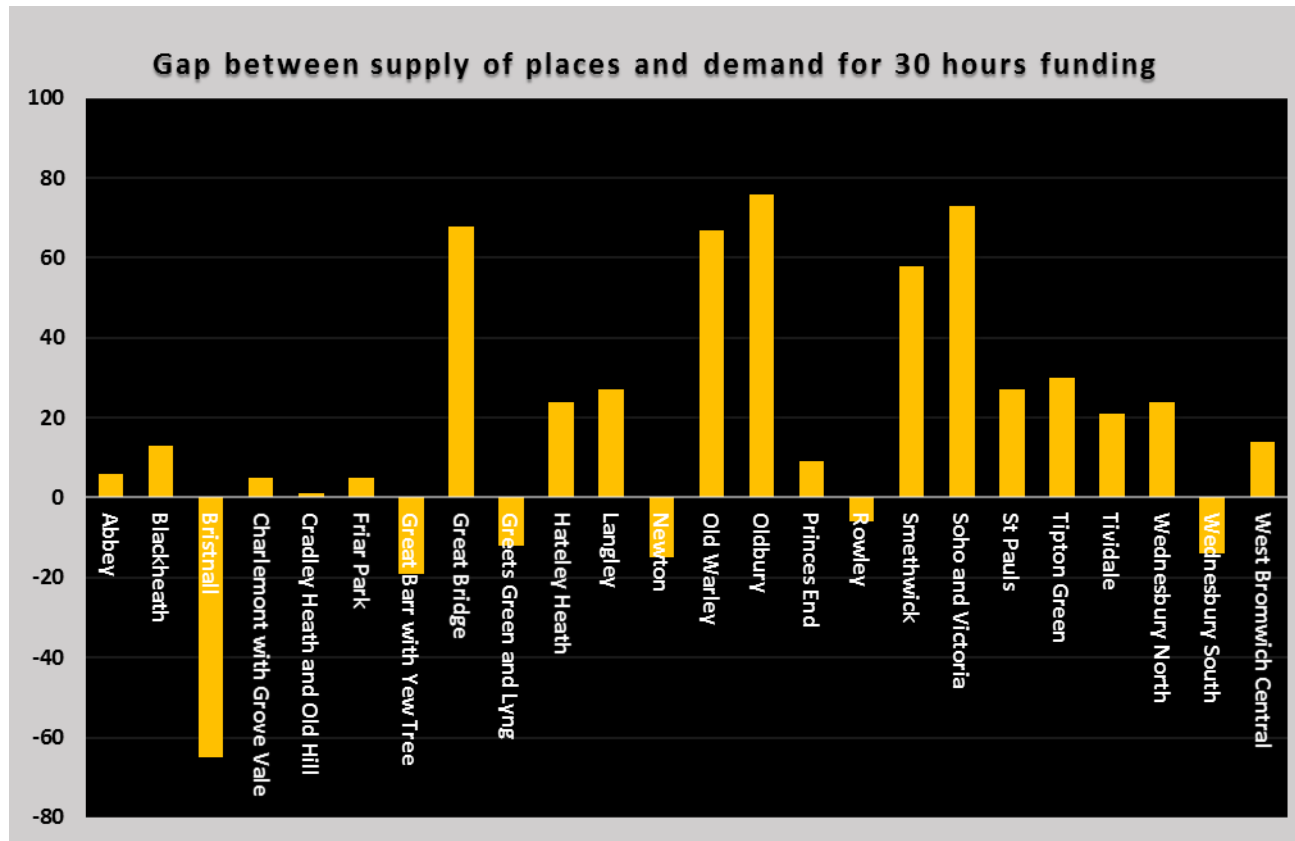
Marketing is required in other wards to increase the take up of 2 year old places

**Graph 2** Gap between estimated places available and take up of 3 & 4 year old funded places in each ward



5 Wards – Hateley Heath, Princes End, Rowley, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South have limited capacity. However, there are places in neighbouring wards. There are sufficient places for 3 & 4 year olds overall.

**Graph 3** Gap between the estimated places available and 30 hours take up in each ward



There are 6 wards where take up exceeds estimated places – Bristnall, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Greets Green and Lyng, Newton, Rowley and Wednesbury South. In these wards, providers are likely to be using surplus 2 year old places. There are sufficient places but little capacity for growth in demand in these wards

## Childcare for School Aged Children

This table shows supply of childcare for school aged children by ward.

Ward	Schools in Ward	School Site/Community Breakfast Club	School Site/Community After School Club	PVI Holiday Playscheme	Total Childcare for School Aged Children
Abbey	4	4	4	3	11
Blackheath	2	2	2	2	6
Bristnall	6	6	6	4	16
Charlemont with Grove Vale	4	4	4	2	10
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	5	5	4	1	10
Friar Park	4	4	4	1	9
Great Barr with Yew Tree	4	4	4	5	13
Great Bridge	5	5	4	3	11
Greets Green and Lyng	4	3	4	2	9
Hateley Heath	4	4	4	1	9
Langley	3	3	3	2	8
Newton	3	3	3	3	9
Old Warley	3	3	3	2	8
Oldbury	5	5	5	2	12
Princes End	4	4	4	1	9
Rowley	3	3	3	1	7
Smethwick	4	4	4	2	10
Soho and Victoria	5	5	5	8	18
St Pauls	3	3	3	4	10
Tipton Green	5	5	4	1	10
Tividale	3	3	3	0	6
Wednesbury North	5	5	5	2	12
Wednesbury South	3	3	3	0	6
West Bromwich Central	3	3	3	4	10

1 highlighted ward - Greets Green and Lyng has a gap with before school (Hanbury Primary). Reddal Hill Primary (Cradley Heath and Old Hill) has after school activities but no formal club; Jubilee Park (Great Bridge) has an after school club at Summerhill Primary St Martin's (Tipton Green) is working with a PVI setting to offer after school provision. Hall Green (Hateley Heath) has childminders offering before and after school  
 2 highlighted wards – Tividale and Wednesbury South have no holiday playschemes  
 2 wards – Soho and Victoria and West Bromwich Central have dedicated SEND provision.

### Findings:

- 7 wards have a ratio of more than 2:1 (Sandwell's ratio) for 0-5 places: Cradley Heath & Old Hill, Greets Green & Lyng, Hateley Heath, Newton, Princes End, St Pauls and Wednesbury South. However, these wards have a high number of vacancies. No gaps identified.
- 1 ward: Greets Green and Lyng has a gap with before school
- 2 wards have no holiday playschemes: Tividale and Wednesbury South

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that sufficient childcare places are available, a detailed and comprehensive action plan will be developed to address the following 9 recommendations. These include actions that were not achieved in the childcare sufficiency action plan of 2018/19. The recommendations are:

1. To continue to support childcare providers to deliver high quality, sustainable provision.
2. To improve the quality of the providers which are judged by Ofsted as Requires Improvement or Inadequate by working intensively with them and those that deliver early education funded places.
3. To extensively market and promote the Family Information Service Hub and the help available with childcare costs to families across Wednesbury.
4. To work with schools and existing providers in Tividale and Wednesbury South ward to address the need for more holiday provisions.
5. To work with the school that has no access to out of school care: Hanbury in Greets Green and Lyng ward (before school club)
6. To use a wide range of direct and indirect marketing as well as extensive outreach, to increase the take up of 2 year old funding.
7. To monitor the take up of 3 and 4 year old 15 hour funded places in the maintained sector (schools) and gauge the impact of 2 year old funding and 30 hours funding on school nurseries.
8. To monitor the take up of 3 and 4 year old 30 hours funded places to address any potential shortfall.
9. To prioritise the following wards which have been identified as having more than one childcare gap: Greets Green and Lyng and Wednesbury South to increase access to childcare in these wards.

## Childcare Gaps by Ward

The table below shows the wards which require action during 2019/20:

<b>Wards</b> (Highlighted wards have multi childcare gaps)	<b>0-5 Provision</b>	<b>Before School Provision</b> (Highlighted wards have gap)	<b>After School Provision</b> (Highlighted wards have gap)	<b>Holiday Provision</b> (Highlighted wards have gap)	<b>SEND</b>	<b>Provide Irregular Working Hours Provisions</b>	<b>Termly monitor the number of places for 2 year olds - 15 hours</b>	<b>Termly monitor the number of places for 3 and 4 year olds - 15 hours</b>	<b>Termly monitor the number of places of 3 and 4 year olds - 30 hours</b> (Highlighted wards have gap)
Abbey									
Blackheath									
Bristnall									
Charlemont with Grove Vale									
Cradley Heath and Old Hill									
Friar Park									
Great Barr with Yew Tree									
Great Bridge									
<b>Greets Green and Lyng</b>		<b>Hanbury</b>							
Hateley Heath									
Langley									
Newton									
Old Warley									
Oldbury									
Princes End									
Rowley									
Smethwick									
Soho and Victoria									
St Pauls									
Tipton Green									
Tivdale									
Wednesbury North									
<b>Wednesbury South</b>									
West Bromwich Central									

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## Appendix 1

### Number and % of Ofsted Early Years Inspections August 2018

Overall effectiveness: The quality and standards of the provision	Number of providers					
	EYR providers	Total number inspected	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
<b>All England</b>	<b>63,460</b>	<b>51,202</b>	<b>9,741</b>	<b>38,667</b>	<b>2,256</b>	<b>538</b>
<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>5,262</b>	<b>4,398</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>3,386</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>45</b>
Birmingham	959	802	110	623	53	16
Dudley	217	185	44	134	5	2
Sandwell	248	206	24	167	12	3
Walsall	156	134	14	113	6	1
Wolverhampton	165	135	12	106	12	5

Overall effectiveness: The quality and standards of the provision	Percentage of inspected providers			
	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
<b>All England</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
Birmingham	14	78	7	2
Dudley	24	72	3	1
Sandwell	12	81	6	1
Walsall	10	84	4	1
Wolverhampton	9	79	9	4

Ofsted Early Years Inspections data is published annually in August. Currently only 2018 data is available. Tables on page 16 use Ofsted data received by the Family Information Service in their daily feed between April 2018 and March 2019. The 2 data sets therefore should be examined separately

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