

# Agenda Cabinet

**Wednesday, 1 September 2021 at 3.30 pm**  
**At Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**This agenda gives notice of items to be considered in private as required by Regulations 5 (4) and (5) of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.**

**1 Apologies for Absence**

**2 Declarations of Interest**

Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

**3 Minutes**

7 - 42

To confirm the minutes of the meetings held on 7 and 21 July 2021 as a correct record.

**4 Additional Items of Business**

To determine whether there are any additional items of business to be considered as a matter of urgency.

**5 Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2020/21 and Improvement Plan**

43 - 114

To receive and note the Sandwell Children's Trust



Annual Review and Improvement Plan.

- |    |  |           |
|----|--|-----------|
| 6  | <b>Sandwell Children's Invest to Save Proposal</b>   | 115 - 144 |
|    | To consider Sandwell Children's Trust Invest to Save proposals.  |           |
| 7  | <b>Contract for the Supply of Liquid Fuels - Appointment of Contractor</b>   | 145 - 148 |
|    | To authorise the use of Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) Framework for the supply of liquid fuels.                        |           |
| 8  | <b>Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy</b>   | 149 - 160 |
|    | To approve the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy and Implementation Plan.  |           |
| 9  | <b>Q1 Budget Monitoring 2021/22</b>  | 161 - 186 |
|    | To consider the latest budget monitoring position at Quarter 1.  |           |
| 10 | <b>Use of Local Council Tax Support Grant 2021/22</b>  | 187 - 192 |
|    | To approve the Local Council Tax Support Grant 2021/22.  |           |
| 11 | <b>Consultation on the Future of Walker Grange</b>   | 193 - 214 |
|    | To approve the commencing of a consultation process on the Walker Grange site.   |           |
| 12 | <b>Premises 106/107/108 High Street, West Bromwich - Approval to accept surrender of lease prior to the break date of 30 June 2024</b> | 215 - 228 |
|    | To authorise the conclusion of negotiations.   |           |
| 13 | <b>Award of a Framework Agreement for the Provision of Tree Maintenance &amp; Arboricultural Services</b>                              | 229 - 236 |

To authorise the awarding of the Framework Agreement for the Provision of Tree Maintenance & Arboricultural Services.

14      **Schools Capital Programme 2021-2024**      237 - 260

To allocate School Condition Allocation funding for cyclical maintenance to support maintained schools for a future school replacement building programme.

15      **Cabinet Petitions Committee Minutes**      261 - 270

To note the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2021.

**Kim Bromley-Derry**  
**Interim Chief Executive**  
Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
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**Distribution**

Councillor R Singh (Chair)  
Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Crompton, Hartwell, Millard, I Padda, Simms and  
Taylor

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## Minutes of The Cabinet

**Wednesday 7 July 2021 at 3.30pm**  
**Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor R Singh (Chair);  
Councillors Ahmed, Crompton, Hartwell, Millard, I Padda,  
Simms and Taylor.

**Also present:** Councillors Mabena, Moore and Shackleton.

**Officers:** Nicholas Austin (Interim Director – Borough Economy),  
Lesley Hagger (Director – Children’s Services), Rebecca  
Maher (Acting Director – Finance), Lisa McNally (Director –  
Public Health), Tammy Stokes (Interim Director –  
Regeneration and Growth), Sue Stanhope (Interim Director  
HR), Surjit Tour (Director - Law and Governance and  
Monitoring Officer), Katharine Willmette (Interim Director –  
Adult Social Care), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager –  
Democracy) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services  
Manager).

### 123/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali and  
E M Giles.

### 124/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.



### 125/21 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 June 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 126/21 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider at the meeting.

### 127/21 **2022 Commonwealth Games – Sandwell Aquatics Centre - Management and Operation of Highways for Commonwealth Games**

It was reported that West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) had been appointed by the Secretary of State to produce the Games Transport Plan. In order to enable a successful Games, a number of traffic management measures would be required at all the venues across the region and partners were working closely to ensure the network operated as an integrated whole.

Approval was sought to sign a Concurrent Powers consent letter with the West Midlands Combined Authority to allow them to make related Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders to enable safe and efficient operation of the highways during the Commonwealth Games over a period of up to 4 weeks from mid-July 2022 to mid-August 2022.

Approval was also sought to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with WMCA to identify and quantify the network management requirements to be delivered and implemented on the Games Route Network (GRN) to enable safe and efficient operation of the relevant highways during the Commonwealth Games.



## Reason for Decision

In order to enable a successful Games, a number of traffic management measures would be required at all the venues across the region and partners were working closely to ensure the network operated as an integrated whole.

Although in normal circumstances Sandwell would undertake the necessary legal requirements to bring about Games Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders and issue Games Temporary Traffic Regulation Notices required for the Aquatics Centre venue, during the Games it was possible that there would be scenarios where, due to unforeseen circumstances, TTROs/TTRNs were required at exceptionally short notice (for example, on a Sunday or overnight).

To guard against this risk it was requested that TfWM should have the ability to exercise concurrent powers, as outlined in the Games Act 2020, in consultation with the local Highway Authority, if the need arose.

The successful management of the West Midlands road network was critical to the success of the Commonwealth Games. During the Games the road network including the Games Route Network would need to function efficiently to balance the travel movement priorities of athletes, other Games family and spectators with minimal disruption to businesses, residents and background users of the network.

## Alternative Options Considered

The only alternative option available was not to sign the concurrent powers agreement letter. Consequently, if during the Games a scenario occurred where TTROs/TTRNs were required at exceptionally short notice to allow the games to continue without interruption (e.g. on a weekend or overnight), then the local authority may not have the resources to implement these within the required emergency timeframes.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

The WMCA would have the resources available at very short notice to coordinate the required emergency activity on the GRN and across local authority boundaries, in consultation with the relevant Highway Authorities. In addition, this would also result in reputational harm as the only relevant Highway Authority not to enter into the wider agreement to help facilitate the operation of the Commonwealth Games.

Not entering into a Memorandum of Understanding would miss the opportunity to agree the mechanisms for efficient functioning of the Games Route network during the games period. This could result in competitors and officials being delayed and potentially missing or delaying programmed events. This would inevitably result in widespread reputational harm.

### Agreed:-

- (1) that approval be given to sign a Concurrent Powers consent letter with the West Midlands Combined Authority to allow them to make related Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders to enable safe and efficient operation of the highways during the Commonwealth Games over a period of up to 4 weeks from mid-July 2022 to mid-August 2022, dates to be specified in the agreement;
- (2) that approval be given to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with WMCA to identify and quantify the network management requirements to be delivered and implemented on the Games Route Network to enable safe and efficient operation of the relevant highways during the Commonwealth Games;
- (3) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to sign both the concurrent powers consent letter and the memorandum of understanding with the West Midlands Combined Authority;



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- (4) that the (Interim) Director Borough Economy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Connected and Accessible Sandwell, be authorised to make any necessary amendments to the content of the Memorandum of Understanding following completion of any reviews and inspections to the existing highway network and be authorised to agree any necessary amendments to the Concurrent Powers Letter, including the final dates on behalf of the Council.

### 128/21 Request to procure an Adult Weight Management Service

Approval was sought to use the adult weight management services grant of £320,730 to procure a behavioural (tier 2) weight management service (during 2021/22) for adults (that included a multi-component programme addressing dietary intake, physical activity and behaviour change for adults who were overweight or living with obesity with the primary aim of promoting health behaviour change, which reduced body weight), using the dynamic purchasing system provided by Public Health England (PHE).

The Director – Public Health gave a presentation setting out the impact and causes of obesity in Sandwell and how the funding would be used to commission an enhanced weight management service as well as build up capacity for weight management support across our community and voluntary sector.

#### Reason for Decision

Obesity caused problems at both an individual and societal level, in that it was a significant driver of ill health and demand on health services. The extent to which obesity was a challenge for any given area could be gauged in the routine data on hospital admissions in which obesity was judged by the clinician to be a primary or secondary factor in the patient's ill health.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

In Sandwell last year the rate of admissions with obesity as a factor was 1842 per 100k population (see table one below). This equated to over 5585 individual admissions, which while by no means the highest in our region, still represented a significant impact on both individuals and healthcare resources.

The public health team would like to take the opportunity to use some short-term funding to provide a service that would improve levels of physical activity, healthy eating and support people to adopt healthier behaviours.

### Alternative Options Considered

Develop a service specification and commission the service using the Council's internal procurement processes. The implication of this was that an internal procurement exercise for anything over £100k could take between 2 and 9 months. Given that this funding may only be used for eligible expenditure between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, there may not be time to go through a full procurement process and deliver the service within the timescales specified. Capacity was also currently stretched in public health due to additional Covid-19 duties.

### Agreed:-

- (1) that the Director of Public Health be authorised, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to use the adult weight management services grant of £320,730 to procure a behavioural (tier 2) weight management service (during 21/22) for adults (that includes a multi-component programme addressing dietary intake, physical activity and behaviour change for adults who are overweight or living with obesity with the primary aim of promoting health behaviour change, which reduces body weight), using the dynamic purchasing system provided by Public Health England (PHE);



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into and execute, under seal as may be required, any contracts or ancillary documentation in relation to the award of contract referred to in Resolution (1) above.

129/21

### **Adoption of Temporary Accommodation Policy**

Approval was sought to the adoption of the Council's Temporary Accommodation Policy, in response to the requirement for all local authorities to have and keep up to date, a policy.

The policy covered:

- factors to be taken into account when making placements, including type, size and location of accommodation;
- length of stay in temporary accommodation;
- offers and refusals; and
- procurement of temporary accommodation.

When considering the factors taken into account when making placements, the policy covered and considered individual risk to households, the needs of children under the Children Act 2004, health and support needs, affordability and access to employment. Specific to the actual property, the policy provided the necessary steer on the type, size and physical condition of property to be offered.

More recently, the Housing Solutions Service had expended a considerable amount of resource to reduce the use of outsourced temporary accommodation (TA). This had involved a focus on sourcing TA from within the Council's own stock (almost exclusively two bedroom flats and around 40 units in total). This approach would be significantly enhanced with the development of the Council's own specific TA facility at Applewood Grove when it became operational and would provide a further 21 units of temporary accommodation.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

In all instances except where a risk assessment or household need requirement required otherwise, the new Applewood Grove facility would be the preferred option by the Council for TA. Where the use of Applewood Grove could not be facilitated, the Council would endeavor to source accommodation from within its own stock and from its contracted arrangements to source accommodation from the private rented sector. The fourth and last option would be to use bed and breakfast accommodation.

In response to a question raised by the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, the Cabinet member for Quality Homes and Thriving Neighbourhoods confirmed:-

- Applewood Grove was expected to be operational by the end of July 2021, having access to this accommodation was important to the delivery of the Temporary Accommodation Policy;
- the Council was continuing to make best use of its own stock, including some of our more difficult to let units, to discharge its duty to homeless households. This approach, alongside increasing access to good quality private sector accommodation had significantly reduced the number of people in temporary accommodation and the length of time before offers of more sustainable accommodation were made to homeless households. The Council would continue to look at the issue of age limit too when letting properties.

### Reason for Decision

It was a statutory requirement for each local authority to produce and publish a Temporary Accommodation Policy setting out the requirements that it needed to consider when allocating and procuring temporary accommodation.



### Alternative Options Considered

There were no alternative options, it was a statutory requirement for a local authority to publish a Temporary Accommodation Policy. The adoption of the Policy would ensure that the Council was not open to any form of legal challenge in this context.

#### Agreed:-

- (1) that approval be given for the Council to adopt the Temporary Accommodation Policy as now submitted;
- (2) that the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Homes, be authorised to review and approve subsequent Temporary Accommodation Policy reviews and amendments except where the changes are major or involve amended legislation.

130/21

### Black Country Collaborative Framework Contract for Minor Highway Works 2021-2024/25

Approval was sought to procure a new Black Country Collaborative Framework Contract for Minor Highway Works. The contract would commence on 1 November 2021, for a three year period up to 31 October 2024, with an option to extend for an additional twelve months until 31 October 2025, subject to satisfactory performance and budget availability.

The scope of the Framework Agreement included all minor civil engineering works associated with improving and protecting the highway network infrastructure. This could include, but was not limited to:

- construction of new footways and carriageways;
- associated highways landscape works;
- installation of new highway drainage;
- installation of new traffic signals and pedestrian crossings;
- installation of bitumen and block paved surfacing;



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- installation of lighting columns, bollards and electrical connections;
- installation of road marking, road signs, electronic message signs;
- excavation, demolition and disposal of existing infrastructure;
- infilling of redundant subway and associated demolition works;
- protection to existing underground services;
- implementation of off-highway civil engineering works on behalf of external and internal clients.

The Framework Agreement would comprise of 3 Lots:

- Lot 1 for package orders up to £100,000;
- Lot 2 for package orders between £100,001 and £500,000;
- Lot 3 for package orders over £500,001.

The Council would lead on the procurement process which would be undertaken collaboratively amongst the four Black Country local authorities, Birmingham City Council and Transport for West Midlands. From 1 of January 2021, OJEU was replaced by a new UK e-tendering platform called Find a Tender service (FTS). Consequently, the new Black Country Framework Contract for Minor Works (2021-2025) would be procured through the new FTS.

It was proposed that a number of suitable contractors would be appointed to each lot to ensure adequate resource was available to undertake all the required minor works across the relevant authorities, during the period of the framework.

### Reason for Decision

The benefits derived from the procurement of this regional Framework Contract would include delivery of projects necessary to improve the highway network and provide road safety measures, cost effectively and efficiently.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

All participants in this Framework Contract would be able to achieve costs savings and additional benefits through the reduction in tendering costs, reduced contract administration and secure social value benefits.

### Alternative Options Considered

Without a current Highways Minor Works framework to enable quick and efficient use of contractors to undertake programmes of work, each project would require separate costly and timely tendering processes. In addition, Highway Services would need to utilise elements of other less suited framework contracts for urgent service provision. This would inevitably lead to long delays in delivering safety and infrastructure improvement projects, increased costs and potential reputational harm.

#### Agreed:-

- (1) that the Interim Director - Borough Economy be authorised to award the Black Country Collaborative Framework Contract for Minor Highway Works 2021-2025, for the sum of £2.5m per year for period of up to 4 years, from 1 November 2021 to 31 October 2025;
- (2) that the Interim Director Borough Economy be authorised to extend the Black Country Collaborative Framework Contract for Minor Highway Works 2021-2025 by one year subject to satisfactory performance during the first 3 years;
- (3) that the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into appropriate contract for the Black Country Collaborative Framework Contract for Minor Highway Works 2021-2025;



- (4) that the Director of Law and Governance execute any documentation necessary to give effect to Resolution (1) and (2) above.

### 131/21 **Black Country Plan – Draft Plan for Consultation**

It was reported that in accordance with national planning policy, development plans should be updated every five years and should identify requirements for 15 years from the date of adoption. It was intended that the Black Country Plan (BCP) would be adopted in 2024 and would replace the Black Country Core Strategy. The Plan would also allocate specific sites for different land uses, carry forward the allocations in the Site Allocations & Delivery Plan (SAD) and would roll forward the land use requirements to 2039.

The Draft Plan had now reached an advanced and important stage of its preparation and would make key decisions on:

- **Climate change** - how can we adapt and mitigate against the impacts?
- **New housing** - how much new housing is needed? How much can be provided in sustainable locations and where will it go? What type and density of housing should be provided and how much affordable housing is required and achievable?
- **Employment land** - where does employment land need protection? How much new employment land is needed and where should it go?
- **Supporting infrastructure and services** - what improvements to transport, schools, green space, etc. will be needed to support new development? Where will new services be located?
- **How we will create healthy and safe places** to promote better health and wellbeing?
- **In the face of new development** how will the natural and historic environment be protected and improved?



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

The public, through the consultation process, would have an opportunity to provide responses which would be considered by the Cabinets of all four councils during the next stage of the Plan's preparation, with regards to any proposals for the removal of sites from the Green Belt anywhere in the Black Country and their allocation for development.

It was proposed to undertake a public consultation on the Draft BCP for an eight-week period, to be agreed by the Interim Director of Regeneration and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strong and Inclusive Economy. It was anticipated that the consultation would commence in August 2021 and run to the end of September/early October 2021.

In response to questions raised by the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, the Cabinet Member for Strong and Inclusive Economy confirmed:-

- there were no general powers to force land owners to bring sites into use. Local Planning Authorities did have the power to compulsory purchase land to meet Local Plan objectives but this would require funding and would need to demonstrate that there were no reasonable prospects of the land owner bringing forward proposals of their own. S.215 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 also gave local authorities the power to compel land owners to tidy up sites or make them safe although this not a matter for the Local Plan decision today;
- with regard to the specific site at Majestic Cinema in Cradley Road, Cradley Heath, this site was not allocated in the Black Country Plan but was one of a number of sites allocated in the Sandwell Site Allocations & Delivery DPD which were carried forward until that plan was reviewed. The Council was actively engaged with the site owner to explore how the site can be redeveloped.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

In response to questions raised by the Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in relation to the future plans for the Charlemont Community Centre and Painswick Close, Great Barr site, which was not deemed suitable for housing, the Cabinet Member for Strong and Inclusive Economy would endeavour to provide a response on the Council's proposals.

### Reason for Decision

The Draft Black Country Plan (formerly known as the Black Country Core Strategy) would provide the framework to guide future planning decisions in Sandwell as well as the wider Black Country. It was based on national policy and guidance, an assessment of local housing and employment needs, as well as meeting objectives that had been defined through an Issues and Options consultation in 2017.

It was important that Sandwell was covered by an up-to-date Local Plan in order to meet statutory requirements, to support regeneration and investment in the Borough, and to protect areas of value from development. Cabinet approval was required for each consultation stage of the Black Country Plan preparation process.

### Alternative Options Considered

The preparation and adoption of a Local Plan was a statutory requirement resulting from Government planning legislation. The Draft Black Country Plan resulted from the outcome of the 2017 Issues & Options consultation, the Call for Sites and the gathering and robust assessment of evidence in the period since.

### Agreed:-

- (1) that the Draft Black Country Plan, consultation material and non-technical summary and Sustainability Appraisal Reports be approved for consultation during Summer 2021;



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- (2) that the Interim Director - Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strong and Inclusive Economy, be authorised to make any necessary minor amendments to the Draft Black Country Plan and Draft Sustainability Appraisal Report prior to commencement of the consultation process;
- (3) that a further report be submitted to the Cabinet summarising key issues raised during the consultation, to inform preparation of the Publication Black Country Plan.

### 132/21 **Black Country Community Renewal Fund 50 Plus Partnership**

Approval was sought for the Council to act as accountable body in the event that the application submitted to lead a Community Renewal Fund application for a Black Country 50 plus partnership with public, private and voluntary sector partners was successful. The model would be embedded in the local community and respond to local needs. Support was targeted at economically inactive, unemployed and employed 50 plus residents, aiming to move individuals closer to the labour market, to upskill and to retrain.

The Community Renewal Fund (CRF) was £220 million of additional short-term funding with a focus on 100 priority areas. Sandwell and the Black Country boroughs were all on the priority list. CRF would lead into the wider Shared Prosperity fund due to replace funding for activities such as those currently funded by the European Social Fund.

The CRF funding should be used to test innovative models and should not duplicate existing/funded provision. Projects would be delivered over a duration of 6 months and all funds must be spent by March 2022.



### Reason for Decision

Sandwell MBC had applied to lead a CRF application for a Black Country 50 plus partnership. Strategic Finance had carried out an appraisal of the funding application, which had been evaluated against HM Treasury Green Book guidance. The appraisal process had recommended action points to mitigate any risk to the council.

### Alternative Options Considered

Alternative options were explored including an application for an all age employment service. This was not progressed since an all age service would duplicate existing funding streams in place.

The option for SMBC to not act as accountable body was explored however the other local authorities preferred SMBC as lead due to the 50 Plus JCP planned programme in Sandwell. The other local authorities had also led applications which Sandwell MBC were included in.

### Agreed:-

- (1) that approval be given to allow Sandwell MBC to act as accountable body for the Black Country 50 Plus partnership;
- (2) that, in the event that the application is successful as set out in Resolution (1) above, the Executive Director of Children's Service be authorised to enter into a contract with West Midlands Combined Authority for Community Renewal funding;
- (3) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to execute any documentation necessary to enable the above in Resolution (2);



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- (4) that in connection with Resolution (1) and (2) above, that the following action points identified within the financial appraisal of the funding application by Strategic Finance, be implemented to reduce any risk to the council:
- that funding agreements are issued and signed by delivery partners prior to the acceptance of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Community Renewal Fund;
  - that MHCLG's terms and conditions of funding are passported to delivery partners in agreements with Sandwell MBC and include the following:
    - procurement complies with Sandwell MBC's own procurement requirements;
    - agreed outputs for each delivery partner;
    - funding allocation for each delivery partner;
    - evidence required for grant claims;
    - grant claims to be paid to delivery partners following submission of claim and approval by MHCLG;
    - repayment of grant on non-delivery of outputs;
    - monitoring requirements;
    - responsibility for funding overspends on delivery of the project;
    - all grant recipients to verify that they are eligible to receive grant funding under the Trade & Co-operation Agreement between the EU and UK;
  - review all estimated costs with delivery partners to ensure that the outputs of the project can be delivered within available funding;



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- that consideration is given on how the project could be continued after the initial funding period;
- that VAT/tax advice is sought from the Council's Tax Accountant;
- that a full governance structure with roles and responsibilities for each delivery partner is produced to ensure the effective management, monitoring and submission of grant claims;
- that systems and processes be established for the management and monitoring of the project.

133/21

### **Appropriation of the Hamstead Sons of Rest Building**

Approval was sought to declare the land at The Hamstead Sons of Rest Building surplus to Council requirements. The building was single storey which was currently in part time use by a Church group. The building had not been used for community purposes since the Covid-19 emergency lock down of March 2020.

The church group had been offered and accepted alternative premises a few hundred yards from Broome Avenue. Once empty, the building would be refurbished to provide a specially adapted two bedroomed bungalow.

The proposal would make much better use of a Council asset to provide a much-needed renovated property for a disabled resident. Planning consent had been granted and subject to consent, work would commence quickly.

In response to a question raised by the Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in relation to the cost of converting the building, the Cabinet Member for Strong and Inclusive Economy sought to provide the details to the Scrutiny Chair.



### Reason for Decision

To authorise appropriation of the land to accommodate subsequent use by housing as part of the housing stock within the remit of the housing revenue account.

### Alternative Options Considered

The building was currently under used. There was an opportunity to make better use of this asset.

If the building was sold this would prevent the Council from providing much needed social housing in the Great Barr area. A sale would also mean the Council losing influence on how this building, which was within a residential area, was managed. A sale of the building increased the risk of future anti-social activity.

### Agreed:-

- (1) that approval be given to declare the following property surplus to the Council services identified:

The Hamstead Sons of Rest Building, Broome Avenue, Great Barr B43 5AR surplus (Site plan identification reference SAM/07760/002);

- (2) that subject to Resolution (1) above, the Director - Regeneration and Growth be authorised to appropriate the land and premises shown for identification purposes from the general fund to the housing revenue account;
- (3) that the Director – Homes be authorised to manage and let the premises referred to in Resolution (1) above as part of the Council's housing stock;
- (4) that in connection with Resolution (2) above, the Director – Finance be authorised to adjust the accounts accordingly.



134/21 **Restart Programme 2021-2025**

Approval was sought for the Council to enter into a contract with Serco to deliver Restart, a national employment programme commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support long-term unemployed people back into work.

Unemployment had more than doubled in Sandwell since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic and the number of people unemployed for longer than 6 months had increased by 28%.

As supply chain partner to Serco, Sandwell Council brought local expertise to Restart participants including knowledge of the local labour market, knowledge of local complimentary provision and an understanding of the unique challenges residents face in each of the 6 towns of the borough.

The Restart programme complemented existing Employment and Skills services and provided an opportunity to expand our offer. It also provided the Council the opportunity to generate income and establish a track record of successfully delivering DWP employment programmes that could lead to future income generation for the Council.

A project appraisal has been undertaken by Strategic Finance and action points raised as a result of the appraisal would be actioned to mitigate any risk to the Council.

**Reason for Decision**

The Covid-19 pandemic had seen employment rates plummet and the extension of the furlough scheme meant that it was still not clear how many furloughed workers were at risk of future redundancy.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

To tackle this, the Department for Work and Pensions had commissioned a new national flagship employment programme called Restart. The Restart programme would support 12-18 month Universal Credit claimants back into work, with participants receiving tailored support from an employment coach for up to one year.

The programme had been commissioned in England and Wales to large national companies across 12 Contract Package Areas, with Serco winning the contract for the West Central region, which incorporated Sandwell.

Delivering Restart as supply chain partner to Serco would allow the Council to expand the employment offer to residents and generate income for the Council.

### Alternative Options Considered

The Council could act as a strategic partner for Serco and provide no programme delivery. This would reduce the risk to the Council but would not generate any income.

#### Agreed:-

- (1) that approval be given for the Executive Director of Children's Services to deliver the Restart employment programme in Sandwell as part of Serco's supply chain;
- (2) that the Executive Director of Children's Services be authorised to enter into a contract with Serco Group Plc (Serco) to deliver the Restart employment programme with effect from 1 July 2021;
- (3) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to execute any documentation necessary to enable the course of action referred to in Resolution (1) and (2) above;



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

- (4) that in connection with Resolution (1) and (2) above, the following action points identified within the financial appraisal of the funding application by Strategic Finance, be implemented to reduce any risk to the Council:
- that sensitivity analysis and stringent monitoring is undertaken on delivery targets to enable timely corrective action to be taken in the event of under-performance;
  - that additional staff are employed on 1-year fixed term contracts to allow flexibility in programme delivery;
  - that contingency plans are reviewed to ensure proposals to manage under-performance will not breach Serco's delivery standards;
  - that a funding source is identified from within existing resources to be used in the event of under-recovery, severance payments or financial penalties incurred in programme delivery;
  - that should the STORM system be utilised by Sandwell MBC, the total cost be reflected in net income projections for the programme;
  - that VAT/tax advice is sought from the Council's Tax Accountant.

### 135/21 **2020/21 Financial Outturn**

Consideration was given to the Council's financial outturn position 2020/21. The overall net service outturn variance, excluding the Housing Revenue Account, was an underspend of £23.279m.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

Services had reported an underspend of £6.939m from allocated budgets, however, after adjusting for reserves, corporate resources, revenue to fund capital costs (RCCO) and the application of centrally held Covid-19 grant funding the adjusted outturn was an underspend of £23.279m.

The Covid-19 crisis had significantly affected our financial position. The impact had included:

- reduced expenditure from the suspension / cancellation of services or a focus on emergency responses only;
- loss of income due to service reductions / travel restrictions;
- additional costs from undertaking new Covid related activity;
- redeployment of staff and resources as part of the corporate Covid response;
- access to additional Covid related grant funding to manage additional costs and income reductions.

Additional Covid related grant funding was available during Quarter 1 of 2021/22 however the financial impacts were expected to continue throughout the year.

Initial budget planning for 2021-2024 had identified non-Covid related financial pressures which were being managed in the short-term by reserves and other one-off sources of funding. The proposed treatment of the 2020/21 underspends would assist to temporarily manage the financial risks however, all service areas had been allocated indicative savings targets during the next phase of budget planning to address the projected funding gap on a long-term basis.

### Reason for Decision

Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act required the Chief Financial Officer to ensure the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs. Budgetary control, which included the regular monitoring and reporting of budgets was an essential element in discharging this statutory responsibility.



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

The recommended treatment of the year end variances supported the financial sustainability of the Council.

### Alternative Options Considered

Cabinet could vary the proposed transfer to the Sandwell Children's Trust, the use of revenue to fund capital costs (RCCO) and the proposed treatment of the year end variances from budget.

#### Agreed:-

- (1) that the financial outturn reports of the Capital Programme, Key Performance Indicators, each service area, Housing Revenue Account, Schools, and Treasury Management be received and referred to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment;
- (2) that the allocation of £464,837 to Sandwell Children's Trust be approved to fund Covid-19 pressures which is in addition to the transfers made during the year and represents total funding of £1,920,307 from the Covid Emergency Grant in 2020/21. This proposal is reflected within the Children's Services Outturn report;
- (3) that the Revenue Contributions to Capital Outlay (RCCO) of £6.191m for the following capital projects which have been reflected within the relevant outturn reports be approved;



## The Cabinet – 7 July 2021

	£'000
<u>Resources</u>	
Contribution to development of West Bromwich Cemetery	1,462
Additional Laptops (SMBC)	429
Additional Laptops (SCT)	600
<u>Adult Social Care</u>	
Development of Health & Social Care Facility (Knowle)	3,500
<u>Housing &amp; Communities</u>	
Purchase of additional fleet vehicles	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,191</b>

(4) that the following treatment of the adjusted year end budget variances be approved:

	£'000	£'000
<b>Add to / (Use) General Balances</b>		
Corporate Management	123	
Resources	2,754	
Adult Social Care	11,102	
Regeneration & Growth	565	
Housing & Communities	2,044	
Children's Services	(1,851)	
<b>Net Total</b>		<b>14,737</b>
<b>Carry Forward to 2021/22</b>		
Resources	929	
Adult Social Care	2,000	
Housing & Communities	92	
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,021</b>
<b>Add to the Earmarked Balances of Revenues &amp; Benefits (Resources)</b>		<b>2,500</b>
<b>Add to the ring-fenced reserve for the Public Health Grant</b>		<b>3,021</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>23,279</b>



136/21

### **Award of contract for the construction of the new cemetery in Rowley Regis**

Authority was sought to authorise the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to accept the tender of O'Brien Contractors Ltd for the construction of the of a new cemetery in Rowley Regis.

The contract award would enable the construction of a new cemetery for Rowley Regis and ensure key bereavement related services continued to be available locally to families in this part of Sandwell.

In accordance with the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules, three compliant tenders were received within the stipulated tender period. These were evaluated on a 70:30 (price:quality) most economically advantageous tender basis.

The tender submitted by O'Brien Contractors Ltd, in the sum of £1,342,242.47, had been checked and found to be technically and arithmetically correct.

In response to a question raised by the Chair of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board in relation to why the construction of the new cemetery had not been treated as an extension of the current site which was adjacent to the new site, with facilities being shared to save money, the Cabinet Member for Governance and Democracy clarified that these were two different cemeteries and this was a new cemetery, not an extension of the current one. This was to avoid any scenarios where elderly or vulnerable members of the public were having to cross a busy road to access facilities at the former site and would also allow two services to be undertaken concurrently.

### **Reason for Decision**

Once complete, the new cemetery would create approximately 3,000 new grave spaces in the borough.



### Alternative Options Considered

If the Council chose not to appoint O'Brien Contractors Ltd as the preferred bidder, this would significantly delay the construction of the new cemetery which may impact on the Council's ability to provide key bereavement related services locally.

#### Agreed:-

- (1) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to award a contract to O'Brien Contractors Ltd, Manor Cottage, Church Lane, Leamington Spa, CV32 7JT for the construction of the new cemetery in Rowley Regis;
- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into or execute under seal any documentation in relation to award of the contract and/or other agreements as may be deemed necessary as referred to in Resolution (1) above.

Meeting ended at 4.21pm

Contact: [democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)



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# Minutes of The Cabinet

**Wednesday 21 July 2021 at 5.00pm  
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor R Singh (Chair);  
Councillors Ahmed, Crompton, Hartwell, Millard, I Padda,  
Simms and Taylor.

**Also present:** Councillors E M Giles, L Giles, Moore and Shackleton.

**Officers:** Lesley Hagger (Director – Children’s Services), Rebecca  
Maher (Acting Director – Finance), Surjit Tour (Director - Law  
and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Elaine Newsome  
(Service Manager – Democracy), Sue Moore (Group Head  
for Education Support Services) and Wendy Sims (Modern  
Slavery – Programme Manager)

## 137/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ali

## 138/21 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Ahmed declared a personal interest in that he was a  
registered taxi driver outside of Sandwell.



## The Cabinet – 21 July 2021

### 139/21 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider at the meeting.

### 140/21 **SEN Transport arrangements: September 2021 to February 2022**

Approval was sought to initiate a tender process using the current Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for the passenger transport contracts from 1st September 2021 until 23rd February 2022.

The Local Authority had a duty and powers to make particular travel arrangements for children with special educational needs and disabilities to facilitate their attendance at an appropriate education provision.

The current DPS for the provision of SEN transport would have ended on 31st July 2021. Contracts had been procured through the current DPS on an annual basis from 24th February each year, up to 23 February 2022.

A closed bid tender process had been held for the award of passenger transport contracts, effective from 1 September 2021 and the proposal for awards to be made had been set out in the report to the Cabinet meeting on 16 June 2021.

A number of challenges had been made regarding the proposals contained in the June 2021 Cabinet report which resulted in the decision of the Cabinet being deferred pending review. At the request of the Leader of the Council, an internal review had been immediately established.



## The Cabinet – 21 July 2021

The resultant internal review, the process of assurance regarding the procurement process via the Council's Audit and Risk Committee, and the request of the Council's Corporate and Budget Scrutiny Board and Children's Services and Education Board to jointly examine existing and proposed arrangements for SEN transport provision, was underway.

The need to ensure arrangements were in place in readiness for the start of the next academic year was understood by Cabinet to be critical. Failure to make such arrangements would have breached the Council's statutory duty. There was a lead-in time for the requisite arrangements to be made. Given the issues arising in respect of the matter and the tender exercise, a very limited window existed to be able to utilise the existing DPS to secure the requisite providers required to ensure service continuity for the start of the academic year for providers that are not able to continue to provide the service from September onwards.

In response to a question raised by the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, the Leader of Sandwell Council reported that the reason for the delay in bringing the matter before members was to ensure the Council had received the necessary legal advice before extending the current contract. It was also important that the suppliers were contacted and on board with the extension of the current contracts to ensure the continuation of service.

In response to a question raised by the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board, the Leader of Sandwell Council reported that the use of Personal Budgets to support transport costs for those families with children and young people with SEND had been discussed and was something that could be considered and accommodated in the future. There had been an increase of the use of Personal budgets over recent years and communicating this option to parents was something that the Council would do going forward.



## The Cabinet – 21 July 2021

In response to a question raised by the Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board, the Leader of Sandwell Council reported that on the allegations that drivers employed by current contractors had not been receiving the National Minimum Wage, the difficulty was that operators operated a self-employed system. The rate of pay may therefore not have been good practice. Following the Modern Slavery examination, the Council's policy was that if good practice was found not to have been implemented, the Council was obliged to report findings to HMRC.

Suppliers had been communicated with to ensure following the contract extension they would continue to have the capacity to fulfil the contract obligations. It was understood that contractors had a good relationship with Sandwell and parents, children and young people who they support.

### Reason for Decision

Since February 2018, the provision of passenger transport services had been arranged via a DPS process that was due to end on 31st July 2021. In total there were 122 different contracts delivered by 18 different operators. At present 659 pupils access SEN transport attending 82 Sandwell schools and 47 out of borough schools.

Since 2018 the overall cost of providing travel assistance including parent mileage, travel passes and more recently the offer of personal budgets had increased by 45% from £3,528,000 in 2018/19 to a projected cost of £6,452,000 for 2021/22. Over the same period SEN pupils requiring travel assistance had increased from 680 to 850 with the average cost per pupil increasing from £5,188pa to £7,591pa. The situation was not unique to Sandwell with most Councils in a similar position.



## The Cabinet – 21 July 2021

The pressure on the SEN transport budget had been managed over the past few years using carried forward underspends in the Education Directorate budget and were fully used by the end of March 2021. Additional funding had been provided in the 2021/22 budget, which had been increased to £5,655,000. A projected budget pressure of £800,000 remained. The projected budget however did not reflect the impact of continuing with the current contracts from September 2021 to February 2022. It also did not cover changes to the transport provided from September 2021 which historically had resulted in an increase in projected costs. To support officers with managing the on-going pressures, an independent review of SEN transport provision had been commissioned in March 2021 to provide assurances of the planned transformations and savings plans already in place and identify further potential options to improve service delivery and realise additional savings.

In August 2020 the Cabinet had agreed to establish a new DPS to ensure the ongoing provision of SEN transport for pupils. The new DPS consisted of a list of suppliers who could be approached as and when transport needs are required and only suppliers awarded a place on the DPS would have been considered to provide transport.

The new DPS included higher thresholds for the expectations of the quality of service to be provided, particularly regarding good practice by transport operators in respect of employment and safeguarding, including Modern Day Slavery, as there had been matters raised via anonymous sources that some operators were not complying with good practice.

Arrangements were required to be made for the provision of SEN transport from 1 September 2021 to comply with the Council's statutory obligations and provide assurance to vulnerable children, families and schools that provision would be in place for the start of the new academic year.

It was proposed to use the current DPS to tender for the new contracts from 1 September 2021 until 23 February 2022.



## Alternative Options Considered

A full options appraisal had been developed ranging from the option to do nothing through to approval of the recommendations in the June 2021 Cabinet paper.

An options appraisal had been considered by external lawyers, and advice provided. Both the internal options appraisal and external legal advice had concluded that the continued use of the contracts issued via the current DPS until 23 February 2022 was the most suitable option. Any additional contracts could also be retendered pursuant to the current DPS. It was understood to be necessary to take this action prior to the expiry of the current DPS on 31 July 2021.

### Agreed:-

- (1) that the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to:
  - a) Continue to use the existing contracts with providers for the continued provision of SEN transport until 23rd February 2022, in accordance with the terms of those contracts;
  - b) Agree any necessary exemptions be made under the Council's Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to in a) above to proceed;
- (2) that the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to tender any new work or work that is handed back by operators using the current Dynamic Purchasing System Framework to cover the period 3rd September 2021 to 23rd February 2022.



## The Cabinet – 21 July 2021

- (3) that in connection with Resolution (1) and (2) above, the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer enter into or execute under seal the contracts and any ancillary documentation in relation to the extension of the contracts for the continued provision of Sandwell’s SEN transport;
- (4) that the Executive Director of Children’s Services, in consultation with the Director - Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer seek assurance from the operators that they are operating within the terms of the existing contracts, and in accordance with the relevant legal framework, and in particular are complying with their obligations in relation to the workforce and good practice. Operators will be required to demonstrate good practice by Friday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021;
- (5) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, where validated concerns have been identified, any existing contracts with those operators will be suspended, with immediate effect in accordance with the terms of the contract until adequate assurance has been provided.
- (6) that in connection with Resolution (1) above, constant monitoring of good practice will be in place and operators that do not comply will have their contracts terminated.

Meeting ended at 5.29pm

Contact: [democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)



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## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2020/201 and Improvement Plan
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Karen Simms
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<p>Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's Services  <a href="mailto:Lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk">Lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Mandip S. Chahal, Senior Commissioning Manager for Statutory Services  <a href="mailto:Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk">Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk</a></p>

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Cabinet, in its capacity as the body that is responsible and accountable for the discharge of the relevant children's social care services functions:
- formally receives the Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2020/21
  - notes the progress made to date by Sandwell Children's Trust in delivering services as set out in the Contract between the Council and the Trust, as set out in the Annual Review 2020/21;
  - formally receives the updated Improvement Plan 2021/24;
  - notes the feedback from the Department for Education following its recent 6-month review of Sandwell Children's Trust;



- e) notes the reports from Ofsted for the period covering the Annual Review 2020/21;

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) requires that an annual review of services is completed and presented to the council. At the Cabinet meeting on 22 March 2017, it was agreed that the Cabinet will perform this function on behalf of the council in its executive role to agree certain ‘reserved matters’ that are set out in the Contract.
- 2.2 The Service Delivery Contract requires SCT to meet the requirements of ‘any improvement plan as agreed between the Council and the Trust and as amended from time to time’. The initial improvement plan agreed with the Trust covered the period 2018 to 2021 and was presented to Cabinet on 19 September 2018.
- 2.3 This report presents SCTs Annual Review 2020/21 and updated Improvement Plan.
- 2.4 Consideration of these reports by the Cabinet form an important part of the governance of SCT; providing assurance to the council in its capacity as the body that is responsible and accountable for the discharge of the relevant children’s social care services functions.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>SCT works with families, foster carers, schools, statutory and voluntary providers to support the achievements of vulnerable children and those in the care of the council</p> <p>SCT works to ensure that children in the care of the Council receive the support and opportunities that any parent would give their child</p>
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>SCT ensures coordination between social care and the NHS to better protect vulnerable children</p>



	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>SCT supports families to improve children’s life chances</p> <p>SCT works closely with the police to ensure that children are protected from the impact of crime, domestic violence, and all forms of exploitation</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>SCT supports care leavers to live independently in the community, working closely with Housing to ensure care leavers are able to good quality accommodation in Sandwell.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>SCT works with families to access services and support so that they are able to improve their economic well-being and the life chances for their children</p>

#### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The contract with SCT has a comprehensive programme of governance arrangements. The contract requires that the Executive Director of Children’s Services, together with council senior officers from finance and legal services, and the Chief Executive of the Trust meet on at least a monthly basis to consider performance and operational matters. In addition, each quarter, the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Executive meet with the Chair of the SCT Board and the Chief Executive of SCT, at a Strategic Partnership Board.
- 4.2 The contract with the Trust specifies that representatives of the Trust should attend Council meetings when reasonably requested, specifically referencing attendance twice a year at the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board and at the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board if requested.
- 4.3 The contract requires SCT to provide a comprehensive annual review for consideration by the Operational Partnership Board, the Strategic Partnership Board and then by the Cabinet.



Progress against the performance indicators for the period 01 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 is set out in the Annual Review 2020/21, together with information about financial, workforce, and other performance areas.

- 4.4 SCT is monitored against 15 Key Performance Indicators, detailed in the Annual Review, however the Service Delivery Contract allows for the Trust to be 'relieved of its obligations to provide such part of the Services and from any liability for not providing such Services and/or for any consequences of such non-performance to the extent required as a result of the Relief Event'. Once it was clear that the pandemic would have a significant effect on how services could be delivered in line with Coronavirus regulations it was agreed with the Council that the Relief Event clauses were applicable. This has meant that for the duration of the relief event, currently to the end of September 2021, that performance would continue to be monitored in line with the relief event clauses of the Service Delivery Contract. Details of the specific KPI's where the relief applied are included in the Annual Review Report.
- 4.5 On behalf of the Council, the Sandwell Childrens Trust developed an Improvement Plan in response to the Ofsted inspection findings published in January 2018. This plan was presented to Cabinet in September 2018 and covered a 3-year period.
- 4.6 Since April 2018 the Trust has received several monitoring visits from Ofsted as well as 2 assurance visits, the most recent of which was in March 2021.
- 4.7 The Trust have undertaken a refresh of the Improvement Plan, utilising the feedback provided by Ofsted during their visits and input from both the Council and Independent Improvement Board, with an aim of becoming a 'Good' or better organisation.
- 4.8 The plan is based on 4 key themes, underpinned by outcomes to be achieved. The key themes are: People, Practice, Partnership and Prevention.



- 4.9 The delivery of the improvement plan will continue to be overseen by the Improvement Board, independently chaired by Mark Gurrey, and progress monitored as part of the Council's contractual monitoring processes.
- 4.10 The DfE carries out a 6-monthly review of SCT and following its visit on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021 was satisfied that progress was being made. The review was attended by council representatives: Deputy Leader, Chief Executive and Executive Director of Children's Services.
- 4.11 During 2020/21 there were 2 inspection visits, an assurance visit over 3 days in October 2020 of the Independent Fostering Agency and a focussed visit over 2 days in March 2021 using the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Ofsted has continued to recognise the improvements that have been made and identified areas for further improvement.
- 4.12 SCT presented the Annual Review and improvement plan to the Children's and Education Scrutiny Board on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021.
- 4.13 SCT has worked closely with the council during this period, staff have adapted to working in different ways and performance has continued to improve. Nevertheless, the longer-term impact on children is yet to be seen and it is likely that there will be an increase in the demand for services. The council and SCT continue to work closely together to monitor all aspects of the impact of Covid and agree appropriate actions.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2016, Cabinet was advised of the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996) to set up a new arrangement in the form of a children's trust to deliver children's social care services. As a result, Sandwell Children's Trust started operating on 1st April 2018. Any alternative to the current arrangement must be agreed by the Secretary of State for Education.



## 6 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>Sandwell Children’s Trust receives a significant financial resource to deliver the Council’s statutory responsibilities for children’s social care, and also to provide targeted early help services.</p> <p>The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.</p>
<p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p>	<p>The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and SCT is performance managed via a monthly Operational Partnership Board, a quarterly Strategic Partnership Board, and SCT is required to attend up to 2 Children’s Scrutiny Board meetings and 1 Budget Scrutiny meeting each year. There is a partnership Improvement Board independently chaired by a DfE appointed consultant. Additionally, the Trust is required to submit its Annual Review to the Council.</p>
<p><b>Risk:</b></p>	<p>The council’s strategic risk register identifies a red risk relevant to this report, regarding improvements required in children’s social care services. This risk is regularly monitored and reported to the Council’s Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. In the most recent review, the risk assessment has increased from 12 (red) to 16 (red) as a result of Covid-19 and the impact this is having on the improvement plan and the delivery of Childrens social care services being assessed as ‘Requires Improvement’ and ‘Good’ as stipulated in the Service Delivery Contract.</p>
<p><b>Equality:</b></p>	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children’s services will have a positive effect on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics</p>
<p><b>Health and Wellbeing:</b></p>	<p>SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.</p>



<b>Social Value</b>	<p>SCT supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. SCT supports care leavers to access education, employment and training.</p> <p>SCT supports community resilience through the recruitment of local residents as foster carers, helping children to remain close to communities they are from and to thrive in Sandwell</p>
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## 7. Appendices

Sandwell Children’s Trust Annual Review 2020/21

Sandwell Children’s Trust Improvement Plan 2021/24

## 8. Background Papers

Cabinet Meeting 19 October 2016

Cabinet Meeting 19 September 2018

Ofsted Inspection Report Published 29 January 2018



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## Improvement Plan 2021-2024





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

*"As we enter our fourth year here in Sandwell Children's Trust, we do so in the knowledge that we have done our very best for our children and families under the enormously challenging circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our staff have shown great dedication and resilience in keeping children safe during a very difficult period. Now is the right time for us to reflect on our progress, consolidate all we have done and plan for the future.*

*I am therefore very pleased to present our latest improvement plan, which underpins our aim to invest in our people, practice and partnerships to provide excellent services for children and families in Sandwell."*



**Emma Taylor – Chief Executive of  
Sandwell Children's Trust**

*"I am really excited to join Sandwell Children's Trust - the Sandwell Family - at this crucial juncture. I can see the good work undertaken by staff at all levels and the difference this has made to how we work with our children and families. I have sensed the passion and willingness from our staff to strive for excellence and it's important that we do this based on our Sandwell Family values. We know what we need to work on to improve even more - our Improvement Plan sets out how we are going to do this, and how we will know we've succeeded."*



**Ieasha Hamrahi**

*“We are very happy to have contributed to Sandwell Children’s Trust new improvement plan and we look forward to seeing changes being made that makes a difference to children and families in Sandwell.*”



**India Purewal**

**Co-Chairs of Sandwell Care Leavers’  
Forum**

*We think it is important that there is a dedicated place for the Chief Executive to review progress and make sure the improvements in this plan are the biggest priority, and are glad that we are able to be involved in this.”*

## Our Approach to Improvement in 2021 and beyond

We have come a long way in the last three years since we began as a Trust, and have made some great improvements within that time, including ensuring the resilience of our infrastructure when responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has laid quality foundations for future improvements. Coming out of the pandemic, we are ready for the next stage of our journey, so it is the right time for us to refresh our improvement plan with the aim of becoming a 'Good' or better organisation.

We know there is still a lot for us to do in a challenging field, with staffing and demand pressures regionally and nationally. The landscape for children's services following the pandemic is ever-changing, so our approach is with this in mind. We have also had several visits from Ofsted and have taken advantage of practice improvement partners from Doncaster, Essex and Camden to provide external validation of our work. We know the areas where we need to improve to achieve our aims, which are People, Practice and Partnerships:

### People

Ensuring we recruit and retain good quality staff through:

- Comprehensive and supportive induction that prepares staff to do the job they came to do
- Offering genuine opportunities for career development and progression from within
- Developing the best managers and senior leaders
- A good learning and development offer for all levels of staff

### Practice

We will ensure that:

- When we intervene with families, this is done with the benefit of high-quality analytical assessments which balance children's wishes and needs with parental capacity and motivation to change
- Intervention with families are proportionate, and we minimise delays in decision making
- Where we can, we prevent needs and risks increasing and empower families and communities to build on their strengths and meet their own needs
- When we work with families we do so in a relationship-based way, understand the impact of trauma on children and families, build on strengths and address the root causes of needs and risks
- We routinely analyse practice and trends, we know the value and impact of our interventions and can provide evidence for this
- We have a culture of genuine reflection and promote a cycle of learning and practice improvement, which can be evidenced

### Partnership and Prevention

We will ensure that:

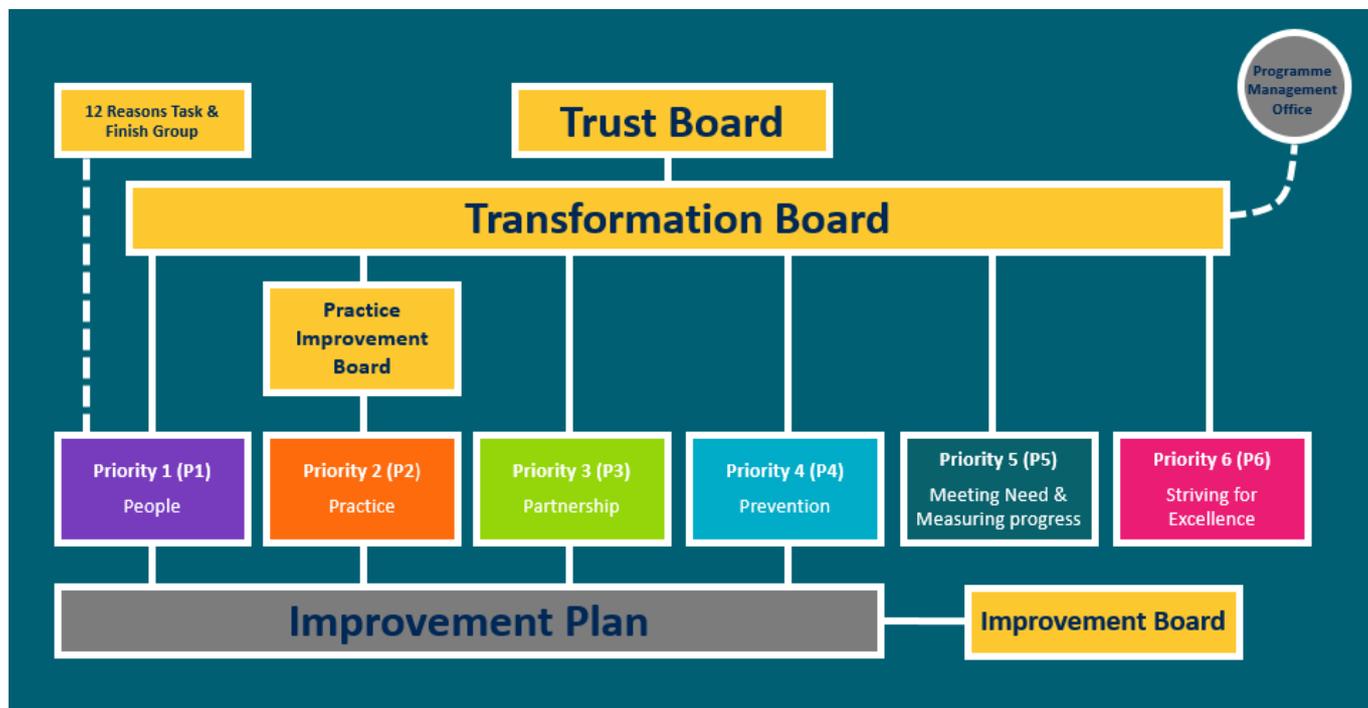
- We work with partners so that Early Help promotes prevention at every level
- Ensuring the most relevant partners are integral in every child's assessment and plan, actively support families and where decisions are made on behalf of children
- Capitalising on the six towns in Sandwell to ensure that a localised community approach is taken, helps to identify and intervene early and swiftly, building relationships and empowering families
- There is a robust, safe and efficient interface between levels of need
- Work with early help partners so that they can adopt aspects of our practice framework and model
- Targeted Services provided by SCT manage risk effectively and contribute towards a whole Sandwell approach to Early Help

## Delivery and Governance

Leaders in Sandwell Children's Trust are accountable to the Trust Board for all of the work they do, which includes the improvement programme. As children's services in Sandwell was rated by Ofsted as Inadequate in 2017, we remain under the statutory intervention of the Department for Education, which means we have an independent improvement board chair and adviser Mark Gurrey. Furthermore, our contractual relationship with Sandwell MBC adds a layer of scrutiny and

governance from the Director of Children’s Services. A further key forum for improvement across the partnership is the Sandwell Safeguarding Children’s Partnership, also chaired by the DCS.

The improvement programme fits within SCT’s strategic transformation programme, which sets out our priority areas for transformation over the next three years. Priorities one to four are addressed through this improvement plan, of which ‘Practice’ is the single biggest area.



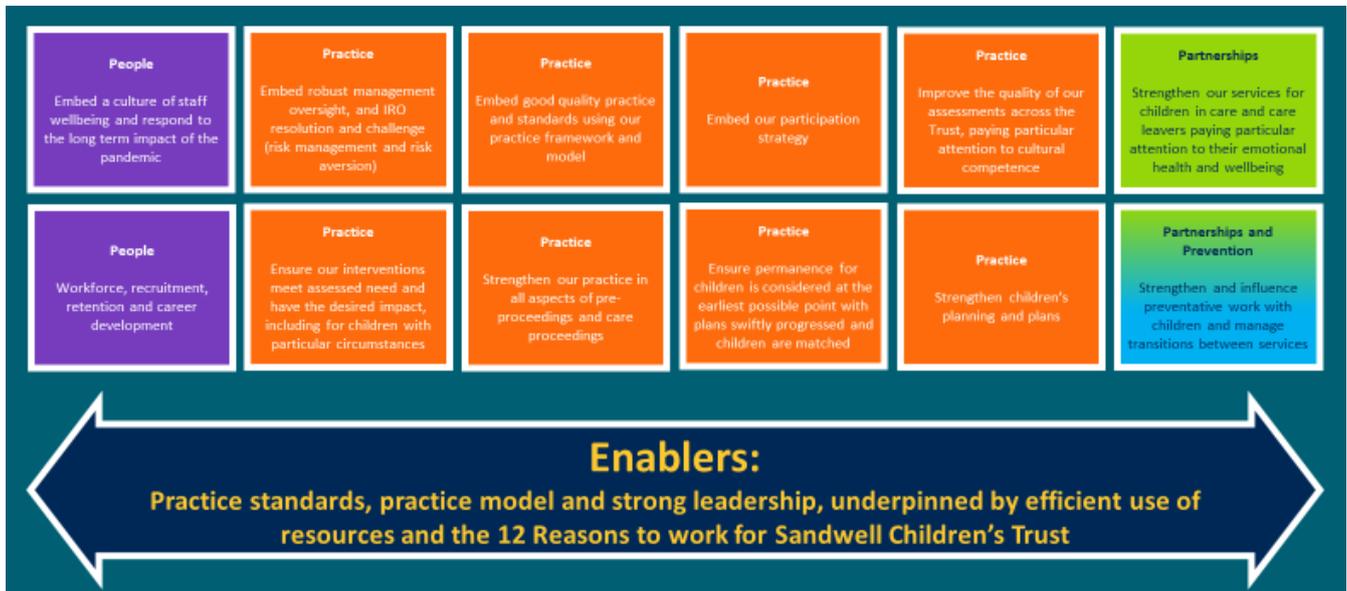
All services within Sandwell Children’s Trust are expected to follow a cycle of planning, doing and reviewing; with constant practice analysis throughout our improvement journey. This allows each Head of Service (and in turn their management team) to demonstrate impact against our improvement priorities on a 12-weekly basis.

The Director of Quality and Performance is the key senior leader responsible for the improvement programme, holding, alongside the Chief Executive, a fortnightly Practice Improvement Board with key staff across the Trust to demonstrate progress against ‘practice’ (Priority 2).

The programme is led and monitored by the Business Improvement and Change Manager, and progress is validated against our Performance and Quality measures and findings in consultation with the Principal Social Worker. This aims to create a balance between strategic planning and practice improvement to achieve positive outcomes for children, which is measurable and can be evidenced.

## Our plan to get to good

As a result of our latest self-evaluation, our performance data, quality assurance activity and intelligence, bolstered by external feedback, we know where more specific improvements need to be made. These are set out below:



## Enablers

Good progress has been made in these three categories of the previous improvement plan, and we believe these key enablers provide a strong foundation for our next stage of improvement. They are:

**Leadership:** Strong leadership ensures that we maintain progress as all services and all staff have a shared understanding of our vision and expectations, there is a culture of accountability for the work that we do and staff feel safe to learn, improve and innovate.

**Efficient use of resources:** An efficient service lends itself to being a good service as staff are focussed on the right things for children and families, are not overly distracted or burdened by meaningless activity and have the space to be creative.

**12 Reasons to work for Sandwell Children's Trust:** Our workforce strategy and delivery programme is key to deliver most, if not all of the improvements within this plan, as we are reliant upon good quality staff, social workers and managers to deliver the best for our families. The 12 reasons also set out our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

## People

### 1) *Embed a culture of staff wellbeing and respond to the long-term impact of the pandemic*

After the last 12 months when staff have had to respond to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it is crucial to ensure that our staff are offered the best emotional and practical support possible to be able to give their best to children and families, throughout the remainder of this crisis and beyond. This will include:

- Evolving our working style to meet staff and business needs
- Ensuring our accommodation and technology needs are met following the pandemic
- Ensuring staff have access to emotional wellbeing services broadly and individually
- Ensuring staff welfare is at the forefront of any service decisions
- Continue to engage with staff, listen to their feedback, and respond in a timely way

### 2) *Workforce, recruitment, retention and career development*

Referred to within the key enablers, having a good quality and stable staff base is essential in ensuring continued improvements can be made, as staff who leave take their learning elsewhere and new staff may need investment of training and development. Instability within teams and services also contribute to instability for children and families, drift and delay, and 'start again syndrome'.

- Offering genuine opportunities for career development and progression from within, with clearly articulated pathways
- Ensuring our financial and overall package is attractive to new and existing staff, and competitive in the local market
- Ensuring we explore every avenue to obtain quality social workers and other support staff and do all we can to sell ourselves
- Ensuring there is a comprehensive and supportive induction that prepares staff to do the job they came to do
- Developing the best managers and senior leaders through established leadership programmes
- Ensuring we maintain a good learning and development offer for all levels of staff

- The embedding of the social work academy in Sandwell and maintaining a stream of interested students and ASYE's to bolster our future

## Practice

### 3) *Embed good quality practice and standards using our practice framework and model*

Our practice framework and model underpins everything we do for children and families, as such it is important that all staff are equipped with a consistent way in which to practice, informed by research and helps maximise the success of our interventions.

- Ensuring when we intervene with families, this is done with the benefit of high-quality analytical assessments which balance children's wishes and needs with parental capacity and motivation to change
- Intervention with families are proportionate, and we minimise delays in decision making
- Where we can, we prevent needs and risks increasing and empower families and communities to build on their strengths and meet their own needs
- When we work with families we do so in a relationship-based way, understand the impact of trauma on children and families, build on strengths, and address the root causes of needs and risks
- We routinely analyse practice and trends, we know the value and impact of our interventions and can provide evidence for this
- We have a culture of genuine reflection and promote a cycle of learning and practice improvement

### 4) *Embed our participation strategy*

We are proud of our 'Four I's' participation strategy (Invest, Inform, Involve and Influence) and are well on the way to be accredited for our work in this area. Having services designed in collaboration with children gives us the opportunity to see things from their point of view. Engaging children in a meaningful way, at every step of the way, is of the utmost importance to us and allows us to tailor our interventions for maximum success.

- Ensuring meaningful participation of children and young people in decision making meetings
- Ensuring our staff are equipped to engage with children and young people of all ages and developmental needs
- Ensuring children and young people are involved in our QA processes and help us to learn
- Ensuring we obtain feedback from children and young people wherever we can
- Ensuring services are developed with children and young people

### 5) *Improve the quality of our assessments across the Trust, paying particular attention to cultural competence*

We are a diverse borough in Sandwell. Our families have wide range of ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, ages, sexualities and gender identities, often layered on top of each other. As such, each family has its own culture, often complex and with its own cultural norms, which we have to understand if we are going to get our interventions right for them. Staff also need to understand their own experiences, values and identities and how these might affect the way in which they practice. Therefore, our aim is for all staff should be culturally competent.

- Ensuring we have clear diversity policies, statements of intent and expectations are communicated to all staff
- Ensuring cultural competence throughout all levels of the organisation, no matter what the role, and that it is a key consideration of assessing and intervening with families
- Ensuring we considering diversity and culture within all the work we do

### 6) *Strengthen children's planning and plans*

Without a good analytical assessment and a clear plan, setting out clear expectations for all involved our interventions with children and families are less likely to be a success. We know we have not yet done all we can to improve the quality of our plans, so this priority area is an essential in the first year of this plan, to be further built on beyond that.

- Ensure we have a fit for purpose design for SMART plans that is well understood, used to drive quality interventions that address the root causes of problems
- Develop plans that help families to know what is expected of them, relevant and drive good quality and meaningful intervention
- Ensure that staff know what a good plan looks like and develop a bank of good practice examples
- Progress made in line with children's plans are measurable and analysed

7) *Embed robust management oversight, and IRO resolution and challenge (risk management and risk aversion)*

Without strong, proportionate management oversight, clear direction and independent challenge, children are less likely to receive consistent and effective interventions. Delays, poorer practice and potential problems are not foreseen or identified quickly enough and in turn are not resolved quickly enough.

- Intervening in a child's life should be proportionate to their assessed need, and when risks are reduced, decisions are made for a more appropriate intervention in a timely way
- We have a consistent and shared approach to risk
- Ensure managers understand their own performance and know their strengths and areas for improvement
- Ensure managers identify potential problems as soon as possible and rectify any problems immediately
- Ensure the footprint of IRO's and CP Conference Chairs are routinely seen, and challenge and resolution has a positive impact on children's outcomes
- Scrutiny, challenge and reflection takes place at every level of management

8) *Ensure our interventions meet assessed need and have the desired impact, including for children with particular circumstances*

Whenever we work with children and families, everything we do should be meaningful, purposeful and our interventions make a difference to a child's life. Our social workers and practitioners are agents of change in their own right and are crucial in helping families to reduce risk or better meet need – taking advantage of specialist resource where the need arises. We also have a range of children with specialist circumstances in Sandwell, including those where their immigration status is unresolved (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and those with No Recourse to Public Funds), those who are at risk of exploitation, and those where their disability necessitates a service. For these children, we need to tailor our interventions, making best use of the skillset of our staff.

- Ensure there is a good support infrastructure and clear performance reporting for staff who work with children with disabilities, so that practice is consistent for all children requiring a service due to their disability
- Ensure that the strong work of the exploitation teams in Sandwell continue to be developed
- Consolidate our intervention with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, those with No Recourse to Public Funds and those who require British citizenship, ensuring consistent practice for these children and families

9) *Strengthen our practice in all aspects of pre-proceedings and care proceedings*

Where care proceedings are a possible outcome of our involvement with a family it is essential that we enter into clear dialogue with parents through the Public Law Outline. We know that our work in this area has been variable, with some good pockets of work identified by courts and our regulators. However, on average, children spend too long in Care Proceedings in Sandwell, and our assessments and evidence does not always lead to the outcomes we seek in court.

- We should do whatever it takes for a child to remain safely within their family, which means family options are explored at the earliest opportunity
- Review and ensure processes for pre-proceedings are robust, that parents are well-informed and expectations are clear to them from the outset
- Incorporate pre-proceedings and court processes into case management systems and utilise performance reporting to maintain an accurate tracker of this activity
- Address the historic delay within existing care proceedings and ensure there is a mechanism to review and drive progress for those children who entered into care proceedings more recently
- Engage with the judiciary and CAFCASS and ensure we maximise our influence in regional forums so Special Guardianship can be considered as a viable permanence option

10) *Ensure permanence for children is considered at the earliest possible point with plans swiftly progressed and children are matched*

Children deserve to know where they are going to live permanently as soon as possible, and these permanent placements should be made without delay, as part of an informed decision from a senior manager. In Sandwell, we need to consistently achieve this for our children.

- We should do whatever it takes for a child to remain safely within their family, which means family options are explored at the earliest opportunity

- Ensure that children in our care have a plan for permanence at the earliest opportunity
- Ensure that initial placements for children are made with due consideration of their needs, and their profile
- Ensure that children's long-term placements are made with robust matching considerations and decisions to maximise the success of these placements

### Partnerships

#### 11) *Strengthen our services for children in care and care leavers paying particular attention to their emotional health and wellbeing*

Children in Sandwell have access to a range of support for their emotional and mental health, but the effectiveness of these services is not as well understood as it could be. We need to be able to influence and develop clear pathways for emotional and mental health support for our children, in particular those for whom we have or have had parental responsibility.

- Develop clear performance analysis and reporting in this area
- Respond to the 2021 review of mental health services for care leavers to ensure good quality transition to adult mental health services
- Improve relationships and partnership working in this area to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children
- Commission services that meet the emotional needs of our children in care and care leavers, where a mental health service threshold is not met

### Prevention

#### 12) *Strengthen and influence preventative work with children and manage transitions between services*

- We work with partners so that Early Help promotes prevention at every level
- Ensuring the most relevant partners are involved in every child's assessment and plan, they actively support families and contribute to decisions made on behalf of children
- Capitalising on the six towns in Sandwell to ensure that a localised community approach is taken, helps to identify and intervene early and swiftly, building relationships and empowering families
- There is a robust, safe and efficient interface between levels of need
- Work with early help partners so that they can adopt aspects of our practice framework and model
- Targeted Services provided by SCT manage risk effectively and contribute towards a whole Sandwell approach to Early Help

## Demonstrating Impact: what are our qualitative and quantitative measures?

We know we need to measure our progress through a range of methods, which include performance metrics, intelligence, feedback from children, families and our partner and most importantly our quality assurance activity. We do this through our single overarching plan / impact workbook which is governed through our Practice Improvement Board.

### *Quantitative Measures*

- A greater percentage of the workforce is permanent and staff turnover, sickness and vacancies reduce.
- We take less time to appoint staff and improve satisfaction with our induction programme, which leads to improvements in practice.
- A greater percentage of staff have one to one supervision within the month and managers are providing quality direction to social workers
- Our re-referrals and repeat plans decrease, indicating interventions are longer lasting and are likely to have been more successful.
- More staff utilise assessment tools, research and direct work tools to engage with children and families.
- Children are subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection plan for less time, where intervention in their lives is more purposeful.
- Plans are updated in a more timely manner, are reviewed in collaborative forums with families and key professionals and focus on reducing risk.
- We understand where exploitation activity takes place, and can evidence disruption actions are reducing exploitation, with a trajectory of reducing risk over the long term once the baseline is understood.
- Agency, Parent and Child attendance at MACE meetings increase.
- There is a greater proportion of children with a plan of permanence, and who are formally matched to their long-term carer. Where adoption is in children's best interests this takes place as soon as possible.
- The average length of Care Proceedings decreases and there is evidence of purposeful work with front-loaded evidence.
- More children who become looked after do so in a planned way where carers are able to meet their needs from day 1.
- Foster Carer recruitment activity shows a greater number of mainstream fostering assessments are being undertaken, leading to a greater number of mainstream foster carers being approved.
- A greater percentage of Children in Care have had good quality life work and where appropriate have Life Story Books.
- More children leave care safely to return to their families, where appropriate, and a greater percentage of children who cease care do so through Special Guardianship.
- More care leavers have access to adult mental health services should they need to and more children and young people known to SCT can access therapeutic support and in a more timely way.

### *Qualitative measures*

- Staff are routinely providing feedback, which is constructive and positive and results in tangible actions where appropriate.
- More of our work is rated as Good or better in all categories.
- Learning from a range of feedback, including children and families, is used as the basis of continued improvement, and feeds into learning and development.
- Children's voice is more evident in planning for them, more children attend meetings and have a say in decisions made on their behalf.
- Managers consistently demonstrate their day to day support and direction to ensure the work we do with children is purposeful and appropriate.
- There is an IRO / CP Conference chair footprint evident and Dispute resolution is used proportionately, ensuring that intervention for children is not delayed.
- Private fostering arrangements are better known and are assessed as safe for children.
- Children placed in interim approved placements are safeguarded, and allegations are handled in a timely and robust way.



2020/21

# Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review



## Contents

2	Foreword
3	Executive Summary
4	Introduction
5	<b>Section (a)</b> Our response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
10	<b>Section (b)</b> The Improvement Plan
17	<b>Section (c)</b> The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year;
24	<b>Section (d)</b> The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year;
33	<b>Section (e)</b> The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections;
35	<b>Section (f)</b> The Trust's performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year;
37	<b>Section (g)</b> Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year;
48	<b>Section (h)</b> The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year;
49	<b>Section (i)</b> Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure;
50	<b>Section (j)</b> Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year;
51	<b>Section (k)</b> The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance); and
52	<b>Section (l)</b> Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.

## Foreword

We are very pleased to present Sandwell Children’s Trust’s third annual review report, which details our progress over the last year. The Trust was set up in April 2018 to improve services for the most vulnerable children and families in Sandwell and we are proud of the progress we have made year on year, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have done our very best for our children and families under these enormously challenging circumstances and our staff have shown great dedication and resilience in keeping children safe during a very difficult period.

This report forms part of our contractual arrangements with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, and is a ‘look backwards’ to all our continued successes and challenges within our third year of operation. This report is a review of the financial year 2020/21, throughout which we have had to align our resources as necessary to respond and adapt to the pandemic. The report will show how we have worked together with our partners and particularly colleagues from Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, our commissioners to do our best for children despite the challenges brought from the pandemic. In doing so we demonstrate our financial performance against the contract sum, our medium term financial plan, and how we have managed this against our demand for providing services to the children and young people of Sandwell. We set out our financial challenges and present a summary of our end of year accounts.

We also show the progress we have made on our improvement journey, against all aspects of our improvement plan, and highlight what others have said about us in a year where external regulators have sought assurance from us. We present the findings of surveys and feedback from children and families, and the themes of quality assurance activity. Finally, we set out where we have made joint changes to our contractual arrangements with the council.

We have continued to develop and mature as an organisation and have a clear vision for how we will strengthen the few areas where improvement is needed and also to build on our successes to become even better in the areas where we have improved. Our overall aim has not changed, which is to provide good services to children and families by 2022 and better services beyond this.

As we said last year, we see the annual review as one of three key strategic documents, the others being our Improvement Plan, and our Business Plan. Each year, the annual review is a useful opportunity to take stock, reflect on our journey and allows us to see the progress we have made.

We continue to be proud of the family we have created in the Trust which includes a dedicated team of social workers, administrators, support services staff, social care assistants, personal advisors and managers with a shared goal of improving and delivering excellent services for children and young people. We want to place on record our admiration and thanks for their efforts at such a challenging time.



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



**Emma Taylor**  
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; created a result of a statutory direction from the government, and for the period of this intervention the Department for Education assigns a representative to act on behalf of the secretary of state, who has a range of powers in relation to the governance of the Trust.

The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services, has the aim of providing 'Good' services to our children and families' by 2022 and is governed by a Board of Directors, chaired by the Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith, and is comprised of the Executive Directors, Independent Non-Executive Directors and council-appointed Non-Executive Directors.

### Financial Context

The finances provided by SMBC to the Trust in 2020/21 is £65,328,000 and our 'third party' income was £7,149,794

We had an opening deficit of £5,814,000. The deficit for 2020/21 is subject to audit but provisionally stands at £1,861,144, making the cumulative deficit £7,675,144.

As outlined in our Medium Term Financial Plan our aim is to make financial savings over the next three years (with this year being the second year), and expect to deliver a cumulative breakeven by the end of 2023/24.

### Improvement

In addition to managing our financial position, the Trust came into being to provide better services to the children and families of Sandwell. It is fair to say that traditional improvement activities slowed whilst all staff were responding to the pandemic. However, we believe that improvements are always found and made through necessity, and we have therefore strengthened some of our infrastructure and created greater strength and resilience amongst our leaders.

Some of our key, specific achievements within this financial year are:

- Continued practice improvement in all areas as outlined within our audits
- Continued strengthening of performance analysis
- Infrastructure to strengthen permanence and matching
- Improved oversight and challenge by Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs (through midpoint reviews and threshold discussions)
- Continued development of services for exploited children
- Development of relationships across the partnership, for example housing, to put into place joint working protocols for homeless children
- Life work officers are in place to promote best practice in this area

There is more to do, which is why we have refreshed our improvement plan, in line with our aims to become good and outstanding in the achievable future.

### Coronavirus

The impact of the pandemic has been significant, and we have risen to the challenge of maximising children's safety and welfare, whilst also balancing the safety and welfare of our staff. This has not been without its challenges, and we have had to be resolute in the face of changing guidance, emerging issues and new developments as they arise. It cannot be understated how our staff at all levels adapted. This report will outline all of the specific business continuity arrangements, risk assessments and mitigating actions we put into place to make SCT as safe as we could.

### External Inspections

Despite remaining under DfE intervention and having the badge of 'Inadequate', we did not have formal monitoring visits or a full inspection from Ofsted. However, we did receive inspectors in November 2020 for a fostering assurance visit, and then in March 2021 for a wider assurance visit. Both visits were positive, praised our approach to managing services during the pandemic, and confirmed the areas we knew we need to focus on as part of our improvement journey.

## 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.

This year in **Section (a)** we begin with a summary of our actions to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Service Delivery Contract allows for the Trust to be 'relieved of its obligations to provide such part of the Services and from any liability for not providing such Services and/or for any consequences of such non-performance to the extent required as a result of the Relief Event'. Once it was clear that the pandemic would have a significant effect on how services could be delivered in line with Coronavirus regulations it was agreed with the Council that the Relief Event clauses were applicable. This has meant that for the duration of the relief event, currently to the end of September 2021, that performance would continue monitored in line with the relief event clauses of the Service Delivery Contract.

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

## Section (a) – Our response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This has been our highest priority this year and we have been resolute in the face of this extended crisis. In their assurance visit in March 2021, Ofsted inspectors noted this as a clear strength and representatives from the DfE have commented that our response has been as good as anyone nationally.

Our leadership team has remained strong throughout the pandemic. Our management and governance structures have been robust and stable and virtual working throughout the breadth of the organisation has become business as usual – we have not suffered any significant breaks in the chain of command because of COVID-19. We have made measured and considered decisions with every challenge we have faced, we have been able to continue to work safely and did not have to significantly change the service and support provided to children, young people and families. We considered the flexibilities in legislation and only some have been adopted in exceptional circumstances.

Robust organisational structures, effective partnerships and resolute officer commitment have ensured that the organisation has repeatedly met the challenges posed by COVID-19. The organisational pillars of ICT, communications, HR, Finance, Performance, Business Support and others, have provided a stable platform from which front line staff have continued to support young people. We have played a crucial role in local partnerships, often leading the way in key strategic and operational meetings.

Frontline service practice has remained under constant review, and we have maintained a register of instances where we have significantly amended practice.

Risk registers and Business Continuity Plans were approved by the Executive Management Team on 11 March 2020 and additional risks have been added to the register relating to the pandemic. In addition to their standard business continuity plans, SCT managers had also developed several Business Continuity “Plans on a Page” (PoPs) and then subsequently ‘surge plans’ examining the potential for a swell in demand across service areas linked to the national picture of lockdowns, local arrangements and school closures. These documents provided a snapshot of key functions for individual service areas and assured Directors and managers of function resilience. These live working documents continue to be reviewed and updated by their owners on a 3-4 weekly basis, during the pandemic.

A fundamental tenet of our work has been that we should continue to visit children and families face to face based upon their needs and the safety of staff. In order to do this, we created a pre-visit risk assessment for social workers to use prior to any visit, which has been an evolving document taking into account evolving legislation and national guidance. Despite the initial national shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), by working closely with SMBC and suppliers throughout the pandemic, the Trust managed to acquire sufficient stock to meet its needs. Equipment was checked to ensure that it meets the quality levels defined by Public Health, usage is monitored weekly and plans are in place to reorder when only 8 weeks of stock remain, to allow for a continuity in visits for children and families. Formal processes were established for the allocation of PPE, which also evolved over time based upon availability and staff need.

Regular communication and meaningful engagement with staff has been of the utmost importance, and we believe we have risen to the challenge of making decisions and delivering advice and direction to staff consistent with ever changing government guidance, in consultation with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), with engagement with staff and trade unions every step of the way. Some of the ways in which we have tailored our approach in this area are:

- An ‘Ask Us’ facility for staff and an evolving frequently asked questions section on the intranet for staff reference.
- Daily COVID-19 message from the Chief Executive eventually was replaced with a midweek blog and an ‘end of week’ round up from Directors
- Engagement via several “stocktake” events where the Chair, Chief Executive and Directors talked about our journey since becoming a trust and how the pandemic has impacted us all, and a reflective session, focusing upon the need for staff to give themselves permission to ‘take a moment’
- At the “Keeping yourself and others safe” sessions, the Chief Executive and Directors talked about how everyone can play their part in keeping colleagues and the children, young people and families we work with safe
- Staff have been invited to vaccination information sessions with a Public Health Consultant
- Staff have been invited to individual sessions with Educational Psychologists
- Teams have had advice and information sessions from Occupational Health

A key opportunity for staff engagement and feedback is the Practitioner Improvement Board. This is a group of staff from across all services within the Trust who meet monthly and have acted as a forum for consultation, particularly in regard to our approach to the pandemic. It has been immensely useful in developing practical ways of implementing our strategic aims. An example of this is when PPE became more available, this group suggested a more efficient and trusting way of distributing it to staff.

All Trust buildings were initially closed in response to the pandemic, with the sole exception of Oldbury Council House which hosted MASH/SAAT. A small admin team was maintained in the Council house to provide core functions that allowed the wider service to operate remotely. This team was available to process incoming and outgoing mail, print and send out necessary documentation of ICPC and review meetings, support staff to access ICT equipment and issue PPE as required.

An ongoing dialogue has been maintained with SMBC Facilities Management and Health and Safety colleagues regarding new ways of working, to consider current and future strategies. The Trust is a member of the council's weekly accommodation group and is aligned to the council's approach on all matters relating to accommodation. In consultation with staff from across the Trust, we have responded to this evolving situation by maintaining essential services. However, we prioritised the recommencement of Family time, ensuring staff, children, carers and families were safe and supported as the Hollies family centre was reopened. The services that were office based are:

- The Wellman Building being opened once a week to allow staff to collect equipment and resources, enabling them to work at home, and latterly to pick up PPE and Christmas presents for children.
- Safe indoor family time at the Hollies.
- A community venue (Windmill Community Centre) and latterly Unity Walk was reopened to undertake Parent Assessment Manual (PAMS) assessments.
- Family time at the Hollies, extended to the Metsec Building to allow additional capacity while maintaining safety for all participants
- Weekly access to the Wellman building to allow staff to collect equipment, to facilitate remote working, and the collection of bulk PPE supplies
- Unity Walk was reopened to allow the continuation of some direct work with young people and court directed PAMS assessment
- Utilisation of both the Wellman and Metsec for the roll out of an organisational wide ICT refresh
- Use of the Wellman building in December 2020 to distribute Christmas presents to all children in care.

Mechanisms were put in place to ensure all expenditure incurred specifically due to the pandemic were recorded, with this information being shared with the Council, fortnightly. This allowed the Trust to make a claim against the additional COVID related funding that had been provided by central government.

With the arrival of COVID-19, the HR team refocused their attention on workforce tracking and planning. Project work ceased whilst the team gathered and built data sheets ensuring that it was clear which staff was unavailable due to either having contracted Covid or having to self-isolate in line with government guidance. Key data was fed to the Performance Team, assisting with the planning of cases/activity. Recruitment and retention remained a key focus during the pandemic. Market conditions saw a fall in both agency and permanent applicants.

Policies were kept under review and amended in line with national guidelines, with a particular focus on staff welfare and support during the pandemic. We undertook individual staff risk assessments which identified 13 individuals whose work activities required special consideration. In addition to this we asked 21 individuals to remain shielding after central government ceased this, and 1 individual who had identified care concerns. The HR Team has maintained support for individuals who are identified as high risk, shielding and who have caring responsibilities with monthly welfare calls.

In February 2021, following active engagement with Public Health Sandwell and the local CCG, staff were able to access the vaccination hub in Walsall. HR continues to monitor vaccination uptake to assist resource planning.

At the beginning of 2021, due to increasing resource concerns caused by a spike in COVID-19 absence, increased agency leavers, long-term sick, maternity leaves and a static recruitment market, several additional measures were implemented to ensure that children and young people's cases were appropriately managed. These included, the HR team meeting daily with each of the operational teams to understand resources. The information gathered is then shared with the Quality and Operations team who make sure that cases are appropriately re-allocated. The business continuity process was initiated, with the creation of a pool of social workers from within the Quality & Performance team. Resources were moved from the

SAAT team to care management. In addition, a Brief Intervention Team was created to swiftly progress timely intervention and the safe closure of some of our children in need.

The Trust's transfer to working virtually rested firmly upon the quality and resilience of its ICT infrastructure. A significantly strengthened ICT infrastructure was needed and arrangements were put in place to make sure that SCT staff had the equipment necessary to work from home and that this equipment worked consistently:

- To ensure that the Front Door remained open, a review of its telephony was required.
- The evolution of Liquidlogic systematic forms, case notes, hazard markers and banners, as well as quick reference guides for staff were undertaken as the pandemic began.
- A review of mobile telephone capability took place to improve front line workers engagement with service users via the most appropriate devices and new handsets were provided.
- It was also agreed to bring forward SCT's Hardware Refresh and Technology Modernisation Programme and all staff received a new Windows 10 device by November 2020.

For the first few months of the pandemic, the performance team worked on several new developments relating to COVID-19, which meant that new processes were implemented, increasing the amount of manual reporting. For example, children's attendance at school – datasets that have not been linked before.

In order to respond quickly to the need for pandemic-related management information, a COVID-19 dashboard was created, which brought together information to identify which children were flagged as highest risk, being visited face to face or virtually, which children had a recent management oversight, and which children had a recent pre-visit risk assessment or education status form. This has been invaluable in identifying those teams that are performing well and those who required additional support, it also allowed managers to identify those children who were most vulnerable and required more immediate actions.

Throughout the pandemic, we have needed to invoke business continuity arrangements on three separate occasions, where staff in particular areas were sick, self-isolating or where staff had handed in their notice. This included the redeployment of staff, particularly qualified social workers, to visit and undertake discrete pieces of work related to safeguarding children. This was achieved through a dynamic 'pool' of staff with a central senior manager co-ordinating this.

#### *Intervention through visiting and the impact of COVID-19 on visiting*

Throughout the pandemic, our approach has been that we visit children and young people face to face, based upon presenting needs of children, and staff safety, utilising PPE. It can be seen that we have maintained good levels of visiting both virtually and face to face, after an initial drop in face to face visits in May / June. Consistently, the new DfE return evidences that the Trust is doing well, when compared to statistical neighbours, and regionally and nationally, in relation to children being seen or contacted by their SW within a 4-week period.

Practitioners are continuing to seek to see children alone during virtual visits, through the use of video messaging; the oversight and assurance of this happening is more of a challenge but where possible, the participation and involvement of children continues. There is increasing evidence of the use of direct work seen on children's case files; however, this is variable and inconsistent. It is recognised that practitioners working with children who are non-verbal need alternative ways of communicating with children and further exploration, although there are some very good examples of innovative ways of communication with these children, more work is needed in this area.

The use of video messaging has increased as a result of COVID-19 and creativity in ensuring the voice of the child. However, this has led to an acknowledgment that for some children, using technology as a means of participation is more successful and is preferred. Whilst it should not, and does not, replace face to face statutory visiting expectations, practitioners are recognising the use of technology as a further means of effective communication with children and young people, who often prefer to be involved in their care planning through this medium.

- Some of the barriers here have been:
- Multi-agency working has been more restrictive, services only working virtually, professionals not completing home visits and children not attending school
- Due to the lack of services completing direct work, this impacted upon plans for children moving forward and at times, Social Workers have been the only professional visiting the home

- Reduced the access of the Local Offer to families in Sandwell. Many provider agencies are having difficulty recruiting staff to provide social activities in the local community. This has resulted in families struggling to access resources via the Local Offer making referrals to social care for an assessment for support services, therefore, having an impact on the Trust considering paying for services outside of the Local Offer
- The overnight short breaks unit Norman Laud closed December 2020, leaving 10 children and families without short breaks for several months. To address this, the team identified and sourced other short breaks units to cover the children without a resource.

Nevertheless, we have prioritised children at highest risk, ensuring all children have had the intervention they need based on their level of risk; we have progressed care planning to ensure safeguarding needs are met and we have been able to review families that could access support in other services – enabling us to work with only those who meet our threshold.

#### *Review of plans*

CP Conferences took place via telephone conference, enabling them to be recorded, and then used to produce minutes. Whilst it is accepted that moving to virtual methods of meetings was not ideal, it ensured that despite the pandemic, plans for children were being reviewed. There was some feedback to suggest that some families preferred this mechanism of meeting, and some young people engaged more fully in their process. Others have felt more isolated using these methods. Part of the work moving forward into the next year will be to review all of the methods of interventions and engagement and ensure families are able to use the methods most suited to their needs. It is clear that partner agencies have found it easier to engage in virtual meetings as this has reduced the time they are spending travelling to and from meetings, it has also improved engagement from professionals that would normally struggle to attend meetings e.g. GP's. As we move to a position of considering how meetings can return in person, the lessons learnt from virtual meetings will still be taken forward.

The review of children's plans has been a significant factor in the work of the safeguarding unit, and there has been scrutiny throughout the year on those plans that have been in place for a long time, or appear to be drifting. The recent Ofsted assurance visit (March 2021) questioned the evidence on some children's files of the impact of the IRO or Conference Chair on progressing plans and challenging drift and delay. This is an area of practice that will be a high priority in the coming year and part of the future improvement plan. Since the launch of the revised Challenge and Resolution process in October 2020, IROs and CPCCs have more consistently utilised informal challenges, working with operational staff and trying to build relationships to bring about resolution, rather than formal challenges.

The quality of plans and planning has been an area of work throughout this year. There have been task and finish groups that have included managers and practitioners from within the service, and also work undertaken within the service to develop and trial a Plan on a Page – which aims to be a document that is simple and clear for parents and children to understand and refer to. This has now been used by a few IROs and a CPCC and the aim is to take this into the next year and into the improvement plan with a view to full role out. Service User feedback on the few cases has been very positive in helping families to understand their plans and importantly what they need to do and what will help to make things better for the child. This work will go alongside plans now to reduce the record of meetings to succinct summaries and analysis and focus more of improving the quality of plans and planning.

The Trust made changes to the reporting expectations for Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC) and it became an expectation that an updated assessment was completed in advance of all RCPCs. The compliance in this area is variable and this has been recognised as an area for improvement. Managers have reflected on this and consider that the communication to staff about this expectation may not have been as robust as it could have been and currently, discussions are taking place for a "re-launch" of this expectation.

Some of the barriers here have been:

- Not having direct/in person contact for some families has been challenging and this at times has led to taking more gradual steps to include and involve them. Some service users may have felt disengaged by not being able to meet people talking about them or their children.
- Reduction in visits has meant that some children have not been seen as regularly as we would have liked or have become harder to reach.
- Ensuring a more collaborative way of working with all partners and SWs – who is seeing a family – and co-ordination of contacts to minimise risk of infection whilst ensuring that children are safe and their plans have progressed.

- Greater support to children in their placements to avoid movements and changes for them.

However, our work has:

- Ensured meetings have taken place so their plans have been reviewed
- Brought in Threshold discussions to ensure that only those children who have needed an ICPC go through that process
- We have engaged some children and families who had felt marginalised from being in rooms of professionals (engaging them in their home or virtually for some has increased their engagement)
- We have reduced the number of multiple moves for looked after children
- We have maintained and improved the stability of placements over 2 years for looked after children
- We have been systematically reviewing those children on CP Plans and have reduced these numbers by nearly 200 in the last 12 months, utilising other services and supporting families in a relationship based way

## Section (b) - The Improvement Plan

We have come a long way in the last three years since we began as a Trust, and have made some good improvements within that time, including ensuring the resilience of our infrastructure when responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has laid quality foundations for future improvements. Coming out of the pandemic, we are ready for the next stage of our journey, so at the end of this financial year it was the right time for us to refresh our improvement plan with the aim of becoming a 'Good' or better organisation.

It is fair to say that traditional improvement activities slowed whilst all staff were responding to the pandemic. However, we believe that improvements are always found and made through necessity, and we have therefore strengthened some of our infrastructure and created greater strength and resilience amongst our leaders.

Some of our key, specific achievements within this financial year are:

- Continued practice improvement in all areas as outlined within our audits
- Continued strengthening of performance analysis
- Infrastructure to strengthen permanence and matching
- Improved oversight and challenge by Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs (through midpoint reviews and threshold discussions)
- Continued development of services for exploited children
- Development of relationships across the partnership, for example housing, to put into place joint working protocols for homeless children
- Life work officers are in place to promote best practice in this area

### *Our new improvement plan and governance*

We know there is still a lot for us to do in a challenging field, with staffing and demand pressures regionally and nationally. The landscape for children's services following the pandemic is ever-changing, so our approach is with this in mind. We have also had several visits from Ofsted and have taken advantage of practice improvement partners from Doncaster, Essex and Camden to provide external validation of our work. We know the areas where we need to improve to achieve our aims, which are People, Practice and Partnerships:

#### People

Ensuring we recruit and retain good quality staff through:

- Comprehensive and supportive induction that prepares staff to do the job they came to do
- Offering genuine opportunities for career development and progression from within
- Developing the best managers and senior leaders
- A good learning and development offer for all levels of staff

#### Practice

We will ensure that:

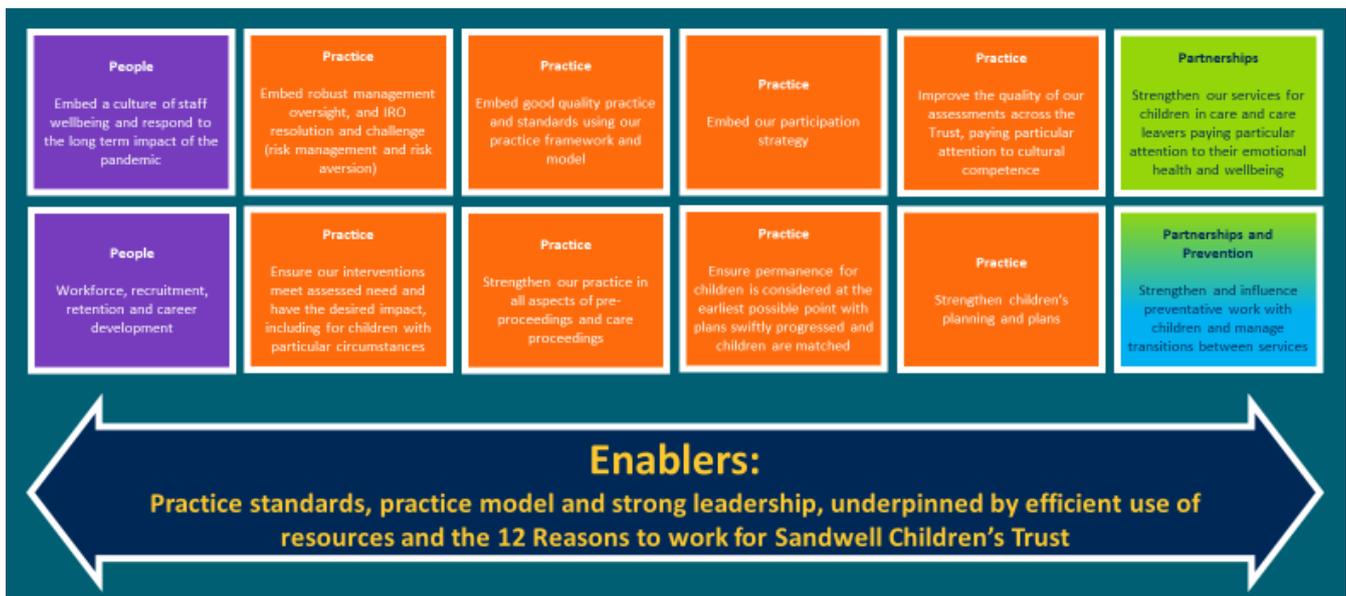
- When we intervene with families, this is done with the benefit of high-quality analytical assessments which balance children's wishes and needs with parental capacity and motivation to change
- Intervention with families are proportionate, and we minimise delays in decision making
- Where we can, we prevent needs and risks increasing and empower families and communities to build on their strengths and meet their own needs
- When we work with families we do so in a relationship-based way, understand the impact of trauma on children and families, build on strengths and address the root causes of needs and risks
- We routinely analyse practice and trends, we know the value and impact of our interventions and can provide evidence for this
- We have a culture of genuine reflection and promote a cycle of learning and practice improvement, which can be evidenced

**Partnership and Prevention**

We will ensure that:

- We work with partners so that Early Help promotes prevention at every level
- Ensuring the most relevant partners are integral in every child’s assessment and plan, actively support families and where decisions are made on behalf of children
- Capitalising on the six towns in Sandwell to ensure that a localised community approach is taken, helps to identify and intervene early and swiftly, building relationships and empowering families
- There is a robust, safe and efficient interface between levels of need
- Work with early help partners so that they can adopt aspects of our practice framework and model
- Targeted Services provided by SCT manage risk effectively and contribute towards a whole Sandwell approach to Early Help

As a result of our latest self-evaluation, our performance data, quality assurance activity and intelligence, bolstered by external feedback, we know where more specific improvements need to be made. These are set out below:



**Enablers**

Good progress has been made in these three categories of the previous improvement plan, and we believe these key enablers provide a strong foundation for our next stage of improvement. They are:

**Leadership:** Strong leadership ensures that we maintain progress as all services and all staff have a shared understanding of our vision and expectations, there is a culture of accountability for the work that we do and staff feel safe to learn, improve and innovate.

**Efficient use of resources:** An efficient service lends itself to being a good service as staff are focussed on the right things for children and families, are not overly distracted or burdened by meaningless activity and have the space to be creative.

**12 Reasons to work for Sandwell Children’s Trust:** Our workforce strategy and delivery programme is key to deliver most, if not all of the improvements within this plan, as we are reliant upon good quality staff, social workers and managers to deliver the best for our families. The 12 reasons also set out our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

**People**

- 1) *Embed a culture of staff wellbeing and respond to the long-term impact of the pandemic*

After the last 12 months when staff have had to respond to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it is crucial to ensure that our staff are offered the best emotional and practical support possible to be able to give their best to children and families, throughout the remainder of this crisis and beyond. This will include:

- Evolving our working style to meet staff and business needs
- Ensuring our accommodation and technology needs are met following the pandemic
- Ensuring staff have access to emotional wellbeing services broadly and individually
- Ensuring staff welfare is at the forefront of any service decisions
- Continue to engage with staff, listen to their feedback, and respond in a timely way

## 2) *Workforce, recruitment, retention and career development*

Referred to within the key enablers, having a good quality and stable staff base is essential in ensuring continued improvements can be made, as staff who leave take their learning elsewhere and new staff may need investment of training and development. Instability within teams and services also contribute to instability for children and families, drift and delay, and 'start again syndrome'.

- Offering genuine opportunities for career development and progression from within, with clearly articulated pathways
- Ensuring our financial and overall package is attractive to new and existing staff, and competitive in the local market
- Ensuring we explore every avenue to obtain quality social workers and other support staff and do all we can to sell ourselves
- Ensuring there is a comprehensive and supportive induction that prepares staff to do the job they came to do
- Developing the best managers and senior leaders through established leadership programmes
- Ensuring we maintain a good learning and development offer for all levels of staff
- The embedding of the social work academy in Sandwell and maintaining a stream of interested students and ASYE's to bolster our future

## Practice

### 3) *Embed good quality practice and standards using our practice framework and model*

Our practice framework and model underpins everything we do for children and families, as such it is important that all staff are equipped with a consistent way in which to practice, informed by research and helps maximise the success of our interventions.

- Ensuring when we intervene with families, this is done with the benefit of high-quality analytical assessments which balance children's wishes and needs with parental capacity and motivation to change
- Intervention with families are proportionate, and we minimise delays in decision making
- Where we can, we prevent needs and risks increasing and empower families and communities to build on their strengths and meet their own needs
- When we work with families we do so in a relationship-based way, understand the impact of trauma on children and families, build on strengths, and address the root causes of needs and risks
- We routinely analyse practice and trends, we know the value and impact of our interventions and can provide evidence for this
- We have a culture of genuine reflection and promote a cycle of learning and practice improvement

### 4) *Embed our participation strategy*

We are proud of our 'Four I's' participation strategy (Invest, Inform, Involve and Influence) and are well on the way to be accredited for our work in this area. Having services designed in collaboration with children gives us the opportunity to see things from their point of view. Engaging children in a meaningful way, at every step of the way, is of the utmost importance to us and allows us to tailor our interventions for maximum success.

- Ensuring meaningful participation of children and young people in decision making meetings
- Ensuring our staff are equipped to engage with children and young people of all ages and developmental needs
- Ensuring children and young people are involved in our QA processes and help us to learn
- Ensuring we obtain feedback from children and young people wherever we can
- Ensuring services are developed with children and young people

5) *Improve the quality of our assessments across the Trust, paying particular attention to cultural competence*

We are a diverse borough in Sandwell. Our families have wide range of ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, ages, sexualities and gender identities, often layered on top of each other. As such, each family has its own culture, often complex and with its own cultural norms, which we have to understand if we are going to get our interventions right for them. Staff also need to understand their own experiences, values and identities and how these might affect the way in which they practice. Therefore, our aim is for all staff should be culturally competent.

- Ensuring we have clear diversity policies, statements of intent and expectations are communicated to all staff
- Ensuring cultural competence throughout all levels of the organisation, no matter what the role, and that it is a key consideration of assessing and intervening with families
- Ensuring we considering diversity and culture within all the work we do

6) *Strengthen children's planning and plans*

Without a good analytical assessment and a clear plan, setting out clear expectations for all involved our interventions with children and families are less likely to be a success. We know we have not yet done all we can to improve the quality of our plans, so this priority area is an essential in the first year of this plan, to be further built on beyond that.

- Ensure we have a fit for purpose design for SMART plans that is well understood, used to drive quality interventions that address the root causes of problems
- Develop plans that help families to know what is expected of them, relevant and drive good quality and meaningful intervention
- Ensure that staff know what a good plan looks like and develop a bank of good practice examples
- Progress made in line with children's plans are measurable and analysed

7) *Embed robust management oversight, and IRO resolution and challenge (risk management and risk aversion)*

Without strong, proportionate management oversight, clear direction and independent challenge, children are less likely to receive consistent and effective interventions. Delays, poorer practice and potential problems are not foreseen or identified quickly enough and in turn are not resolved quickly enough.

- Intervening in a child's life should be proportionate to their assessed need, and when risks are reduced, decisions are made for a more appropriate intervention in a timely way
- We have a consistent and shared approach to risk
- Ensure managers understand their own performance and know their strengths and areas for improvement
- Ensure managers identify potential problems as soon as possible and rectify any problems immediately
- Ensure the footprint of IRO's and CP Conference Chairs are routinely seen, and challenge and resolution has a positive impact on children's outcomes
- Scrutiny, challenge and reflection takes place at every level of management

8) *Ensure our interventions meet assessed need and have the desired impact, including for children with particular circumstances*

Whenever we work with children and families, everything we do should be meaningful, purposeful and our interventions make a difference to a child's life. Our social workers and practitioners are agents of change in their own right and are crucial in helping families to reduce risk or better meet need – taking advantage of specialist resource where the need arises. We also have a range of children with specialist circumstances in Sandwell, including those where their immigration status is unresolved (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and those with No Recourse to Public Funds), those who are at risk of exploitation, and those where their disability necessitates a service. For these children, we need to tailor our interventions, making best use of the skillset of our staff.

- Ensure there is a good support infrastructure and clear performance reporting for staff who work with children with disabilities, so that practice is consistent for all children requiring a service due to their disability
- Ensure that the strong work of the exploitation teams in Sandwell continue to be developed

- Consolidate our intervention with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, those with No Recourse to Public Funds and those who require British citizenship, ensuring consistent practice for these children and families

9) *Strengthen our practice in all aspects of pre-proceedings and care proceedings*

Where care proceedings are a possible outcome of our involvement with a family it is essential that we enter into clear dialogue with parents through the Public Law Outline. We know that our work in this area has been variable, with some good pockets of work identified by courts and our regulators. However, on average, children spend too long in Care Proceedings in Sandwell, and our assessments and evidence does not always lead to the outcomes we seek in court.

- We should do whatever it takes for a child to remain safely within their family, which means family options are explored at the earliest opportunity
- Review and ensure processes for pre-proceedings are robust, that parents are well-informed and expectations are clear to them from the outset
- Incorporate pre-proceedings and court processes into case management systems and utilise performance reporting to maintain an accurate tracker of this activity
- Address the historic delay within existing care proceedings and ensure there is a mechanism to review and drive progress for those children who entered into care proceedings more recently
- Engage with the judiciary and CAFCASS and ensure we maximise our influence in regional forums so Special Guardianship can be considered as a viable permanence option

10) *Ensure permanence for children is considered at the earliest possible point with plans swiftly progressed and children are matched*

Children deserve to know where they are going to live permanently as soon as possible, and these permanent placements should be made without delay, as part of an informed decision from a senior manager. In Sandwell, we need to consistently achieve this for our children.

- We should do whatever it takes for a child to remain safely within their family, which means family options are explored at the earliest opportunity
- Ensure that children in our care have a plan for permanence at the earliest opportunity
- Ensure that initial placements for children are made with due consideration of their needs, and their profile
- Ensure that children's long-term placements are made with robust matching considerations and decisions to maximise the success of these placements

### Partnerships

11) *Strengthen our services for children in care and care leavers paying particular attention to their emotional health and wellbeing*

Children in Sandwell have access to a range of support for their emotional and mental health, but the effectiveness of these services is not as well understood as it could be. We need to be able to influence and develop clear pathways for emotional and mental health support for our children, in particular those for whom we have or have had parental responsibility.

- Develop clear performance analysis and reporting in this area
- Respond to the 2021 review of mental health services for care leavers to ensure good quality transition to adult mental health services
- Improve relationships and partnership working in this area to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children
- Commission services that meet the emotional needs of our children in care and care leavers, where a mental health service threshold is not met

### Prevention

12) *Strengthen and influence preventative work with children and manage transitions between services*

- We work with partners so that Early Help promotes prevention at every level

- Ensuring the most relevant partners are involved in every child's assessment and plan, they actively support families and contribute to decisions made on behalf of children
- Capitalising on the six towns in Sandwell to ensure that a localised community approach is taken, helps to identify and intervene early and swiftly, building relationships and empowering families
- There is a robust, safe and efficient interface between levels of need
- Work with early help partners so that they can adopt aspects of our practice framework and model
- Targeted Services provided by SCT manage risk effectively and contribute towards a whole Sandwell approach to Early Help

#### *Demonstrating impact*

We know we need to measure our progress through a range of methods, which include performance metrics, intelligence, feedback from children, families and our partner and most importantly our quality assurance activity. We do this through our single overarching plan / impact workbook which is governed through our Practice Improvement Board.

#### Quantitative Measures

- A greater percentage of the workforce is permanent and staff turnover, sickness and vacancies reduce.
- We take less time to appoint staff and improve satisfaction with our induction programme, which leads to improvements in practice.
- A greater percentage of staff have one to one supervision within the month and managers are providing quality direction to social workers
- Our re-referrals and repeat plans decrease, indicating interventions are longer lasting and are likely to have been more successful.
- More staff utilise assessment tools, research and direct work tools to engage with children and families.
- Children are subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection plan for less time, where intervention in their lives is more purposeful.
- Plans are updated in a more timely manner, are reviewed in collaborative forums with families and key professionals and focus on reducing risk.
- We understand where exploitation activity takes place, and can evidence disruption actions are reducing exploitation, with a trajectory of reducing risk over the long term once the baseline is understood.
- Agency, Parent and Child attendance at MACE meetings increase.
- There is a greater proportion of children with a plan of permanence, and who are formally matched to their long-term carer. Where adoption is in children's best interests this takes place as soon as possible.
- The average length of Care Proceedings decreases and there is evidence of purposeful work with front-loaded evidence.
- More children who become looked after do so in a planned way where carers are able to meet their needs from day 1.
- Foster Carer recruitment activity shows a greater number of mainstream fostering assessments are being undertaken, leading to a greater number of mainstream foster carers being approved.
- A greater percentage of Children in Care have had good quality life work and where appropriate have Life Story Books.
- More children leave care safely to return to their families, where appropriate, and a greater percentage of children who cease care do so through Special Guardianship.
- More care leavers have access to adult mental health services should they need to and more children and young people known to SCT can access therapeutic support and in a more timely way.

#### Qualitative measures

- Staff are routinely providing feedback, which is constructive and positive and results in tangible actions where appropriate.
- More of our work is rated as Good or better in all categories.
- Learning from a range of feedback, including children and families, is used as the basis of continued improvement, and feeds into learning and development.
- Children's voice is more evident in planning for them, more children attend meetings and have a say in decisions made on their behalf.
- Managers consistently demonstrate their day to day support and direction to ensure the work we do with children is purposeful and appropriate.
- There is an IRO / CP Conference chair footprint evident and Dispute resolution is used proportionately, ensuring that intervention for children is not delayed.
- Private fostering arrangements are better known and are assessed as safe for children.

- Children placed in interim approved placements are safeguarded, and allegations are handled in a timely and robust way.

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

Over the course of the year, we have reported our key contract performance and are pleased to say that despite the pandemic having an impact on our work, we have maintained good performance in many areas. Over the course of the year, eight of the fifteen Key Performance Indicators have improved or been maintained above our target, three have remained broadly the same but below target, and four have declined or oscillated between failure and tolerance. Particular areas of improvement / maintenance are:

- Timeliness of contacts, referrals and Initial Child Protection Conferences and children in care reviews
- Outcome of random case file audits
- Unallocated children

Those that have declined are:

- Timeliness of visits to children
- Management supervision

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020 SMBC agreed that coronavirus pandemic constituted a relief event, which stipulated that the Trust would be free of any performance consequences or liability in specified areas of the contract. Namely, PI6, PI10, PI11 and PI13, and the relevant parts of the service specification. This relief event was extended to the end of the financial year by letter on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Already discussed earlier within this report, two particular concerns that arose due to the pandemic were staffing (i.e. staff sickness, self-isolation and shielding), and spikes in demand / surges. This will be a theme across many of the performance indicators.

Below is the individual performance of the key performance indicators specified within the contract:

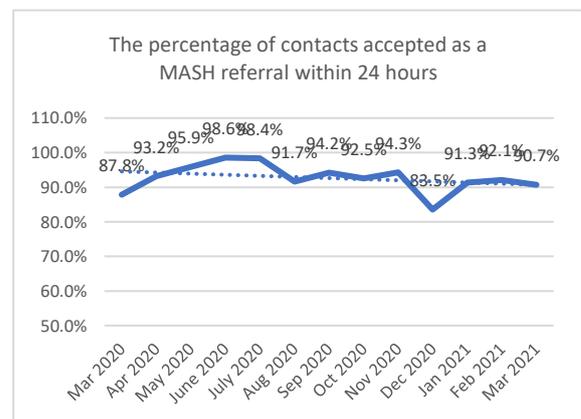
### PI1 - The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours

**Target: > 75%**

**Tolerance: > 65%**

**Failure: < 65%**

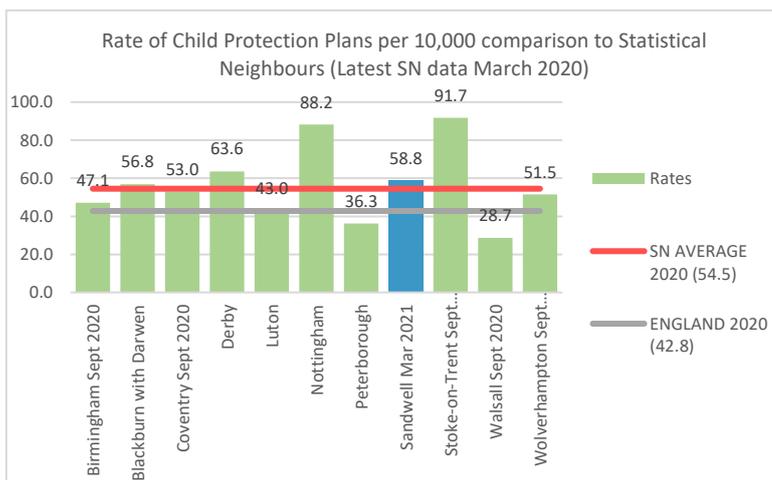
This measure is important as it shows how efficiently our front door is operating and how quickly we are responding to referrals where threshold is not immediately clear. We have been consistently above our target in this area for several years, although there was a dip in performance in December 2020 (caused by a technical problem with our case management system).



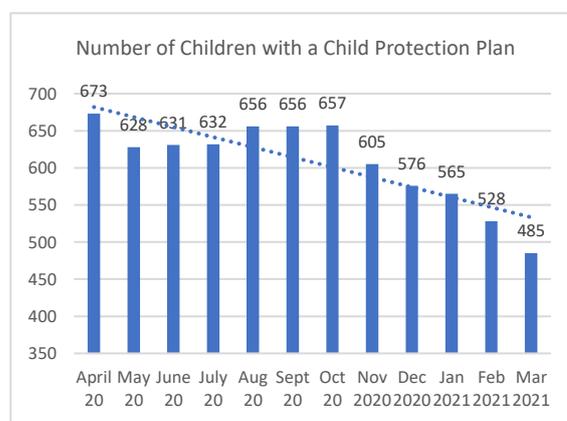
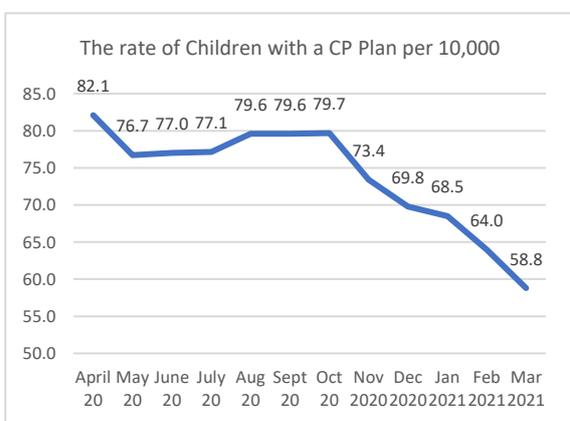
**PI2 - The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population.**

- 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 children where there are child protection concerns. Our statistical neighbour average is 54.5 and the England average is 42.8 (measured at March 2020).



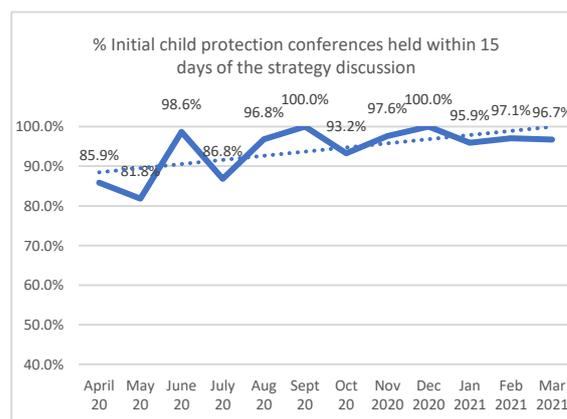
Throughout the year we have worked hard to ensure that the threshold for child protection was consistent, and this is now much more in line with our SN average, and positively at the lowest rate for 2 years.



**PI3 – The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC’s) 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 timely we are when we are completing S47 enquiries and organising Initial Child Protection Conferences for children. 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.



Performance in this indicator has been sustained above target since February 2020 and is consistently above our comparators for 2020 (England 77.7%, West Midlands 77.6% and Statistical Neighbour 78.4%).

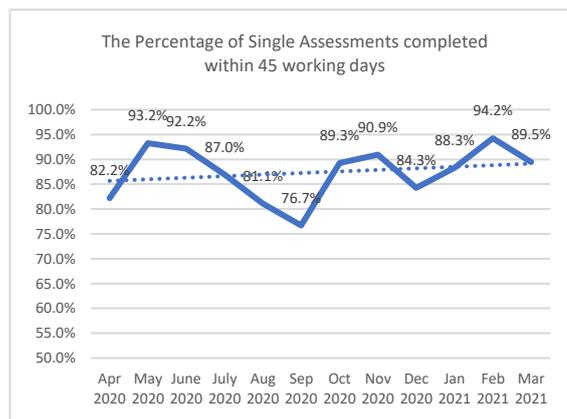
**PI4 - The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days**

**Target: > 85%**

**Tolerance: >75%**

**Failure: < 75%**

This measure shows how timely our Single Assessments are for children (in line with the statutory maximum expectation of 45 working days). Most Single Assessments are completed by Social Workers within the Safeguarding and Assessment Teams (SAAT), but a significant amount are completed across other service areas as part of updating/review assessments for children.



We saw a dip in performance mid-year, which coincided with increased demand in this area but also a period of time when staff were self-isolating and shielding.

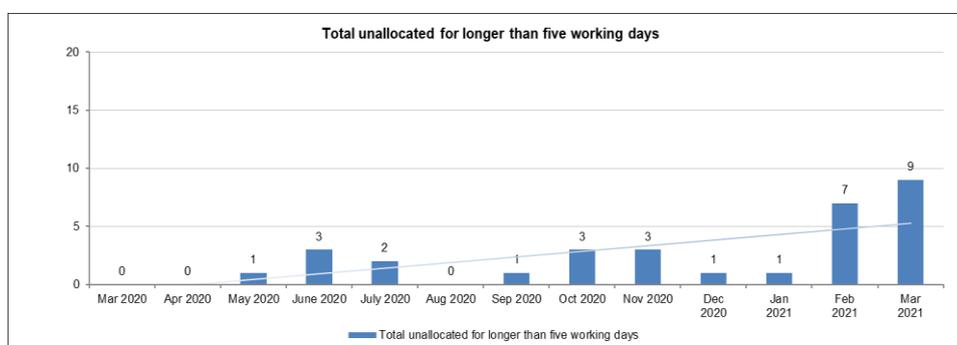
**PI5 - The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days**

**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.

As can be seen our performance in this area has consistently been better than our target this year. As at end March 2021, we had nine children unallocated for longer than 5 working days, which is higher than we wanted, and acted as an early warning to us for later problems we experienced from April 2021 onwards (outside the scope of this report).

Nevertheless, the day to day processes we have in place for allocations and transfers work and have been sustained. However, the difficulty in recruiting SWs to our vacant positions has affected our performance in this area, which is discussed elsewhere in this report.

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

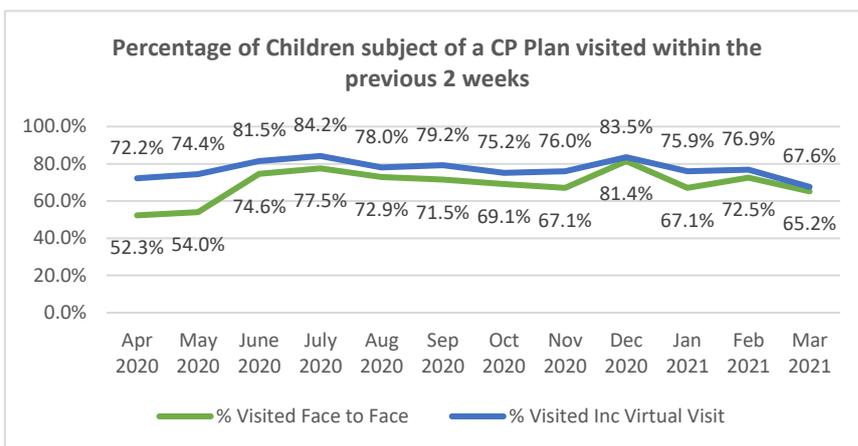
**Target: > 80%**  
**Tolerance: >70%**  
**Failure: < 70%**

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.

Throughout the pandemic, we have measured both face to face and virtual visits (i.e. through video calls), recognising a need to utilise available tools and technology as imaginatively as possible.

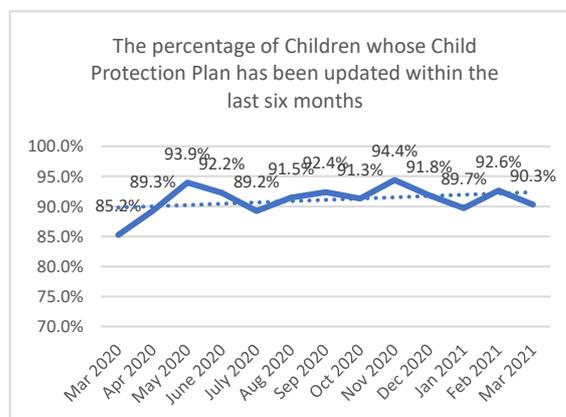
It is clear that at the start of the year (and the pandemic), that the use of virtual visits was higher, although as the year progressed the 'gap' reduced. This was because staff became more confident in visiting children face to face with the development of our pre-visit risk assessments, and also as the national response evolved. The drop in performance at the end of the year is accounted for by increasing staffing fragility within the Care Management service, which has since developed.



**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 and discussing children’s plans and our interventions. Good performance in this area would help to show we are ensuring our interventions are having the desired impact, and making changes where warranted. Plans that are not updated are normally an indicator of drift and delay within our interventions.



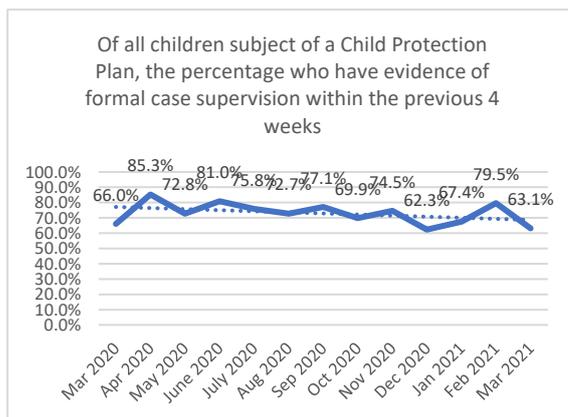
This measure is linked to how often Social Workers are holding / recording their Children’s Core Group Meetings and Conference Chairs their Review Child Protection Conferences, which has been a priority focus over the last 12 months.

Performance has been relatively consistent – between 85 and 95% throughout the year. However, this falls below our target of 95%.

**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%**

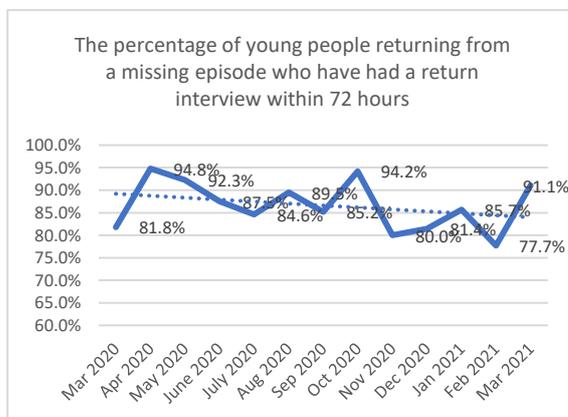
This measure helps to demonstrate formal management oversight for this cohort of children. Good performance in this area shows that Team Managers are regularly considering progress in these cases and providing social workers the opportunity for reflection on a case by case basis. We have consistently performance above our target in this measure save for December 2020 and March 2021.



**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.

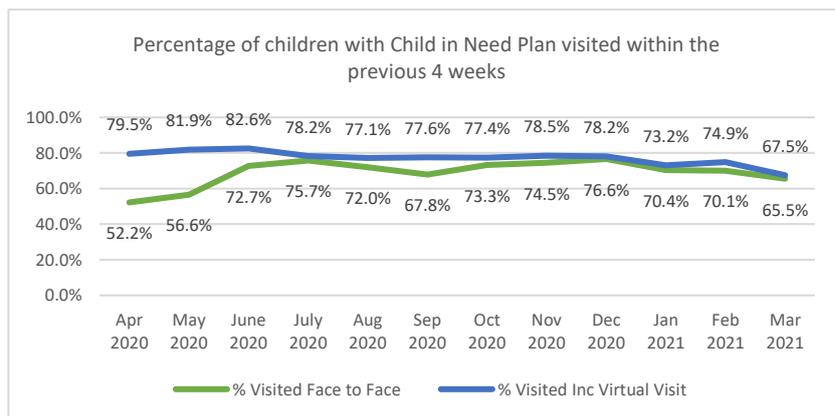


Our performance in this area has been good, although the relatively small sample sizes per month mean there can be variance month to month.

**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.

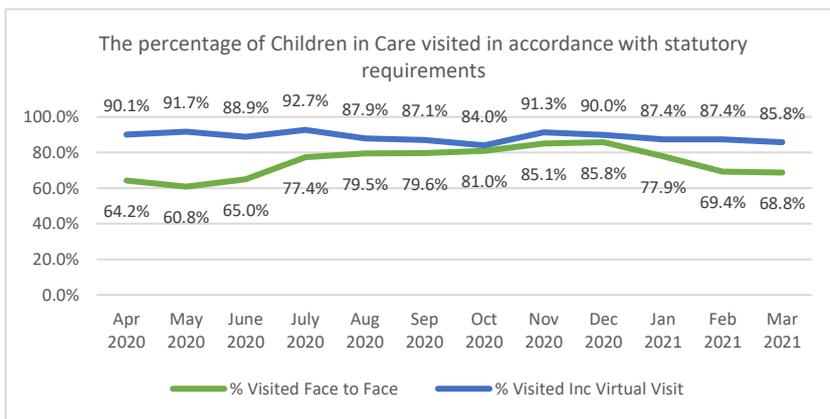


As with other measures relating to visits, we have measured virtual visits alongside face to face and see the same pattern where the use of virtual visits waned after the first few months of the year.

### PI11 – The percentage of Children in Care 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 Children in Care. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is defined through statute. Good performance helps to show we have established relationships with our Children in Care, know their needs and meet their needs.

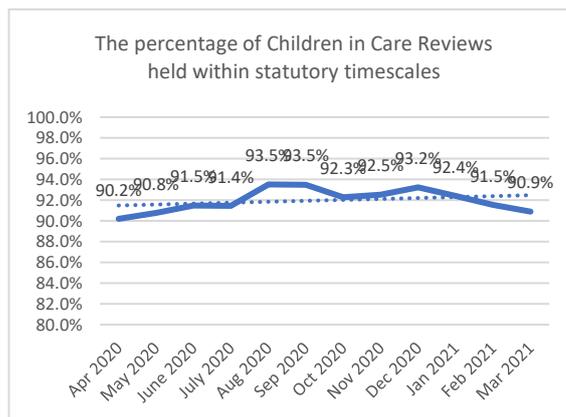


Many Children in Care are placed in stable situations, and are secure with their carers. Therefore, we have felt more able to make use of virtual visits, a flexibility outlined within the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) Amendments 2020. However, we see the same pattern of virtual visits being used at the start of the year and then again at the end of the year following the second national lockdown. The slight drop in performance was another early indicator of staffing difficulties within Care Management, referred to elsewhere.

### 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. This is a cumulative measure across the financial year starting in April each year.

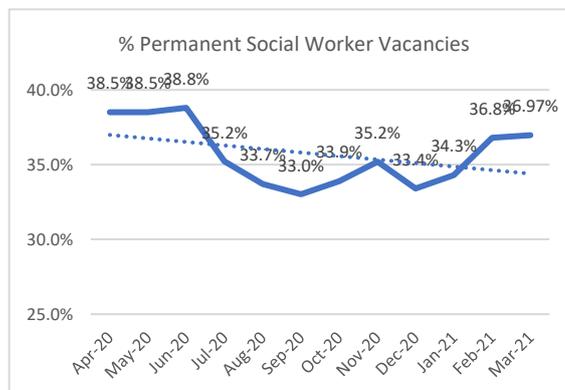


Our performance in this area has been consistently good, above our target, although our aim is higher.

### 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.



It is clear that we made progress in this area in the summer of 2020, but towards the end of the financial year we saw the opposite trend. This has been one of our bigger challenges going into the 2021/22 financial year, which will be covered in later sections.

### 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.

It can be seen that average caseload has gradually increased over the course of the year, which is representative of the evolving staffing shortage we have against our demand. This will be covered in more detail in the next sections.

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

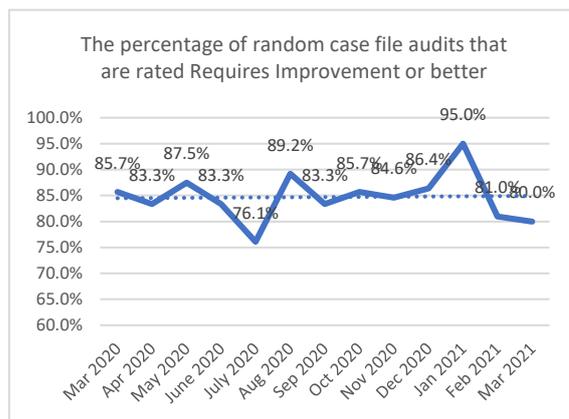
Target: > 55%

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 our assessments, plans and interventions with children and families are improving.

The quality of our work has been consistent according to our random monthly audits, despite the challenges we have faced, which should be seen as a positive.



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

### Quality Assurance and Auditing

Alongside knowing ourselves from a performance perspective, we continue to work to ensure we are interrogating the quality of our own practice. We utilise performance intelligence to develop lines of enquiry, and deploy resource to test these out through dip sampling and direct work with service areas. 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 random case files every three months (which is 360 every year).

Our quality assurance and practice learning activity comes from a range of sources, which include: Audits, direct feedback, learning from complaints / compliments, independent scrutiny from outside of our organisation and from within the safeguarding unit.

We also have a practice learning team arm of the Beyond Auditing Service, who deliver one to one and group practice learning on specific topics, hold reflective discussions and help develop best practice guidance for areas of practice improvement. This team also contributes to the design and delivery of services where they need to be improved.

During the first lockdown and until July 2020, some of our Quality Assurance activities (monthly and thematic audits), were scaled down to support the operational services to cope with additional pressures due to restrictions of lockdown. All audits were suspended for managers across the Trust. However, the QA/BA and WFD teams continued to undertake a small amount of Learning and thematic audits to ensure we met our contractual requirements of 90 Audits per quarter. In addition, the QA/BA and Workforce Development Team also undertook Focussed Brief Audits to ensure the initiatives and work undertaken during lockdown was safe and in line with government guidelines to promote wellbeing and opportunities for children and young people. From the Summer of 2020, a new pattern of auditing was established, whereby managers would undertake six audits per year on alternative months.

#### *Audit Activity and Overall Trajectory*

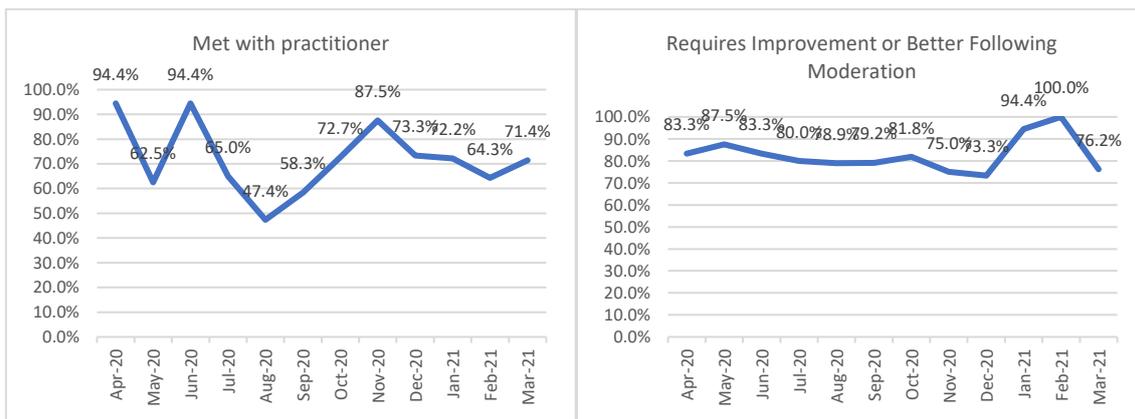
Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, we undertook:

- 218 learning audits (of which 195 were moderated) across the child's journey.
- 134 thematic audits
- 176 Focussed brief audits
- 61 significant incident dip samples (pre-birth and under 1's)
- 17 individual learning audits
- 18 multi-agency audits

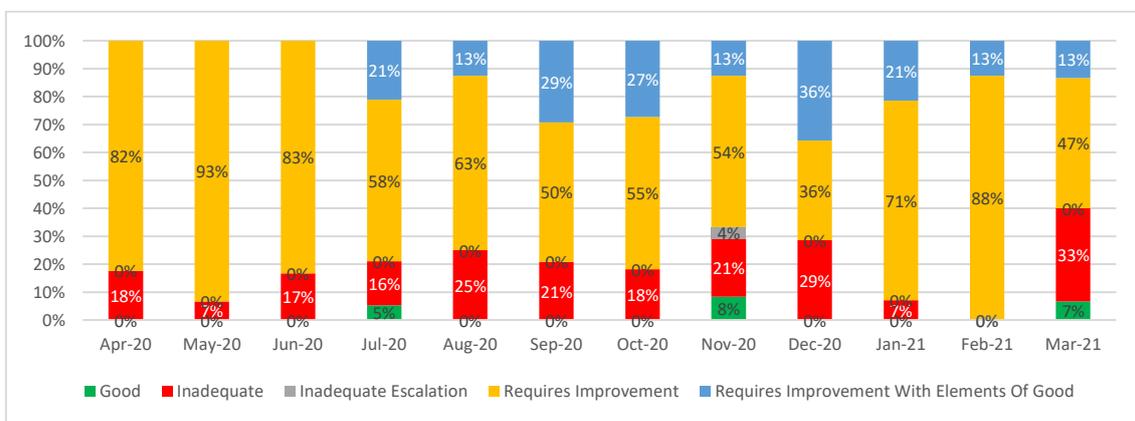
A total of 624 audits within the year, which represents a spread of approximately 15% across our children. Through all of our Quality Assurance activity across the year, our work has been consistently Requires Improvement or better, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic:

This year, the focus of our audits have moved from on compliance and solely measuring impact on children to a genuine opportunity for learning and improving. As such, we have promoted the importance of discussions with the most relevant practitioner or manager during the audit process and afterwards, our progress has been good.

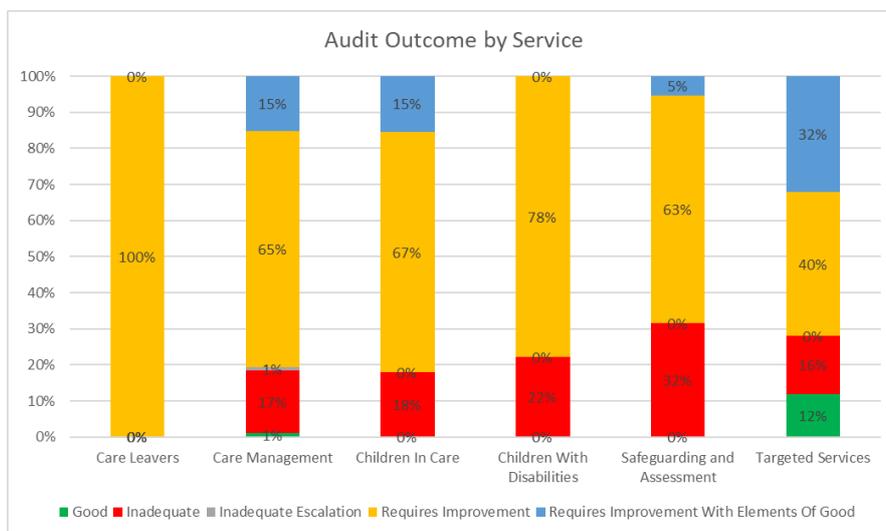
Our random learning case file audits are important as we expect all social work qualified and front-line managers to undertake six audits per year. This helps them to understand what good looks like and encourage them to have learning discussions, which they will take into their own practice, we call this ‘a window back into practice’.



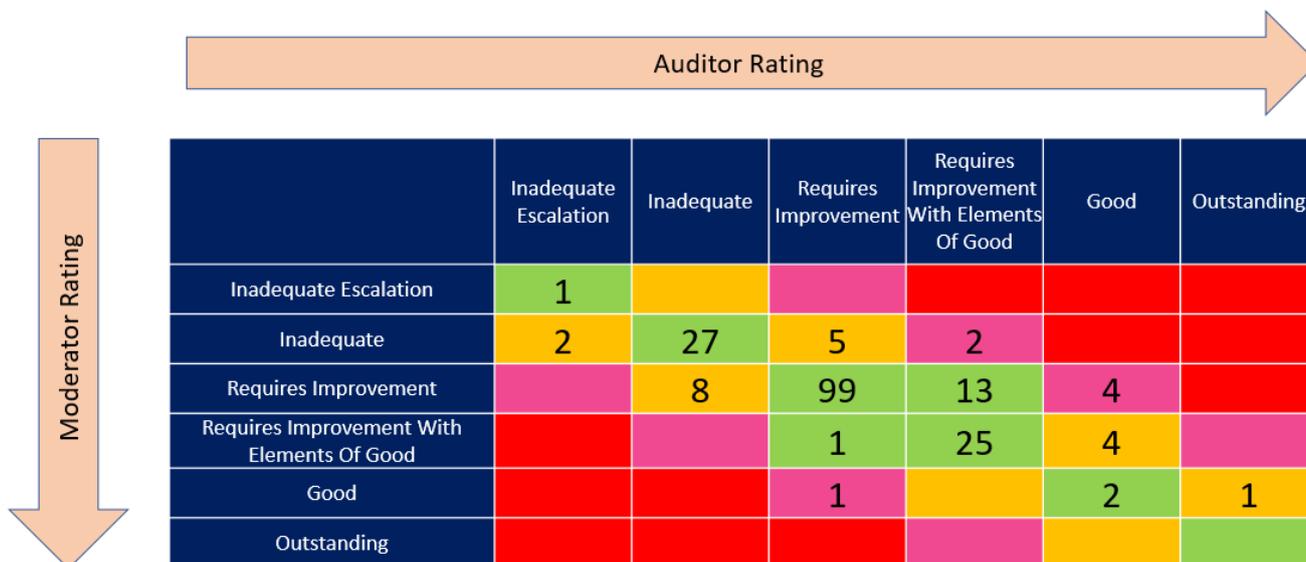
It is worth noting that this year we introduced the category of ‘Requires Improvement with Good features’ so we can better judge our progress. Below is the month by month distribution of audit outcomes, where it is clear there is an increasing amount of Good practice, but there still remains some inadequate practice:



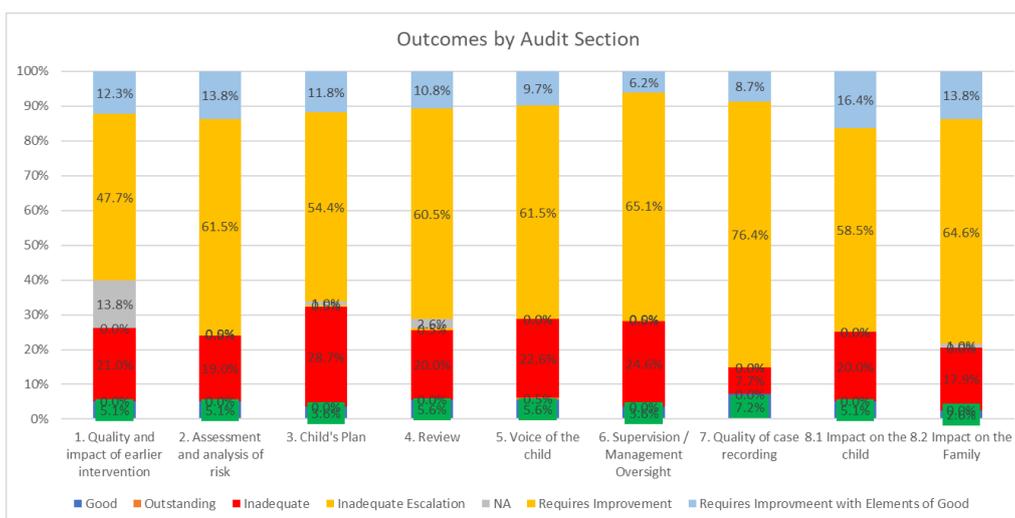
Looking at this on a service by service perspective, it can be seen that Targeted Services has the biggest proportion of good work, and Safeguarding and Assessment Service has the most inadequate work. It is worth noting that Children with Disabilities and Care Leavers services have had fewer audits, which has meant the audit data is less likely to be completely representative of the work undertaken.



Where audits are submitted on time, all have been moderated, and the below chart shows the difference between auditor judgement and moderator judgement. The vast majority of audit judgements are broadly agreed and where there is disagreement, the moderator tends to moderate 'down' – demonstrating very small pockets of individual optimism. Where this is the case moderators hold reflective conversations with auditors.

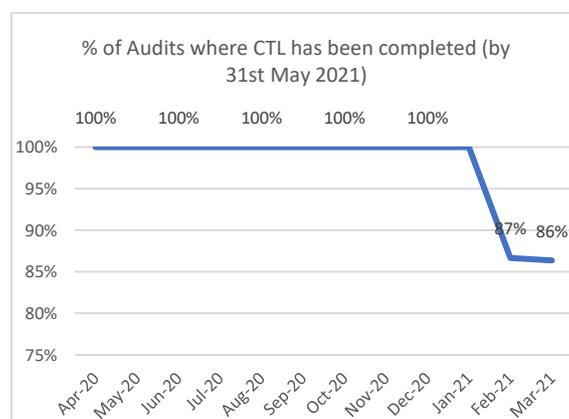


Our learning case file audits are completed with judgements in nine categories, which are set out here:



The graph shows a consistent element of good work in each category, particularly around the quality of assessments and perceived impact for the child. However, between 20-25% of our work remains rated as inadequate, with higher prevalence within children's planning and management oversight, this continues to inform our improvement plans and activity.

Team Managers are required to 'close the loop' wherever there are actions identified within an audit. The senior QA Auditor monitors this and ensures that the actions and findings find their way into case file supervisions.



### *Learning from Compliments and Complaints*

Over the course of the year we have had x compliments from a range of sources including Children/Young People, Court, CAMHS, Foster Carers, School, Parents, Health, Local Authority, and family members. It is important that we learn from positive feedback and share where we are getting things right.

The themes of our compliments are:

- Communication, including treating young people with respect
- Delivering objectives
- Quality of Practice, including Relationship Based Practice with our partner agencies, foster carers, families and young people.
- Quality of Service
- Support
- professional development
- teamwork

In addition to this a recurring theme made by our partners has been the recognition to the improvements in the way we are now working, in comparison to the past.

### *Complaints*

During 2020/21 we received 214 complaints, of which 204 have been completed / resolved. The complaints received over the course of the year cover the following themes:

- Access to services (1)
- Accuracy of Assessment/Reports (10)
- Actions / Conduct of Worker (70)
- Change in Social Worker (1)
- Contact Arrangements (14)
- Decision Making (26)
- Delays in receiving services (6)
- Delay in Providing Documentation (5)
- Financial Assistance (15)
- Inappropriate Disclosure of Information (6)
- Issue with carer (1)
- Lack of support (16)
- Not feeling listened to (6)
- Placement Change (7)
- Poor Communication (17)
- Quality of Service (9)
- Social Work Process (3)
- Support with Social Media (1)

This year, representatives from the complaints and QA services have ore regularly attended team and service meetings to share and discuss the themes and learning from complaints. We also held a series of learning events, targeted at managers and practitioners, with the focus on the themes of complaints, learning and service improvement activity. Learning from complains contributed to our core training offer and the targeted practice learning work.

Key learning from complaints include:

1. A need to ensure that children, young people and families understand why we become involved in their lives.

2. Before meetings take place with families and professionals, that important information is shared with parents before the meeting and that information is fully explained to them to ensure they understand what is being discussed.
3. To ensure that applications for citizenships and passports are progressed in a timely way.
4. For expectations to be made clear to parents.

### *Children and Young People's Participation*

The Participation Team has continued to engage with children and young people during the pandemic. Face to face forums have had to be put on hold, but the team have found creative ways to engage. Virtual meetings were established immediately, and despite the limitations of the software available (young people don't like to use Skype) alternative tools were employed to stay connected. The use of Zoom and WhatsApp enabled the Trust to keep in touch using communication platforms that young people were comfortable with. In between the national lockdown and the localised Sandwell restrictions, officers were twice able to meet with some of our care leavers, socially distanced in a local park.

Partner organisations have continued to support the Trust and its young people. Colleagues from Kooth, the HOME Programme, Brook Sexual Health, REES Foundation as well as several internal services have engaged virtually throughout the pandemic. Officers have also hosted regular quizzes which have proved popular. Virtual meetings have been noted and the discussions shared with the wider 'Voice of Sandwell' and 'Care Leaver's Forum' groups, which have well established WhatsApp groups.

Ensuring their voice is heard, children and young people have maintained their involvement in activities that support the Trust, including recruitment (Social Worker, Managers, Targeted Support Workers, Service Managers and Independent Reviewing Officers) and inductions for new social workers, frontline students and ASYE social workers.

From the beginning of lockdown in March until the end of July 2020, the Trust worked closely with Sandwell Council to provide daily food parcels for children, families and care leavers (including their own children). The Trust helped to support over 400 children and young people via the local food hub, ensuring that Sandwell's most vulnerable children and families were supported during the most difficult period of lockdown.

In addition to supporting our most vulnerable with food parcels, the Trust has also been involved in the distribution of DfE laptops. Both engagements afforded the Trust the opportunity to catch up with its children and young people. When it has not been possible for the Participation Team to see young people in person, then the team have made welfare calls and checked in.

Unaccompanied minors have been contacted to seek their views on a national transfer. This is paving the way for a local forum of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) which will complement the Trust's existing groups.

Our young people have helped develop and chair two Corporate Parenting Board meetings, as well as providing feedback to the Trust's Board on the issues that are important to them.

The Participation Team have been working on several initiatives that will enhance engagement. The Voice of the Child group has reconvened with a specific focus on the How Can I Help You Participation Strategy. Mind of My Own training has been regularly delivered, with the engagement leads for Mind of My Own hosting sessions for our IROs and Managers. Officers have contributed to a 'flagship' submission to the National Youth Agencies 'Hear by Right' accreditation scheme. The Trust has engaged with a range of external and national partners. For example, a presentation to the National Care Leaver's Benchmarking Forum and working with the West Midlands Participation Leads Group, supporting the development of a regional participation strategy and young people's forum.

All complaints, whether formal or informal are monitored by the Participation Team, who contact each child or young person to make sure that they have the support they need. Officers work closely with the Customer Experience Team to refine the organisations processes. The Participation Team are co-leading on the Trust's first 'feedback fortnight' which seeks to gather the views of as many children and young people as possible.

By November 2020, work had begun to engage unaccompanied minors (UASC) and Children with Disabilities with the participation team supporting the relevant service areas, ensuring that the 'four I's' of the participation strategy are considered. Work with the care leavers forum and Voice of Sandwell group continued virtually, with many of our young people participating virtually in activities related to the Trust.

National Care Leaver's Week was celebrated with a full programme of activities – interview techniques, wellbeing, a 'raising aspirations' panel and a 'lockdown heroes' celebration event.

The participation team supported the development of a regional participation strategy, again championing the use of the 4 'I's of Inform, Invest, Involve, Influence.

Autumn drew focus on Mind of My Own, with the participation team working with several groups including IROs, Team Managers and COG staff. This engagement, along with the promotion of Mind of My Own, saw an increase in the number of statements received from across the service.

Care Leavers participated in an equality and diversity seminar with the Trust's Board, where they shared powerful stories of their own experiences and those around them.

A newsletter was developed for our Care Leavers, and the team are working with the Leaving Care and Trust Comms teams to ensure that each care leaver receives a present at Christmas.

The Voice of the Child Board was reinvigorated towards the end of the 2020, with a focus on the four I's of the participation strategy. The Participation Manager presented an overview of activities undertaken to the Trust's Executive Management Team and will be attending the Trust Board to do the same.

In January 2021, the Participation Team entered a submission for the National Youth Agency 'Hear by Right' accreditation scheme.

#### *Significant and serious incidents:*

During the initial lockdown, there was a national rise in the in number of significant incidents to children, in particular very young children. During the COVID-19 lockdown period we have had 6 such significant incidents, which is a disproportionate number. The Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership determined that 5 of the 6 met the criteria for Childrens Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR).

We determined early on that 4 out of 6 significant incidents were of particular concern that warranted early quality assurance, self-assessment and learning. This was with the aim of assuring ourselves that there were not systemic issues within our service, and to ensure that we identify and respond to early learning from the incidents. We are confident that there are no serious or widespread systemic issues, but there were areas for learning, which has fed into our overall quality assurance conversations and improvement plans.

Learning that resulted from this work:

- Timely pre-birth assessment as early into pregnancies as possible
- Early identification of connected care and when a placement is unregulated
- Ensuring that Strategy Discussions/Meetings identify and respond to safeguarding need in babies and toddlers
- Ensuring that historic information impacts on the analysis and decision making within assessments
- Robust management oversight in relation to Children in Care who are high risk of offending

- Ensuring robust interventions and decision making where we step down to Targeted Services and parents refuse to engage

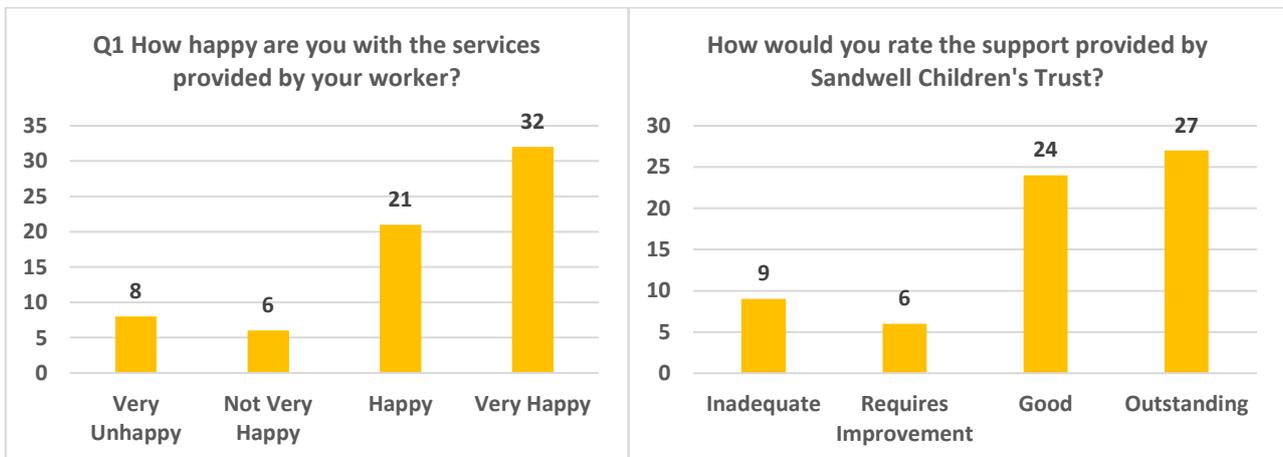
Actions that resulted from this work:

- A programme of training and reflective work provided to specific workers and offered through the BA practice learning team
- Unregulated Placement Event for all Managers/IROs/Conference Chairs
- Learning the Lessons from significant incidents event for all staff
- 7-minute briefing note
- Learning session for IROs/Conference Chairs to ensure that the IRO/CC role for Pre-birth and connected carer assessments is robust and challenging, and actively prevents drift and delay for children.
- A new Birth Plan Form for unborn babies, the pre-birth protocol updated, and regional procedures disseminated
- Improvements have been made to the Children in Care Updating Assessment by making the assessment more child friendly

Audits have consistently identified improvements in quality of overall work in the Trust. Good practice is noted across all areas, with approximately 80% or more audits being rated as RI and above. Our Practice Framework and Model supports us to work in a relationship based, strength based and Trauma informed manner. QA/BA and operational service have worked together to learn from past experiences, understand ongoing challenges, and embrace new ideas and improvements. Under the new arrangements of the CSRs multi-agency focus is also on early learning and progression of identified actions to impact practice directly.

*Feedback from Children and ‘Feedback fortnight’*

In the Trust, we understand that feedback from our children, young people, family and carers, and partners allows us to measure how well we are doing. We secure regular feedback via our customer relations service, however, in quarter 3 we decided to secure feedback using an event we called ‘Feedback Fortnight’. This was held between 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020, when we reached out to all children, young people, families, carers and professionals using snap surveys to gather feedback. We used a variety of mechanisms like text messages, social media pages, and our internet page to engage our stakeholders. A total of 169 surveys were completed by stakeholders during the fortnight, which was analysed, and learning has been widely shared across the Trust, and also published on our social media and internet pages. The feedback that was received has been extremely positive, and both children and families, and professionals have confirmed that our services are child centred and are supporting children and families in Sandwell effectively. The following figures show some of the responses that we received:





In total, Children and families completed 67 surveys of which 39 surveys expressed their wishes on how to improve the quality of service delivered by the Trust. Of the 39 comments, 20 children and young people stated that they would change nothing about the services. They were largely satisfied with the quality and timeliness of our service delivery, with special mention for the great services delivered by our COGs. COGs appear to be delivering high quality, person centred services using a relationship-based approach. Some quotes are:

*“Due to how COVID-19 as affected how all organisations are run I think everyone has done a really good job on making it work so well considering the challenges due to the current pandemic.”*

*“I have no concerns so far. My daughter's worker has been professionally excellent and caring towards all of the family.”*

We have also analysed the areas of improvements during the qualitative analysis of feedback we received. The main areas of improvements that were suggested are:

- Building stronger partnerships and more face to face meetings
- Reducing staff turnover, and better communication when staff is changed
- More activities for children and young people in community, and better support for homeless young people and families

#### *QPP and Multi agency audits*

The QA service continues to represent SCT in our partnership meetings with the Sandwell Childrens Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP), and in particular with the i.e. Quality and Performance (QPP) Sub-Group of the Partnership. We have worked collaboratively together to develop the multi-agency performance scorecard for the QPP, and actively participated in the new form of multi-agency auditing process. Findings from QPP have also been included in the QA reports for dissemination, wider learning and improvements. The multi-agency audits have provided us greater insight into the effectiveness of our partnership working such as core groups, The multi-agency audits have again provided necessary evidence to demonstrate that there are no systemic issues in the way the Trust delivers its services to children and families, and that this is also in line with the quality of service provided to children and families by our partner agencies.

#### *What we know about practice*

During the 6 months (April-Sept'20) the QA Service supported the Trusts understanding of the quality of practice during the covid pandemic. The service developed and implemented a Focussed Brief Audit (FBA) specifically to be able to meet this need. the COVID focussed QA work has assured the Trust that there has been a robust approach taken to staff safety and wellbeing, and that children were safe during lockdown. These FBAs have provided us with crucial information around risk assessment being kept up to date, PVRAs being undertaken

before each visit, ensuring children receive the best possible support via face to face (or virtual) visits and direct work, and Education risk assessments being completed in a timely manner. This has helped shape our efforts to keep our staff and children safe, and make improvements were needed.

The Significant Incident QA work has ensured that the service has been assured that there are not systemic issues within the service in relation to practice, but where there was key learning that the Trust has taken an 'early learning approach' to practice and made changes to support improved practice.

The auditing programme continues to offer a robust, good quality 'window back into practice' for auditors and the service alike. Practitioners are reporting that they like the 1:1 reflective session about the audits, and that they feel very proud when their practice is identified as having 'good features'. Seeking feedback from children and families at the end of audits helps to triangulate the quality of both the intervention with the child and their family as well as the quality of the auditing. This helps and supports a strengths-based inclusive approach being taken to quality assurance and learning from good practice.

There is evidence that there is growing confidence in the auditing process in the Trust and that the practice is rated accurately, which gives assurance both internally to the Trust as well as externally – Ofsted also agree with the robustness of the QA process. The lifting up and improving rate of practice means that children are receiving a better service from the Trust.

The multi-agency audits have provided us greater insight into the effectiveness of our partnership working such as core groups, The multi-agency audits have again provided necessary evidence to demonstrate that there are no systemic issues in the way the Trust delivers its services to children and families, and that this is also in line with the quality of service provided to children and families by our partner agencies.

#### *Impact of Quality Assurance on Practice*

- Improvement in quality of audits and auditors - via training and moderations, embedding an understanding of what good looks like, which managers take into their own practice
- Relentless focus on including practitioners whilst auditing for increased learning impact
- Embedding Practice Framework and Model using a practical approach as a window back into practice
- Increased focus on 'Impact and intervention' rather than process
- Strong Leadership - audits inform practice and service improvement plans and SEFs
- Feedback from children and families evidence real impact on outcomes

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

The table below outlines the outcome of Ofsted's Visits and Inspections in 2020/21:

xxx – Outcome of Ofsted Inspection and Monitoring Visits

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
<b>Overall Assurance Visit</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2021	No judgement for assurance visits <a href="https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50162853">https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50162853</a>
<b>Fostering Assurance Visit</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> October 2020	No judgement for assurance visits <a href="https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50158180">https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50158180</a>

### *Children's Social Care*

Ofsted inspectors visited us on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021 for their assurance visit. Due to the two-week lead time for this visit, this visit felt like a full inspection for most. Feedback from inspectors was as expected, we have areas of strength and areas for continued improvement (all of which we already knew):

#### Positive feedback

- Children are safe
- Good response to the pandemic – children and staff well supported
- Good partnership links
- Evidence of good work and practice in each service
- Good quality audits and moderation with a positive audit framework
- Good work from education services and schools
- Leadership – we know ourselves well

#### Improvements to be made

- Child Protection Planning and Intervention
- Pre-proceedings and court work
- Permanence and Matching for children
- Some managers and IROs could identify issues sooner and could be more successful in resolving them
- Our children's emotional wellbeing and CAMHS offer (including for care leavers)

### *Fostering service (IFA)*

We received inspectors on a 'no-notice' basis on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020 to seek assurance about our fostering services throughout the pandemic. We expected this and had factored the preparation for this into our weekly Ofsted Preparation meetings with the fostering service. The visit was not without its difficulties, particularly with staff getting used to demonstrating our good work virtually to inspectors. Feedback was that inspectors did not identify any widespread or serious concerns in relation to the care and protection of children and was largely positive. However, there were two regulatory requirements set out in the letter, which were:

- *The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))*

- *Within 16 weeks of the date on which the old agency ceases carrying out the functions of a fostering agency, the fostering service provider in relation to a new fostering service (“the new fostering service provider”) must, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, carry out an assessment of any foster parent for whom it has assumed responsibility by virtue of regulation 33(2) or (3) (a “transferred foster parent”) and decide whether to approve them as a foster parent, in accordance with the provisions of regulations 26 and 27, with the modification that regulation 27(1) does not apply. (Regulation 34(1))*

*In particular, this relates to completing the process for all foster carers who transferred from the local authority when the agency was set up.*

The latter of these requirements had a deadline for 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. We successfully reviewed each of the remaining foster carers who this regulation applied to by the end of the financial year, and informed Ofsted.

A full training package for foster carers has been available since the summer of 2019, but our promotion and drive for foster carers to attend was felt to have room for improvement. Since the assurance visit, we have slightly improved in this area, with an increase of 6% of all foster carers completing their Training, Support and Development portfolio within the previous three years. Core training also increased by an average of 10%.

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

### Financial Context

The finances provided to the Trust consists of funding from SMBC (the Contract Sum) and contributions from third parties. The basic contract sum was £65,328,000 and the 'third party' income was £7,149,794, which consisted of

- CCG health contribution
- Education funding for placements
- DfE improvement grant
- Troubled Families claims

In addition to this we drew upon a high cost placement reserve from SMBC of £500,000, and COVID-19 funding of £1,920,398. This makes a total income of £75,398,192.

We also had an opening deficit of £5,814,000. The deficit for 2020/21 is subject to audit but provisionally stands at £1,861,144, making the cumulative deficit £7,675,144.

### Medium Term Financial Plan

The Medium Term Financial Plan is a rolling three-year strategy to manage our finances whilst addressing our deficit. We can review this on an annual basis in line with the review of our business plans.

The key aspects of the Medium Term Financial Plan are:

- Introducing more efficient ways of working
- Ensuring that we manage the demand of our work as efficiently as possible
- Ensuring we get best value for money for the services in which we commission
- Ensuring we take advantage of invest-to-save initiatives
- Delivery of savings aligned to our improvement journey

The cost-saving work outlined within this plan can be broken down to specific areas, such as the cost of children's placements, reducing the number of placements we need to utilise, ensuring that our service by service demand aligns with our establishment, and making sure the work we do is necessary – reducing drift and delay. The MTFP aims in the next three years to address our cumulative deficit and is largely due to staffing costs (agency premium), and high demand for services to be provided for Children in Care.

For the year 2020/21 we aimed to achieve a draft deficit position of £1,613,469. This would be achieved through the delivery of cost savings totalling £2,600,000 compared with the previous year.

### Year-end position

Income totalling £75,398,192 was received for 2020/21, and expenditure was £77,259,336, meaning the Trust has incurred a £1,861,144 provisional deficit, which was £247,675 above the aims outlined within the Medium Term Financial Plan. This was due to continued demand pressures on high cost placements and continued reliance of agency staffing in some areas.

This deficit is expected to be mitigated throughout the course of the next three years due to the development of a well governed cost savings plan tackling demand, supplier management and staffing permanence.

The below table highlights the provisional full-year outturn for - 2020/21.

<b>Provisional full-year outturn</b>	<b>2021</b>
	<b>£</b>
<b>Income</b>	75,398,192
Expenditure	(77,259,336)
<b>Operating deficit</b>	<b>(1,861,144)</b>
<b>Deficit before taxation</b>	<b>(1,861,144)</b>
Tax on deficit	Nil
<b>Deficit (Loss) for the Financial year</b>	<b>(1,861,144)</b>

This year, some of the key points are:

- We received £2.1m of DFE Improvement Grant funding to fund some of our improvement initiatives.
- We drew upon the high cost placement reserve of £500k paid by SMBC.
- We received emergency COVID funding from SMBC of £1.92m to offset increased costs caused by COVID-19. Examples of this (non-exhaustive) are: Cost incurred not being able to step children down from their placements; increased Independent Living Allowance for Care Leavers (in line with increases to Universal Credit) and additional resources to cover staff who are sick, shielding or self-isolating as a result of covid-19.
- Other third-party income received was £1.0m less than budgeted in the MTFP.
- Key cost pressures remain within staffing (requirement for agency staff to fill front-line roles) and placements (particularly external residential provision).

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

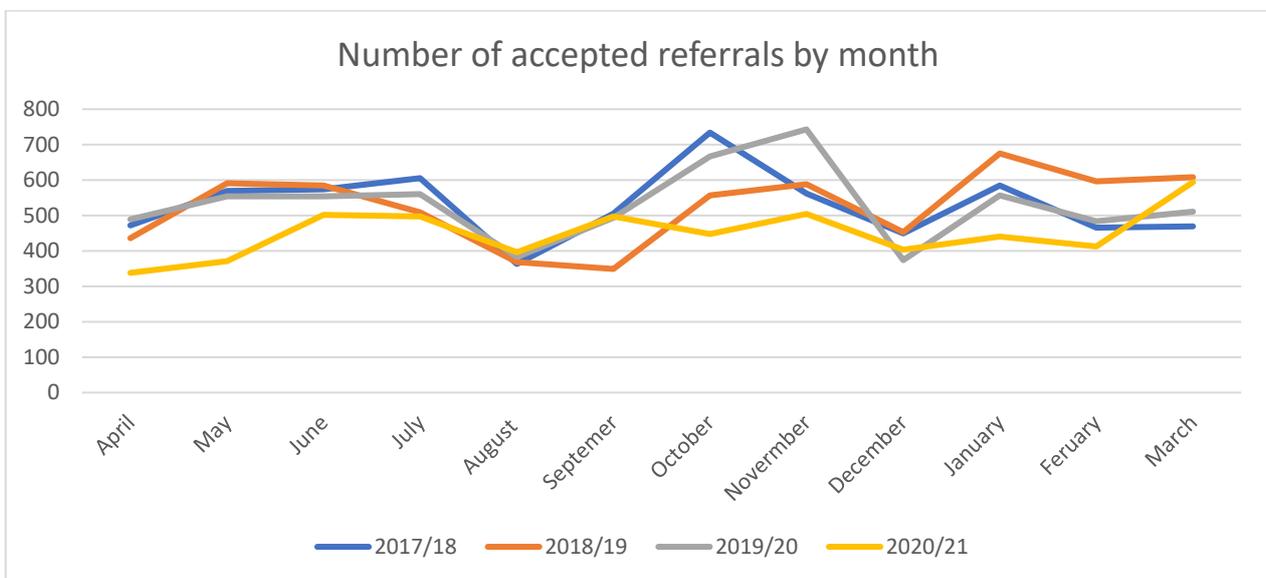
**Our contacts / referrals**

The more contacts we receive from our partners, the public or directly from families, the more resource we need to screen to determine whether they meet our threshold for intervention. Whilst we do not want to dissuade anyone from contacting us, particularly members of the public and families, we do need to strike the right balance with partners as to what constitutes appropriate referrals. As such, we maintain close strategic and operational relationships with partners to ensure a shared understanding of the threshold for access to our services. We received 27,938 contacts during the year, of which 36% were from Police, 16% from Health and 10.7% from Education. We saw a drop in referrals from education services during the pandemic, which we believe is largely due to schools being closed. However, we received more contacts overall than last year.

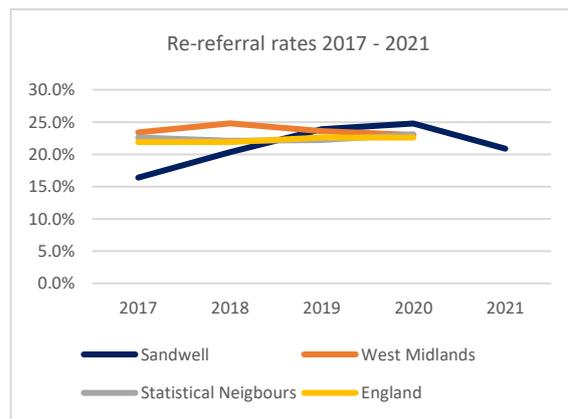
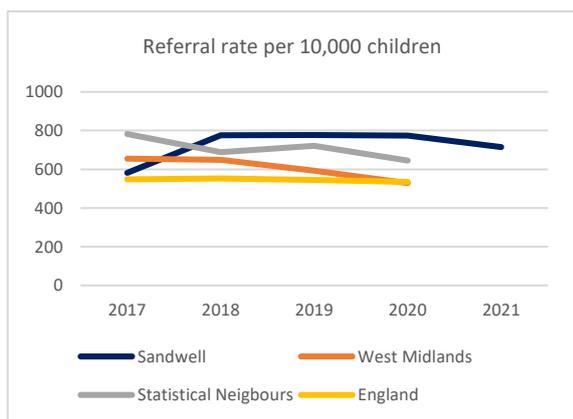
**Total Contacts for 2020/21 by source**

Contact Source Categories	Total	%
Health	4468	16.0%
LA	2416	8.6%
Police	10045	36.0%
Education	2988	10.7%
Other	3034	10.9%
Prison and Probation	857	3.1%
Self / Relative / Friend	1944	7.0%
Voluntary Organisation	1105	4.0%
CAFCASS, Central Government and Legal	838	3.0%
Anonymous	243	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27938</b>	

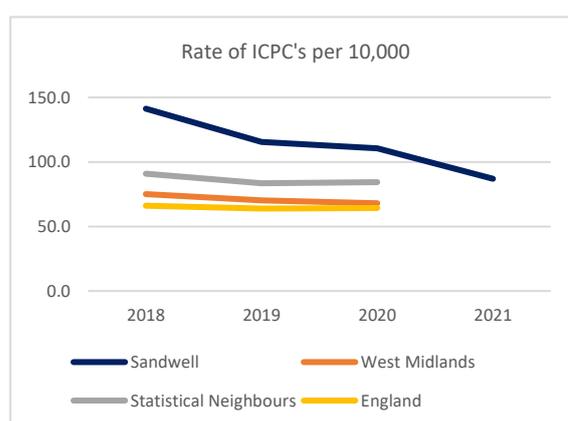
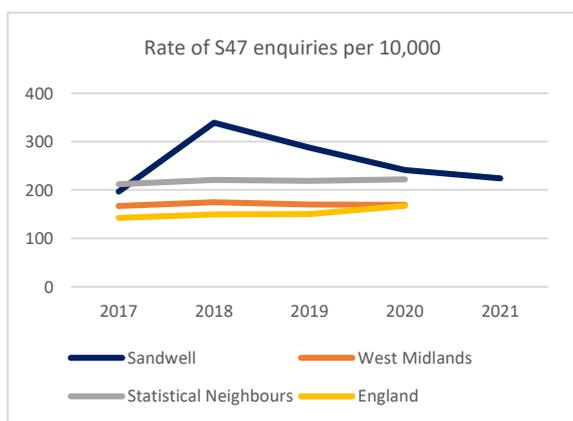
The number of referrals we accept serves as an indicator for how many children and families we are likely to work with over the longer term. We accepted a total of 5,402 referrals across the year, which was lower than the previous three years (6,364), but this still represents more referrals per 10,000 children than our comparators. This year 19.3% of contacts led to a referral, which is a reduction of five percentage points.



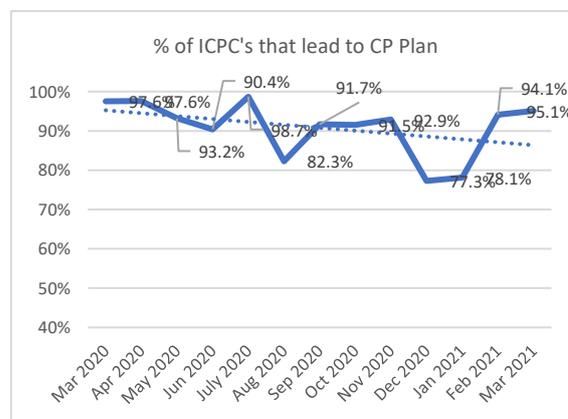
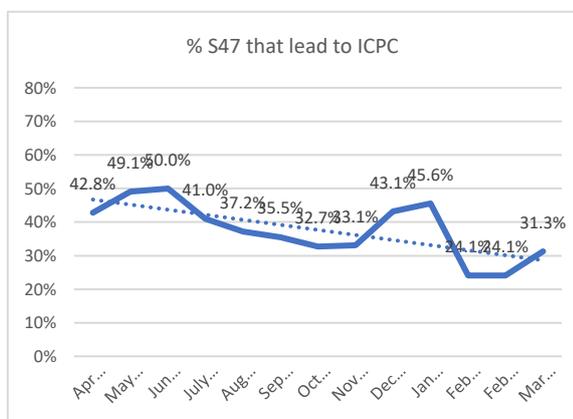
We have seen a decrease in re-referrals (where we were involved with the family less than 12 months prior), in 2018/19 the re-referral rate was 23.9% , last financial year the rate was 25%, but this year our rate is 20.9%. This is now 2.8% higher than our statistical neighbour comparators for 2018/19.



The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has further reduced this year to 224, which brings us more in line with our Statistical Neighbour average rate of 222. In addition, the rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has reduced to 87 this year (from 110.70 in the previous year), bringing us closer to our Statistical Neighbour average rate of 84.4. This shows we are more confident and purposeful when we are faced with deciding whether to proceed with S47 enquiries and holding Child Protection Conferences



The conversion rate of S47 enquiries leading to Child Protection Conferences is lower this year, and a reducing trajectory can be seen. However, where we choose to hold an Initial Child Protection Conference, this tends to lead to a Child Protection Plan.



It is clear there is still work to do to reduce demand at our front door, thus our

**Our children in Sandwell Children’s Trust**

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, we had 856 children with a Child in Need Plan, 485 children with a Child Protection Plan and 888 Children in Care. We have more children in care on average than our statistical neighbours:

**Table X – Comparison with Statistical Neighbours (CP / CIC)**

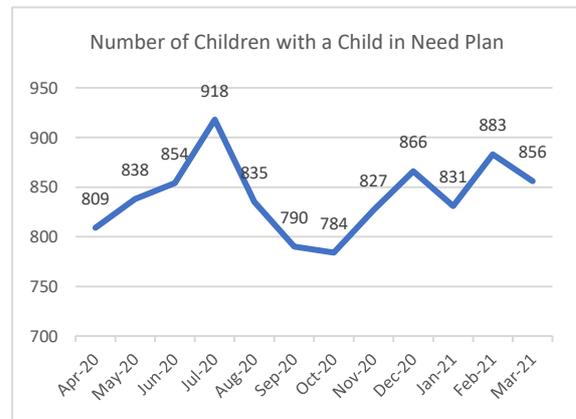
	Sandwell (31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021)	Statistical Neighbour Average 2019/20	England Average 2019/20
Assessments undertaken	755 per 10,000	672.6 per 10,000	553 per 10,000
Children with a Child Protection Plan	58.8 per 10,000	54.5x per 10,000	42.8 per 10,000
Children in Care	107.6 per 10,000	94.3 per 10,000	67 per 10,000
Children with a Child in Need Plan	103.8 per 10,000	No comparators	

This continues to highlight our challenge in ensuring improvement whilst working with significantly more children and families than our neighbours, within a fragile marketplace for social workers within the region and nationally.

*Children in Need*

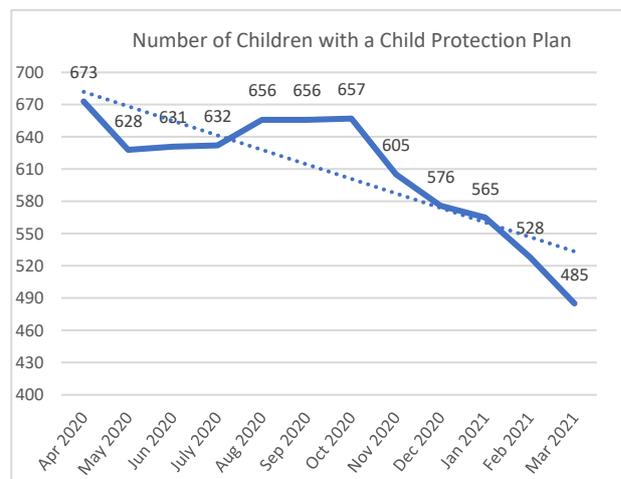
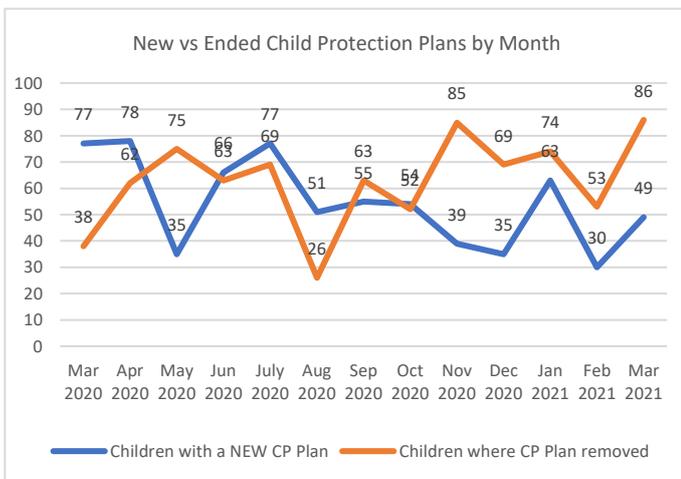
The graph below shows that we began the year with 1066 children in need, with a downward trend across the year, ending with 807. Interventions with families through a Child in Need Plan are intensive, purposeful and kept under constant review as it is very easy for plans to drift.

The majority of these children are held within the Care Management service, although some older children are provided services through the Children in Care service under a Child in Need Plan.



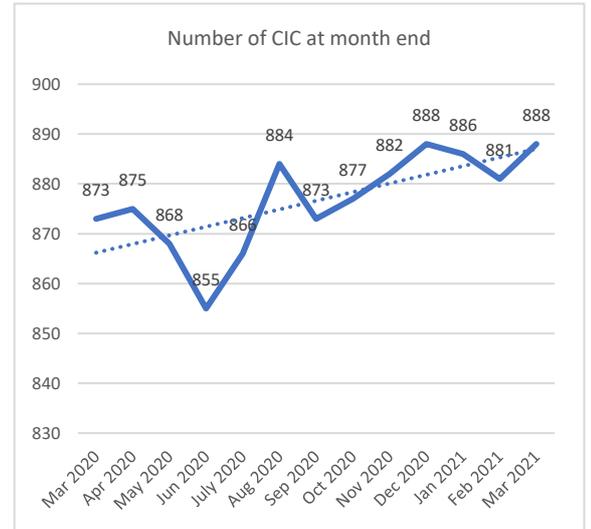
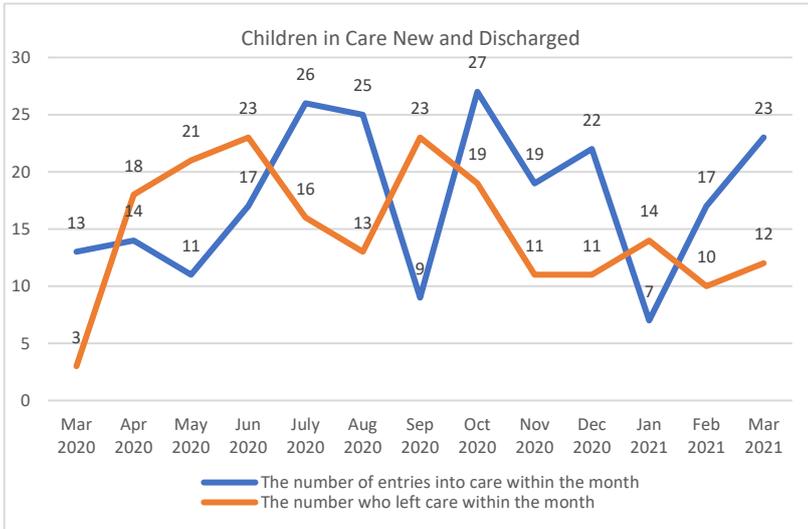
*Children with a Child Protection Plan*

We began the year with 673 children who were subject of a Child Protection Plan, and across the course of the year this decreased to 485, with the most significant decrease in Quarters 3 and 4.



## Children in Care

We began the year with 873 children in care and saw a gradual increase to 888, with a variable level of children coming into care but a more consistently low number of children leaving care across the year.



## Demand for -Staff

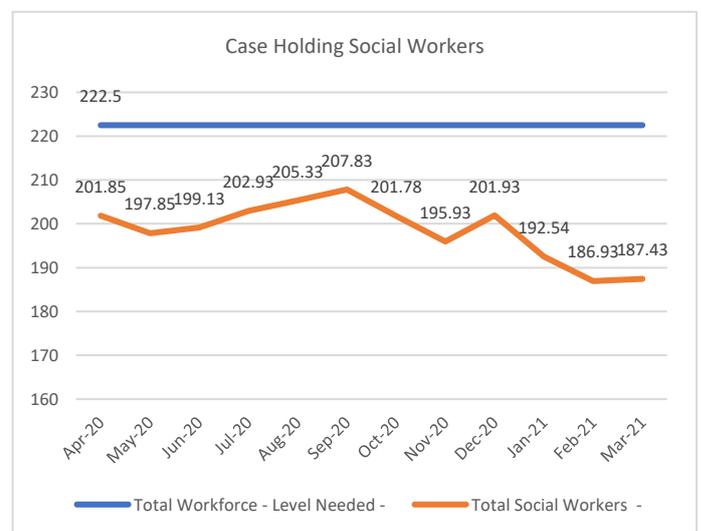
It is important to acknowledge that Sandwell Children’s Trust employs nearly 600 staff, of which around half are social workers. If not for the range of specialist and support staff within the Trust, social workers would not have the foundation and infrastructure to work effectively with children and their families. Nevertheless, our focus continues to be 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, we continue to have a very simple calculation for this, which is:

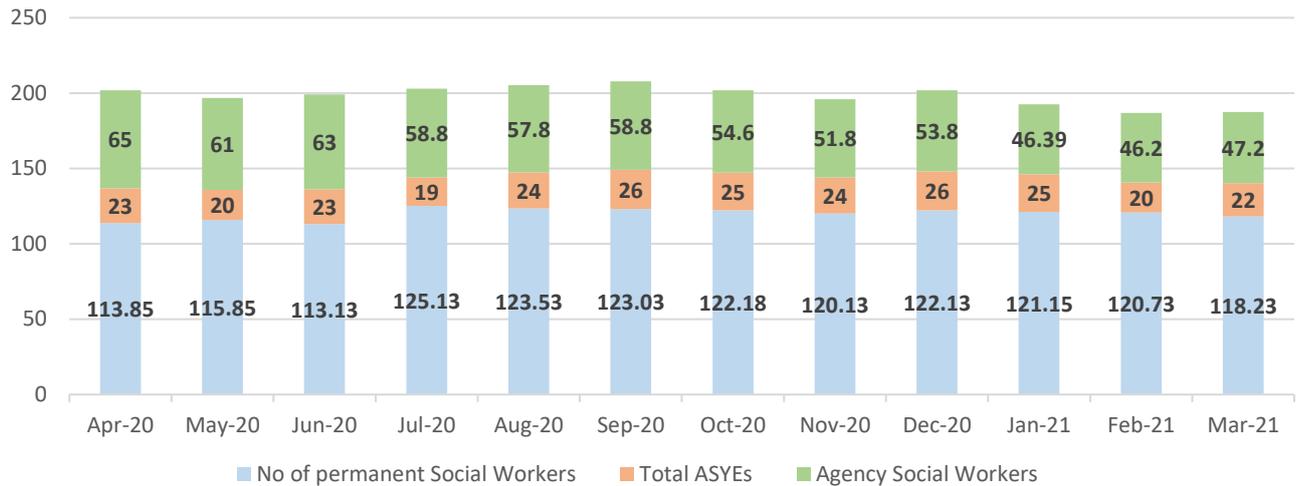
1. For social workers working with Children in Need and those with a Child Protection Plan (within the care management service), an average of 18 children.
2. For social workers working with long term Children in Care (within the Children in Care Service), an average of 15 children.
3. For Social Workers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

### Case-holding Social Workers

We have an agreed establishment of 222.5 Full Time Equivalent social workers, based upon our current demand, and considerations within the Medium Term Financial Plan. This is made up of permanent social workers, agency social workers and those within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE’s).

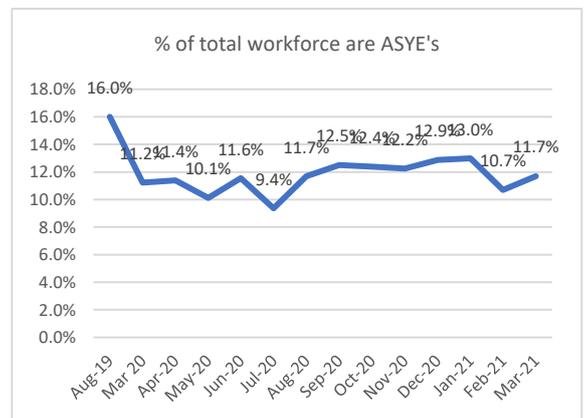


### Staffing Levels (Permanent SWs, ASYE and Agency)



### 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.

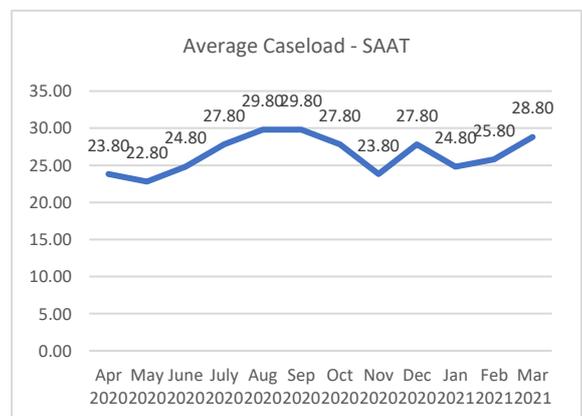


Clearly, the more newly qualified social workers we have, the more pressure there is on our experienced workforce, not only in relation the support they need to provide, but also the proportion of cases allocated to them.

The number of ASYE cases has remained consistent at around 23 over the course of the year but has coincided with number of total social workers in the organisation reducing from 201.85 to 187.43.

### Safeguarding and Assessment Service (Assessments of Children and Families)

The Safeguarding and Assessment Team are responsible for undertaking assessments that arise from new referrals. This work is short-term and should not exceed 45 working days, aiming to meet the intervention needs of the family within the 45-day timescale where possible. In the event that further work is required, SAAT may identify longer term needs and transfer the families to Care Management, or where necessary, to Children in Care; or alternatively may step down families to Targeted Early Help in instances where further support work is required.



### Average Caseload SAAT

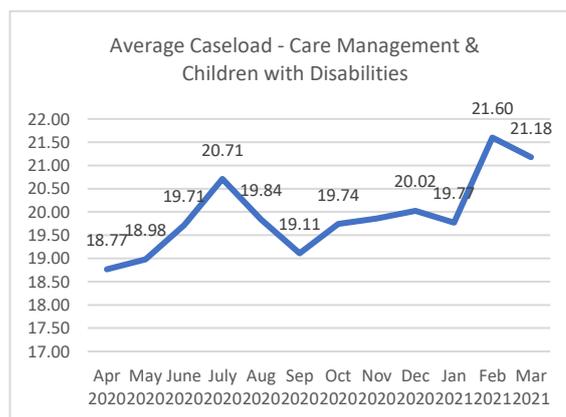
	Apr 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021
Number Cases SAAT	524	563	716	744	780	730	761	767	762	745	721	875
Total Caseholders SAAT FTE	23.80	22.80	24.80	27.80	29.80	29.80	27.80	23.80	27.80	24.80	25.80	28.80
Average Caseload SAAT	22.02	24.69	28.87	26.76	26.17	24.50	27.37	32.23	27.41	30.04	27.95	30.38

The average number of cases within the SAAT service has increased across the year from 23.8 to 28.8 with a particular spike in the summer of 2020.

### 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. We began the year with an average caseload of 18.77 children, saw peaks in July 2020 and February 2021, and finished the year with a higher average caseload of 21.18.

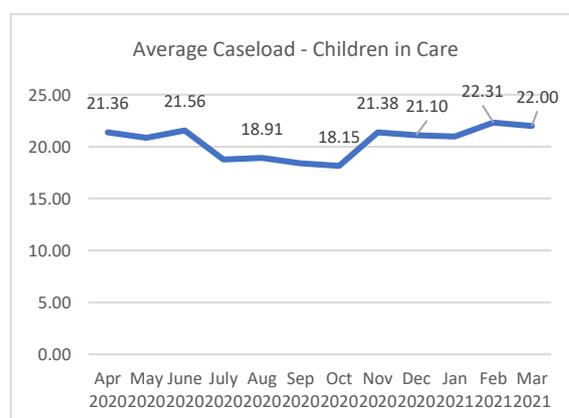


### Average Caseload Care Management and Children with Disabilities Service

	Apr 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021
Number Cases CM/CWD	1763	1745	1765	1850	1800	1772	1757	1770	1785	1735	1731	1655
Total Case holders CM/CWD FTE	93.95	91.95	89.54	89.34	90.74	92.74	88.99	89.14	89.14	87.75	80.14	78.14
Average Caseload CM/CWD	18.77	18.98	19.71	20.71	19.84	19.11	19.74	19.86	20.02	19.77	21.60	21.18

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.



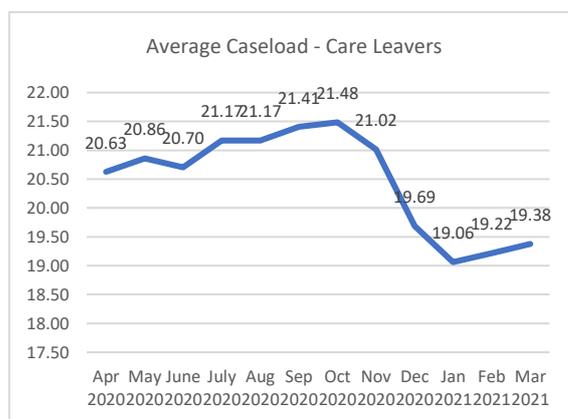
We began the year with approximately 21.36 children per social worker, which decreased to 18.15 in the autumn of 2020, and the increased across the remainder of the year to 22 children per social worker, which is significantly above our aspirational target of 15.

**Average Caseload Children in Care Service**

	Apr 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021
<b>Number Cases (Children in Care)</b>	630	636	636	628	624	625	617	620	633	629	647	649
<b>Total Case holders (Children in Care) FTE</b>	29.50	30.50	29.50	33.50	33.00	34.00	34.00	29.00	30.00	30.00	29.00	29.50
<b>Average Caseload (Children in Care)</b>	21.36	20.85	21.56	18.75	18.91	18.38	18.15	21.38	21.10	20.97	22.31	22.00

**Care Leavers**

Our care leavers service provides a service to young people 18 or over who are still in care. Throughout the year there was gradual increase of young people per worker, which reduced towards January 2021.

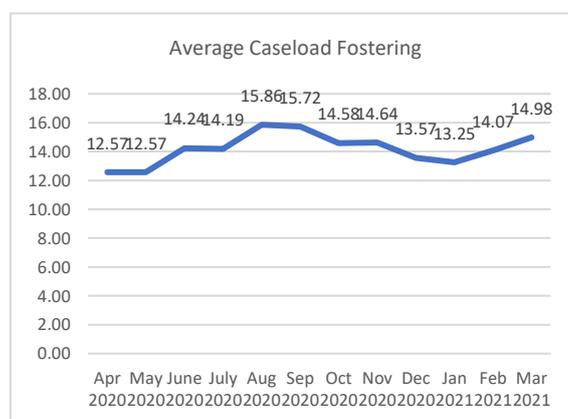


**Average Caseload Care Leavers Teams**

	Apr 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021
<b>Number of Young People - Care Leavers</b>	264	267	265	271	271	274	275	269	252	244	246	248
<b>Total case holders Care Leavers FTE (inc. PAs)</b>	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80	12.80
<b>Average Caseload Care Leavers</b>	20.63	20.86	20.70	21.17	21.17	21.41	21.48	21.02	19.69	19.06	19.22	19.38

**The Fostering Service**

The new staffing establishment for the Fostering Service was put into place at the start of this year, and is based on modelling of 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.



Average Caseload Fostering Teams

	Apr 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021
Number Cases Fostering Service	255	255	249	254	268	264	255	256	251	245	246	247
Total Caseholders Fostering FTE	20.29	20.29	17.49	17.90	16.90	16.79	17.49	17.49	18.49	18.49	17.49	16.49
Average - Caseload Fostering	12.57	12.57	14.24	14.19	15.86	15.72	14.58	14.64	13.57	13.25	14.07	14.98

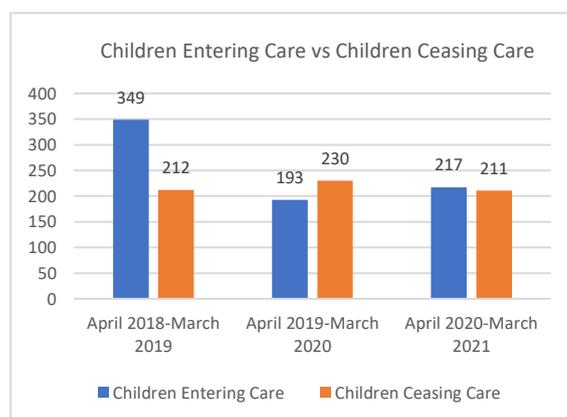
### Demand for Foster Placements for Children in Care (Internal and External)

A priority for SCT within the last two years 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)).

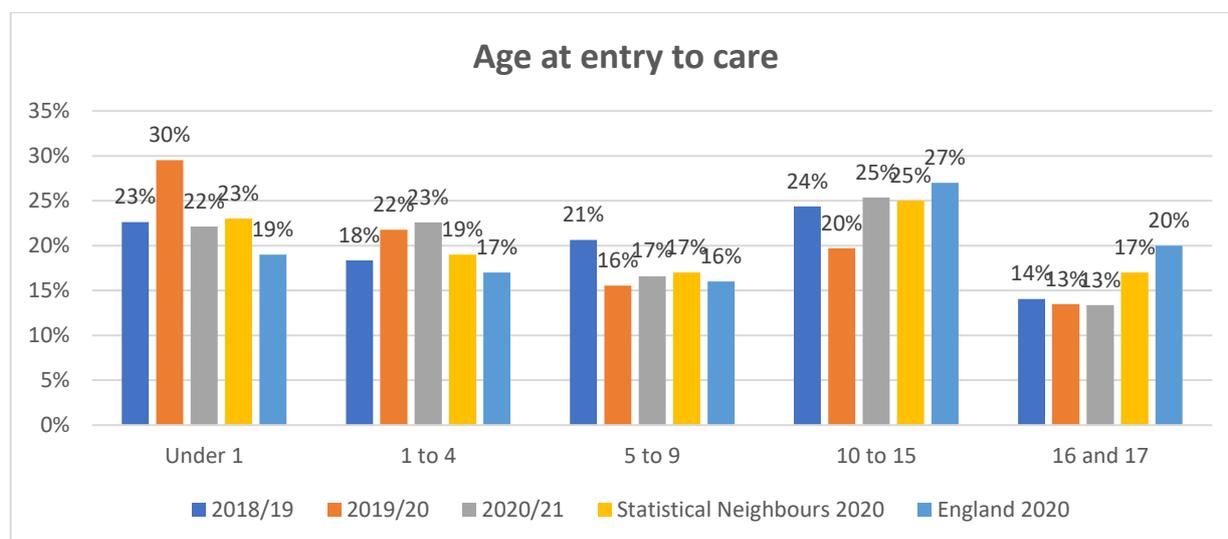
The number of Children in Care who need a placement is the biggest contributor to our resource deficit outlined in Section (a). First and foremost, we need to ensure that all our children in care are in the right placement for them, and wherever possible we must be getting best value for money from these placements. 35% of our total placement spend is represented by 7% of children’s placements.

#### Entry into care

In previous sections we have articulated that the number of children in our care have remained static. Over the past two years we have averaged around 200 entries and exits per year, which is lower than our Statistical Neighbour comparators entering care (247), and in line with England Average of 206 over the two-year period (April 2018-March 2020). This is similarly the case for Children Ceasing Care we are lower than the Statistical Neighbour Average of 232 and in line with England Average 194



Over the previous three years we have tended to have a greater proportion of children aged between 0 and 9 than our comparators. Where we need to act to protect a child, the sooner we do this the better, and younger children are more likely to be found good quality permanent placements through adoption. Outcomes for younger children in our care are also better on average.



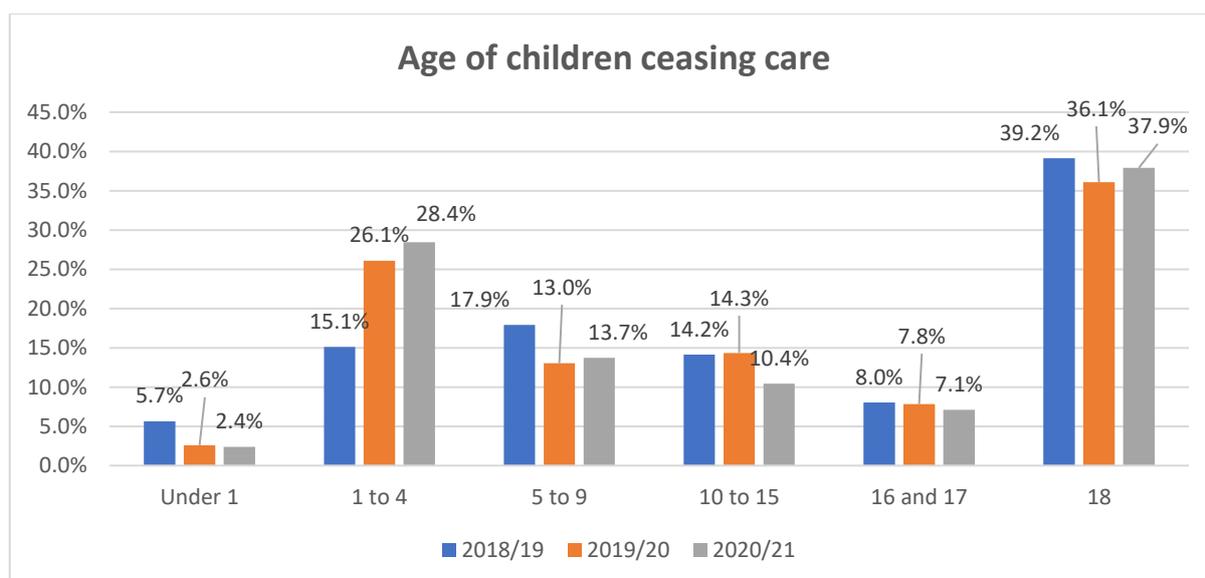
Last year we had a drop in the use of Police Protection and Emergency Protection Orders, although we have found this year to have seen an increase in both areas. We have also seen a reduction in the use of Section 20 accommodation on entry into care.

Initial Leal Status (at point of entry)	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Accommodated with breaks (no care episodes recorded)	0	1	0
C1 Missing Legal Status	1	0	0
Care Order	13	0	0
Emergency Protection Order	3	0	2
Interim Care Order	165	100	116
On remand, or Committed for Trial or Sentence and Accommodated by LA	10	9	9
Police Protection and in LA accommodation	41	18	35
Single Period of Accommodation under Section 20	116	65	55
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>217</b>

The table below shows where our Children in Care have been placed since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019, focused on those settings that have the highest resource implications.

### Children ceasing care

The majority of children ceasing care across the previous three years have been those turning 18, and those children between 1 and 4 years old.

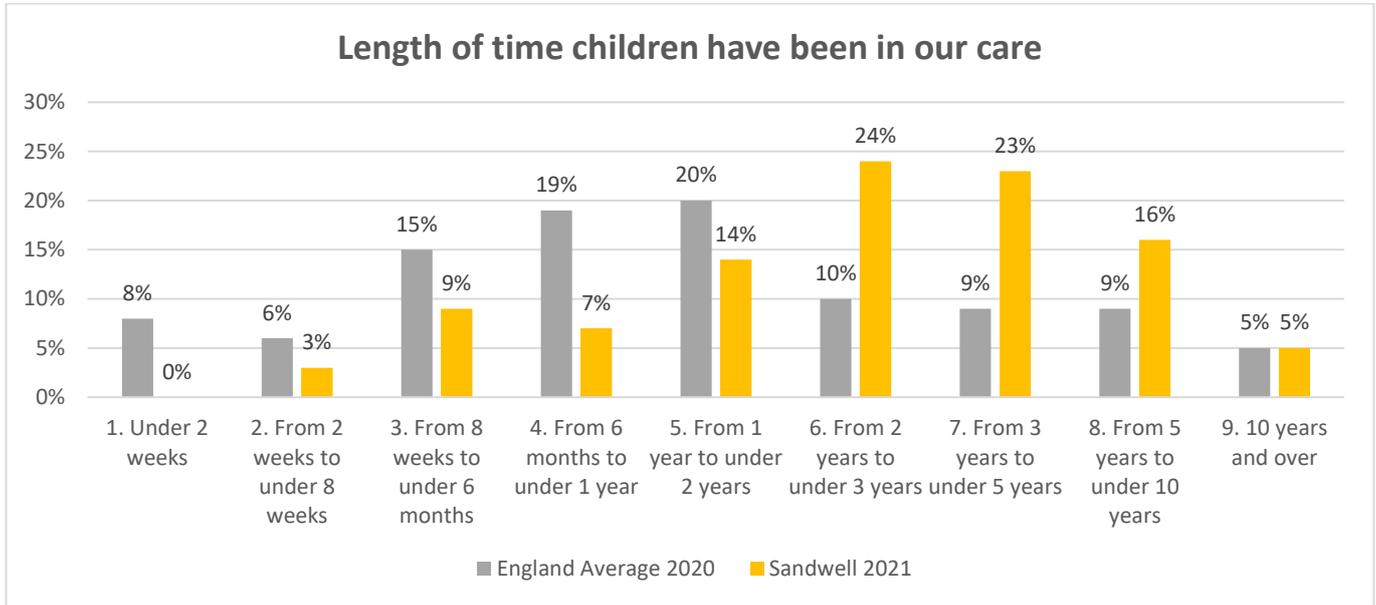


Over the course of the last three year we have seen an increase in the use of special guardianship and a consistent flow of children being reunified to their family.

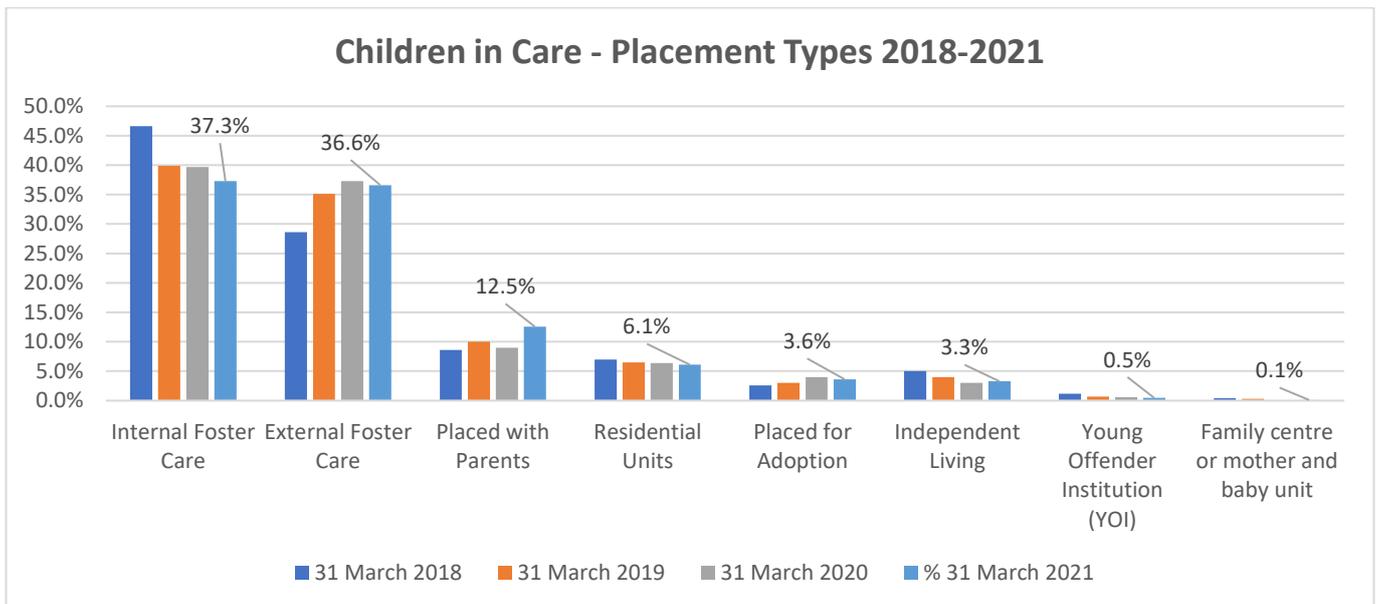
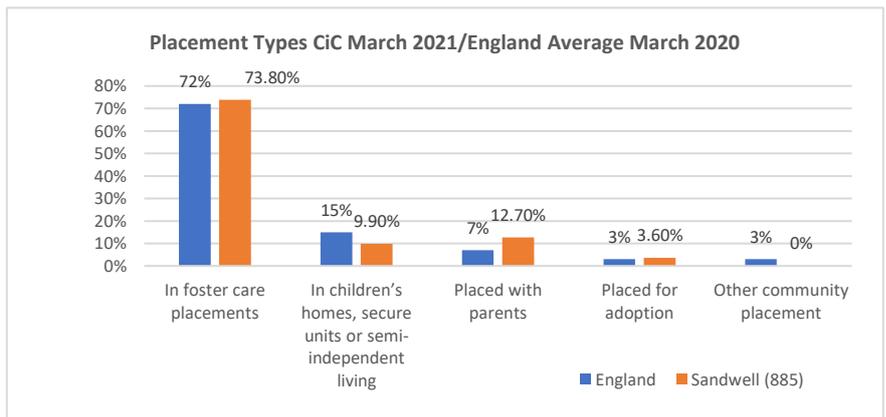
Ceased Care Reasons	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Adopted	34	30	36
Care Order Discharged	0	10	5
SGO	10	20	25
Reunification	57	47	41
Independent Living	81	79	74
Child Arrangement Order	6	7	4
Supervision Order	5	13	17
Other	19	24	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>211</b>

**Our current cohort**

In Sandwell, more children have been in our care between 2 and 10 years than the England average. This goes some way to demonstrate that we are still managing the legacy of children who required protection from the tie we were deemed inadequate.

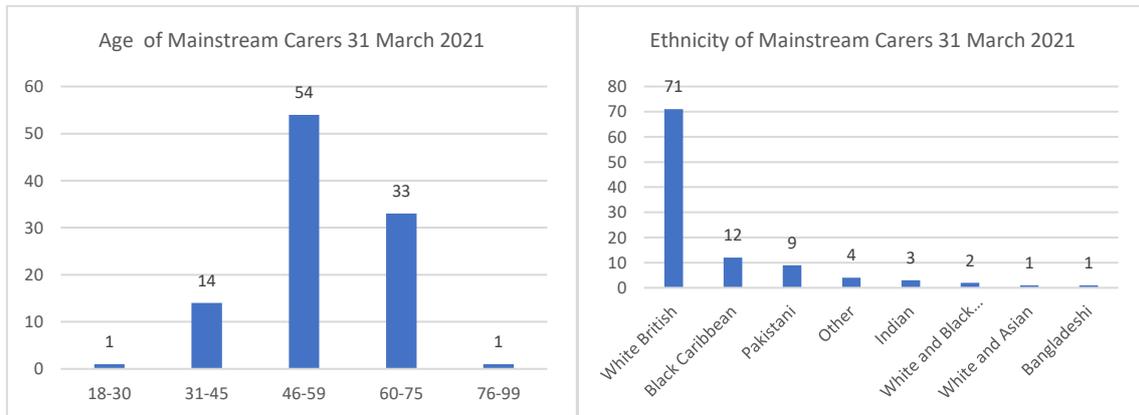


Over the last three years, a smaller proportion of children have been placed within our own foster care placement, and we have seen increased use of external foster carers and children who are placed with parents. However, our use of residential homes is lower than the England average in 2020.



## 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.



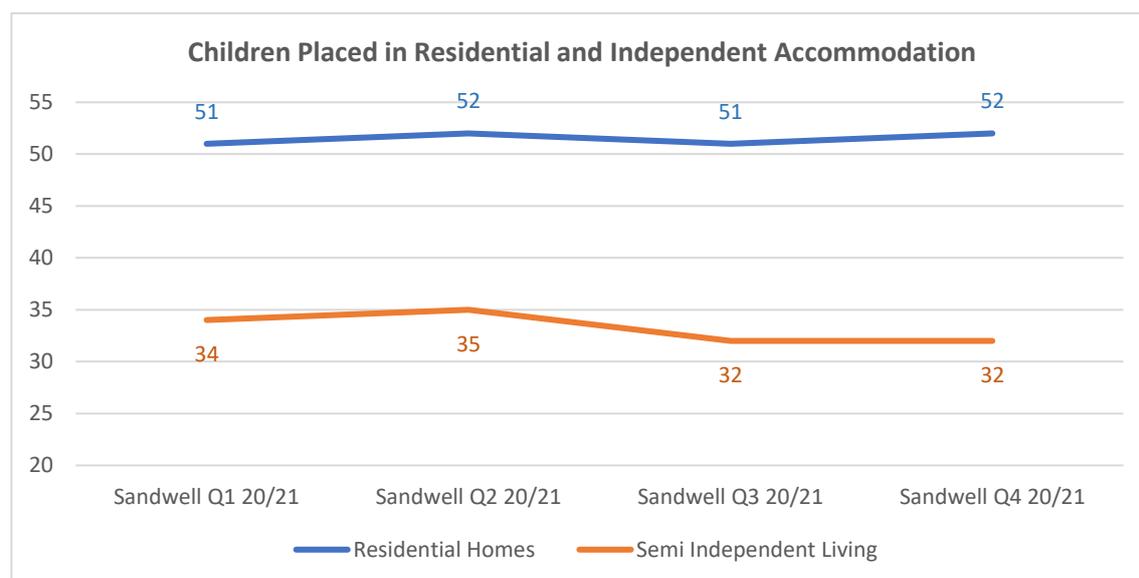
As at 31 March 2021, we had 331 children placed with 225 internal foster carers (106 mainstream and 119 Family and Friends), which is 37.4%. 325 children were placed with external agency foster carers, which is 36.7%. Finally, our use of connected carers has increased by 10.

Most of our carers are of White British ethnicity, and 34 out of 103 (33%) mainstream foster carers 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.

## 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, which often is supported and comes at a significant cost.



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

There were no formal action plans or rectification plans in the Contract year 2019/20, owing to the agreements pertaining to the Relief Event agreed on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020, which remains in place.

**Section (i) - 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*

There were no changes to the Service Delivery Contract during this financial year.

*Changes to Support Services Agreements*

There were no changes to the support services agreements during the year.

*Other significant changes*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020, Pauline Turner was removed as a company director, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 Frances Craven was removed as a company director and on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021 Emma Taylor was added as a company director (effective from 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021).

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

There are no proposed changes to the Services Specification, Financial Mechanism or the Performance Indicators in the next contract year. However, we enter into constructive conversations about these matters to coincide with the Contract Review of next year.

**Section (k) - The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)**

There are no comments to be made about the contractual governance, (change controls).

**Section (I) - 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.

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## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children's Trust Invest to Save
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Karen Simms  Cabinet Member for Finance, Council Sustainability and Transformation Councillor Maria Crompton
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger  Director of Finance, Simone Hines
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Mandip S. Chahal, Senior Commissioning Manager for Statutory Services <a href="mailto:Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk">Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk</a>  Steve Lilley, Finance Business Partner <a href="mailto:steve_lilley@sandwell.gov.uk">steve_lilley@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Cabinet, in line with the Service Delivery Contract with Sandwell Children's Trust, considers the Invest to Save proposals put forward by the Trust and:
- a) Agree the increase to the Contract Sum in the short term as per the Strategic Commissioning Invest to Save proposal, to be paid back to the Council via a reduction in the future Contract Sum.
  - b) Agree the increase to the Contract Sum in the short term as per the Early Help Invest to Save proposal, to be paid back to the Council via a reduction in the future Contract Sum.



1.2 That, subject to 1.1a and 1.1b, the Executive Director of Children’s Services take the necessary actions, as laid out in the Service Delivery Contract, to vary the contract sum.

**2 Reasons for Recommendations**

2.1 The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) allows SCT to make an Invest to Save proposal which would require an increase to the Contract Sum in the short term, but which would be paid back to the Council in terms of a future reduction in the Contract Sum.

2.2 If the Council considers that the information provided by SCT is sufficient to substantiate the request it will agree a Fast Track Change to the Service Delivery Contract.

2.3 This report presents two Invest to Save proposals from SCT for the consideration of Cabinet.

**3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?**

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>SCT works with families, foster carers, schools, statutory and voluntary providers to support the achievements of vulnerable children and those in the care of the council</p> <p>SCT works to ensure that children in the care of the Council receive the support and opportunities that any parent would give their child</p>
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>SCT ensures coordination between social care and the NHS to better protect vulnerable children</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>SCT supports families to improve children’s life chances</p>



	SCT works closely with the police to ensure that children are protected from the impact of crime, domestic violence, and all forms of exploitation
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>SCT supports care leavers to live independently in the community, working closely with Housing to ensure care leavers are able to good quality accommodation in Sandwell.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>SCT works with families to access services and support so that they are able to improve their economic well-being and the life chances for their children.</p>

## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) includes a detailed financial mechanism for agreeing the annual Contract Sum.
- 4.2 The financial mechanism allows SCT to request changes to the annual contract sum. These requests fall into 2 categories, Type 1 or Type 2.

Type 1:

(1) there has been an increase in the demand for the Services and/or an additional cost to the Trust that could not reasonably have been anticipated when the overall budget for the relevant Contract Year was agreed by the Parties; or (ii) a business case proposal which would require an Increase to the Contract Sum but would deliver an improvement in the Services

Type 2:

where the Trust wishes to make an Invest to Save proposal which would require an increase to the Contract Sum in the short term, but which it would pay back to the Council in terms of a future reduction in the Contract Sum



#### 4.3 SCT is required to produce a detailed proposal that sets out:

- the short-term increase being sought.
- the investment to be made using the funding being requested.
- the anticipated pay back to the Council in terms of a reduced Contract Sum and/or improvement in the Services at a future date and a timescale for this

4.4 On receipt of any requests Council representatives must meet with SCT to discuss the detail of the request. At this point further information can be requested to further substantiate the request or, if enough information has been provided, the process to seek approval for a change to the Contract Sum will be commenced.

4.5 The appended proposals contain within them the information as required in paragraph 4.3 and if agreed by Cabinet future Contract Sum Negotiations will include more detailed discussions on the return on investment process.

4.6 The investment amount being requested is £287,500, split across Early Help and Strategic Commissioning. Both proposals would see additional investment in 2021/22 and 2022/23, with the investment being returned to the Council in 2023/24 and 2024/25 by a reduction in the overall contract sum.

4.7 The success of the invest to save proposals have been predicated on the current position in relation to demand for services, the need for residential provision and the current market for the supply of placements. Significant increases in demand for statutory intervention may impact of the ability to achieve the specified savings, however if demand were to increase significantly the implementation of the proposals would potentially reduce any rate of cost increase.

4.8 Progress against the invest to save proposals will be monitored utilising the existing contract monitoring arrangements of the Operational



Performance Board, Strategic Performance Board, Scrutiny and separate finance meetings.

- 4.9 SCT provide detailed financial information to the Council monthly, which will be utilised to measure the progress that is being made in achieving the savings detailed in the proposals.
- 4.10 The impact of the activity will be assessed after 12 months and if the anticipated progress in making savings is at significantly slower rate or significantly lower value than detailed in the proposals, the continuation of the activity and associated funding from the Council will be reviewed.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Council is not obligated to agree to the proposals put forward by SCT. SCT may not be able to undertake the identified work which may in turn impact on its ability to achieve positive change for children and/or delay the achievement of a 'Good' rating from Ofsted.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	<p>Sandwell Children's Trust receives a significant financial resource to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities for children's social care, and to provide targeted early help services.</p> <p>The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.</p> <p>Funding has been earmarked from within the council's general fund reserves should Cabinet approve the proposals.</p> <p>The additional funding being requested is in effect a reprofiling of the Contract Sum to achieve greater savings in the long term and enhanced outcomes for children and families in the short/medium term.</p>
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<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and SCT includes mechanism for SCT to make a request for an in-year change based on an invest to save proposal. Any proposal agreed would be subject of a change control process that is detailed in the Service Delivery, it would include mechanisms to review the progress being made.
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with—to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision.</p> <p>Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that for the significant risk, that the invest to save proposals do not result in the improvements and savings originally anticipated, that have been identified, arrangements are in place to manage and mitigate these effectively.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children's services will have a positive effect on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.
<b>Social Value</b>	<p>SCT supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. SCT supports care leavers to access education, employment and training.</p> <p>SCT supports community resilience through the recruitment of local residents as foster carers, helping children to remain close to communities they are from and to thrive in Sandwell. The invest to save proposals will further enhance this.</p>



## 7. Appendices

Invest to Save – Early Help

Invest to Save – Strategic Commissioning

## 8. Background Papers

Cabinet Meeting 19 October 2016

Cabinet Meeting 19 September 2018



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## Sandwell Council: Invest to Save Submission from Sandwell Children's Trust – DRAFT

### 1. Context

Sandwell Council and Sandwell Children's Trust have worked closely and highly effectively together to agree both a new contract sum for 2021-22 and an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the extended period from 2021-24. This agreement sees some important increases in the annual funding of the Trust, based on changes in demand, and the continued expectation of the Trust achieving a break-even position by the end of this MTFP period.

To achieve a break-even position by the end of the financial year 2023/24, continued effective delivery against a significant savings programme for the Trust across this 3-year period is required. This savings programme requires efficiencies be achieved in a number of key areas across the organisation. Most significantly a successful reshaping of the delivery of placements for children in the care system.

Between September 2020 and February 2021, a DfE Financial Advisor/Commissioner worked with the Council and the Trust to provide independent analysis of key areas of Trust expenditure and the future savings programme. A series of recommendations have been produced by the advisor/commissioner to support the budget setting process.

The negotiations and agreement of the revised MTFP have been undertaken amidst a pandemic and with considerable uncertainty about the impact this may have in the long-term on the cost of provision and demand for services. The Council have worked inclusively with the Trust and additional resources have been provided to mitigate against the direct impact of COVID on both children and young people and effective delivery of change programmes.

Feedback provided by Ofsted, following their monitoring Visit in March 2021 has shown that the Trust has a continuing need to improve practice, ensure that pathways for referrals are appropriate and prioritise reunification within the family unit or permanency within a care environment.

With the Service Delivery Contract there is a process included within the Financial Mechanism Schedule that allows the Trust to make in-year change requests. These change requests fall into two categories:

Type One – where: (i) there has been an increase in the demand for the Services and/or an additional cost to the Trust that could not reasonably have been anticipated when the overall budget for the relevant Contract Year was agreed by the Parties; or (ii) a business case proposal which would require an increase to the Contract Sum but would deliver an improvement in the Services

Type Two – where the Trust wishes to make an Invest to Save proposal which would require an increase to the Contract Sum in the short term but which would pay back to the Council in terms of a future reduction in the Contract Sum

With the commencement of a new Chief Executive, and in conjunction with the DCS, a review of the approach and effectiveness of the early help system has commenced in conjunction with our wider partners. In addition, the Chief Executive has undertaken an internal review of all 'preventative' services within the Trust. This review has identified that there is a significant issue in relation to demand into the service, particularly in relation to partners willingness to act as 'lead professional' when supporting children and families.

**Early Help across the partnership analysis –**

The approach to early help across the partnership needs to be strengthened to ensure that only those children that require social care support are referred to SCT

Work needs to be undertaken to ensure that all partners deliver the lead professional role in supporting children and families at an earlier stage.

Partners taking a more coordinated approach in identifying children and families at an earlier stage and providing the support they require and not automatically making a referral to the Trust for statutory intervention is required. ***For more detail Refer to Appendix 2 – Presentation to the Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership.***

**Targeted Early Help and Preventative Services SCT Analysis**

SCT has a number of early help, prevention and edge of care services (such as COGS, Family Solutions Team, Multi Systemic Therapy and Family Group Conferencing) and a number of third-party contracts, that are not fully aligned to create an ‘SCT Early Help and Prevention Offer’ that is integrated into a wider partnership led Early Help offer.

The improvement funding provided by the DfE over the past two years to support practice improvement against Ofsted recommendations will continue into 2021/22, but at a significantly reduced level (53% reduction).

It should be noted that the Trust is committed to delivering the cost savings already outlined in the MTFP and has a cost savings program already in place for that. The purpose of this Invest to Save proposal is to enhance these savings further by strengthening the Trust’s approach to early help bringing together all early help services that currently sit with the Trust and realigning services so that children and families are supported at an early stage preventing unnecessary escalations into more costly statutory services. Coupled to this, the Trust will work with the Early Help Partnership to strengthen understanding of thresholds for statutory intervention and confidence of partners in undertaking the role of lead professional. Taking a ‘prevention at every level’ approach coupled with a much greater focus on early help will ensure that support for children and families is undertaken at the earliest opportunity.

**2. Context: The Financial Risk we are seeking to minimise:**

Children’s social care is under significant financial pressure. Total spending on children’s services reached £10.5 billion in 2019/20. The Local Government Association (LGA) estimated in 2019, based on funding levels at the time, that children’s social care would face a £3 billion funding gap by 2025 just to maintain existing levels of support. In the last year for which there is data for, just under 135,000 investigations nationally where a child was suspected of suffering significant harm did not result in a child protection plan – three times as many as just ten years ago. The increased spending pressures are driven, in large part, by increased pressures at the most acute end of the system. Controlling for other variables, for every £20 increase per child in preventative spending in a previous year, there was an average reduction of almost 2.5 Children In Need the following year within local authorities between 2010/11-2018/19. Reduced spending on preventative and family services is associated with rising rates of adolescents entering care. (The Case for Change, Independent Review of Children’s Social Care)

This bid seeks to enhance expertise and capacity within the Trust to fundamentally reshape practice and, with a strong strategic approach, aims to ensure all early help services are well

coordinated across the whole continuum of need. Also, that this approach ensures that wherever possible, needs are identified at the earliest possible point and interventions prevent needs from escalating further. In effect this approach means that if needs are met at an earlier point with effective services then this reduced the need for costly, intrusive statutory services – working alongside the partnership to maximise the opportunity offered by having a joined-up approach to Early Help.

### **3. The Approach that it is recommended to take:**

Additional strategic capacity must combine professional credibility of earlier intervention / prevention expertise, partnership working, bringing together of services and negotiation skills whilst at the same time working alongside and enhancing the capacity and ambitions of current key leaders of service provision within the Trust and wider partnership – particularly working alongside the DCS and her team.

The strategic approach as described is being led by and sponsored by the new Chief Executive of the Trust and is supported by the DCS and wider Safeguarding Partnership.

The involvement of senior leadership across the partnership together with a clear governance structure will give this the impetus it needs to succeed where it might not have done so in the past.

Invest to save funding would be used to establish one post that would work with partners to support a partnership approach to Early Help. This role would:

- i. take responsibility for ensuring that services within SCT form part of a continuum of early help services which align closely with other partners and voluntary organisations, without duplicating roles and responsibilities- thereby creating a fully integrated early help offer across the Borough
- ii. ensure that preventative services within SCT adhere to a set of clear principles, in particular, an approach of ‘prevention at every level’. This means that the lead will ensure that where children do need statutory intervention, that these internal interventions are evidence based, ensure that there are no gaps in services, and the services in place work to meet all the assessed needs for children and families to help prevent children entering care or their placement breaking down.

#### **Role A:**

The role would be recruited at head of service level (Hay1 grade) at a cost of £95k per annum for two years with the option to extend for a third year. The role would be required to realign all Early Help Intervention and Prevention activity and third-party provision, working closely with our partners (including schools, health, our voluntary group), ensuring that services reflect local needs and create an SCT Early Help offer that underpins the principle of prevention at every level.

### **4. The Proposed level of “invest to save” funding:**

The Trust is confident that by reducing demand across statutory services through earlier intervention will not only support children and families at an earlier stage but will significantly reduce the number of children and families requiring more costly statutory support. This will

ultimately lead to a reduction of children in need, child protection and children becoming looked after.

#### 1. Reducing Demand for Statutory Services (Referrals into the Front Door)

Reducing the number of referrals and re-referrals into the Front Door through earlier intervention will reduce the number of Children in Need and/or those subject to a Child Protection Plan.

In the period April 2020 to March 2021, SCSP received 26,217 individual contacts which resulted in 5,402 accepted referrals to the Trust's Social Care services, which equates to approximately 80% of referrals not being accepted. Even when a referral is not accepted it will still require the utilisation of resources. The role would enable the reduction of initial contacts and work with partner agencies to ensure that the signposting of contacts is more appropriate. This will reduce referrals made to the Trust and inappropriate demand at the Front Door. A reduction in demand, through the decrease in accepted referrals, will lead to better management of resources to meet the needs of those children that do require statutory intervention. A reduction of demand (appropriately) will ensure caseloads in all areas of the service can then be better managed, with social workers able to deliver high quality practice.

Working alongside partners to support earlier intervention at the earliest opportunity will ensure that referrals into social care for those children and families that need a social care intervention.

Year 1 – 110 accepted referrals in year from baseline of 5,402 referrals

Year 2 – 222 accepted referrals in year from baseline of 5,292 referrals (cumulative reduction of 332 referrals (110+222) to 5,070 referrals)

Year 3 – 274 accepted referrals in year from baseline of 5,070 referrals (cumulative reduction of 595 referrals (110+222+274) to 4,807)

Of this cohort of referrals, the Trust would normally see c. 44% of these referrals allocated to social workers and becoming Children in Need or requiring a Child Protection Plan.

Based on the assumption that seed investment from SMBC of £7,500 per month would begin in January 2022, the Trust would (if successful in delivering referral reductions as demonstrated above) be generating in month savings in excess of this monthly investment figure by the end of 2022/23. The requirement is for 15 months of investment which will total £112,500. The role would continue to be funded albeit by the Trust from this point onwards via ongoing service demand reductions.

Should the Trust continue to deliver reduced demand in line with assumptions, the investment by SMBC would be **fully paid back by December 2023**. There would be flexibility within the model to pay back the investment over an extended timeframe should this become necessary however this proposed commercial dynamic both incentivizes the Trust to deliver demand led savings quickly and also reduces the investment risk to SMBC.

Beyond the repayment of the investment, the Trust would have autonomy in deciding how long to continue to fund the role and the ability to retain further savings delivered to utilize as it deems appropriate.

The Trust can not fully guarantee that the activity and savings can be fully delivered within the timescales, given the nature of business and the fact that demand is not fully within the control of the Trust and there are a number of external dependencies.

The second stage of reviewing the Early Help offer will be to look at the better alignment of MST, FST and FGC to focus support on children and families earlier and those families that are on the edge of care which will generate savings by avoiding more costly social work interventions either through escalating from Child in Need to child protection and/ or becoming looked after. This will be subject to a further Invest to Save paper at a later date.

The timeframes for the delivery of both the investment and the returns are shown below;

Timeline of investment	Yr 1 2021/22	Yr 2 2022/23	Yr 3 2023/24	Yr 4 2024/25	Total
Investment by SMBC	(22,500)	(90,000)	0		(112,500)
Investment by Trust			(90,000)	(90,000)	(180,000)
Saving		35,417	229,167	395,833	660,417
<b>Net ROI</b>	<b>(22,500)</b>	<b>(54,583)</b>	<b>139,167</b>	<b>305,833</b>	<b>367,917</b>
<b>Cum ROI</b>	<b>(22,500)</b>	<b>(77,083)</b>	<b>62,083</b>	<b>367,917</b>	

January 2022 – SMBC investment of £7,500 a month commences  
 Q4 2022/23 – In month return on investment exceeds monthly investment value.  
 March 2023 – SMBC cumulative investment of £125,000 ceases  
 April 2023 – SCT begins to self-fund investment from generated demand led returns  
 December 2023 – payback of investment from project returns is complete  
 January 2024 onwards – SCT determine future of investment in role and also retain further saving generated

**Appendix 3** demonstrates the monthly investment and savings profile more fully.

Risks to the delivery of the proposed return on investment are:

- Effectiveness of partnership working and wider Early Help arrangements
- Effectiveness of SCT Early Help Offer
- Failure to manage referrals and demand effectively
- Failure of family or young people to engage with the early intervention programme or frequent re-referrals to service

A draft timeline against key milestones that the investment would be tasked to achieve is as follows;

Action	Due by	Rationale
Engage with Partnership Organisations in multi-agency approach	Within 3 months	Ensure children and young people have access to the right service at the right place at the right time. Effective partnership working enhances accountability to improve safeguarding outcomes for children, young people and families.
Finalise early help strategy	Within 3 months	Sets out approach to identifying children and families who would benefit from Early Help, describe the assessment of need for Early Help and also the process by which targeted Early Help services should be deployed to address the assessed needs of the child and their family.
Revise Early Help	Within 6	The Early Help Assessment helps children, young

Assessment process	months	people and families to get the help they need at the right time. The assessment helps the Partnership to understand what support is needed and how organisations can all work together to provide that support.									
Develop preventative strategies encapsulating the Voice of the Child	Within 12 months	Enable children and young people to have a voice so that their aspirations are understood, they remain safe and healthy, support is given to families with multiple needs and ultimately demand for reactive services is reduced.									
Access and maximise available Grant funding for Early Help services.	Within 18 months	Aim is to ensure that the Trust working with partners to access all available funding in the Early help space e.g. joint applications for funding									
<p><b>6. Intended outcomes/impact of such funding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing needs of children and families from escalating with earlier support</li> <li>• Positive Ofsted inspection feedback</li> <li>• Greater alignment of SCT services with a clear Early Help Offer</li> <li>• Better integration of SCT Early help services within the broader partnership Early Help Offer</li> <li>• Reduced cost of providing services</li> <li>• Reduced caseloads / less intensive cases for social workers (leading to a more stable permanent workforce)</li> <li>• Capacity to focus interventions that make a difference to children and young people that do require statutory support</li> </ul>											
<p><b>7. Monitoring/Reporting of Impact:</b></p> <p>Monitoring progress and impact of Early Help and Prevention on children, young people and their families will be reported on quarterly. An assessment will be made on the success of the early intervention and an analysis on the costs avoided as a consequence of the child/young person not requiring a statutory service.</p> <p>This will be reported to SMBC on a quarterly basis.</p>											
<p><b>8. Risk Analysis</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Risk Description</th> <th>Collective Impact</th> <th>Likelihood</th> <th>Mitigation through Invest to Save</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Early Intervention  Needs of young person increase during time taken to perform assessment</td> <td>Increased chance of young person entering statutory services</td> <td>High</td> <td>High</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Risk Description	Collective Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation through Invest to Save	Early Intervention  Needs of young person increase during time taken to perform assessment	Increased chance of young person entering statutory services	High	High
Risk Description	Collective Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation through Invest to Save								
Early Intervention  Needs of young person increase during time taken to perform assessment	Increased chance of young person entering statutory services	High	High								

Unnecessary family disruption	Impact on wellbeing of all family members, increased cost	Medium	Medium
Risk averse attitude of partners	Inappropriate contact in the Front Door	Medium	Medium

**Appendix 3 – Monthly Analysis of Investment and Returns**

Accepted Referral reduction in month				
Reduction in referrals allocated to social workers and becoming CIN or requiring a CPP				
Cum redction in referrals allocated to social workers				
Investment from SMBC	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021/22
Investment from Trust	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500) ✓	(22,500)
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(22,500)</b>
Saving				
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(22,500)</b>
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(15,000)</b>	<b>(22,500) ✓</b>	<b>(22,500)</b>

Accepted Referral reduction in month				10	10	10	12	12	12	14	14	14	✓	110
Reduction in referrals allocated to social workers and becoming CIN or requiring a CPP				5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	✓	48
Cum redction in referrals allocated to social workers	-	-	-	5	9	14	19	24	29	36	42	48	✓	48
Investment from SMBC	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	2022/23	
Investment from Trust	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(90,000)	
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(90,000)</b>												
Saving						2,083	2,083	4,167	4,167	6,250	8,333	8,333	✓	35,417
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(5,417)</b>	<b>(5,417)</b>	<b>(3,333)</b>	<b>(3,333)</b>	<b>(1,250)</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>(54,583)</b>	
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>(30,000)</b>	<b>(37,500)</b>	<b>(45,000)</b>	<b>(52,500)</b>	<b>(60,000)</b>	<b>(65,417)</b>	<b>(70,833)</b>	<b>(74,167)</b>	<b>(77,500)</b>	<b>(78,750)</b>	<b>(77,917)</b>	<b>(77,083)</b>	<b>(77,083)</b>	

Appendix 3

	Breakeven												
Accepted Referral reduction in month	16	16	16	16	16	16	18	18	18	21	21	21	212
Reduction in referrals allocated to social workers and becoming CIN or requiring a CPP	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	9	
Cum redction in referrals allocated to social workers	55	62	70	77	84	91	99	106	114	123	132	142	142
	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	2023/24
Investment from SMBC													0
Investment from Trust	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(90,000)
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(90,000)</b>							
Saving	10,417	12,500	12,500	14,583	16,667	18,750	18,750	20,833	22,917	25,000	27,083	29,167	229,167
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>2,917</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>7,083</b>	<b>9,167</b>	<b>11,250</b>	<b>11,250</b>	<b>13,333</b>	<b>15,417</b>	<b>17,500</b>	<b>19,583</b>	<b>21,667</b>	<b>139,167</b>
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>(74,167)</b>	<b>(69,167)</b>	<b>(64,167)</b>	<b>(57,083)</b>	<b>(47,917)</b>	<b>(36,667)</b>	<b>(25,417)</b>	<b>(12,083)</b>	<b>3,333</b>	<b>20,833</b>	<b>40,417</b>	<b>62,083</b>	<b>62,083</b>

Accepted Referral reduction in month	22	22	22	22	22	22	24	24	24	24	24	24	274	595
Reduction in referrals allocated to social workers and becoming CIN or requiring a CPP	10	10	10	10	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	11		
Cum redction in referrals allocated to social workers	151	161	170	180	189	199	209	220	230	241	251	262	262	262
	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	2024/25	Total
Investment from SMBC														(112,500)
Investment from Trust	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(7,500)	(90,000)	(180,000)
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(7,500)</b>	<b>(90,000)</b>	<b>(292,500)</b>											
Saving	31,250	31,250	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	33,333	395,833	660,417
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>23,750</b>	<b>23,750</b>	<b>25,833</b>	<b>305,833</b>	<b>367,917</b>									
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>85,833</b>	<b>109,583</b>	<b>135,417</b>	<b>161,250</b>	<b>187,083</b>	<b>212,917</b>	<b>238,750</b>	<b>264,583</b>	<b>290,417</b>	<b>316,250</b>	<b>342,083</b>	<b>367,917</b>	<b>367,917</b>	<b>367,917</b>

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## Sandwell Council: Invest to Save Submission from Sandwell Children's Trust

### 1. Context

Sandwell Council and Sandwell Children's Trust have worked closely and highly effectively together to agree both a new contract sum for 2021-22 and an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the extended period from 2021-24. This agreement sees some important increases in the annual funding of the Trust, based on changes in demand, and the continued expectation of the Trust achieving a break-even position by the end of this MTFP period.

To achieve a break-even position by the end of the financial year 23/24 continued effective delivery against a significant savings programme for the Trust across this 3-year period. This savings programme requires efficiencies be achieved in a number of key areas across the organisation. Most significantly a successful reshaping of the delivery of placements for children in the care system.

Between September 2020 and February 2021, a DfE Financial Advisor/Commissioner worked with the Council and the Trust to provide independent analysis of key areas of Trust expenditure and the future savings programme. A series of recommendations have been produced by the advisor/commissioner to support the budget setting process.

The negotiations and agreement of the revised MTFP have been undertaken amidst a pandemic and with considerable uncertainty about the impact this may have in the long-term on the cost of provision and demand for services. The Council have worked inclusively with the Trust and additional resources have been provided to mitigate against the direct impact of COVID on both children and young people and effective delivery of change programmes.

Feedback provided by Ofsted, following their monitoring visit in March 2021 has shown that the Trust has a continuing need to improve practice, ensure that pathways for referrals are appropriate and prioritise reunification within the family unit or permanency within a care environment.

Within the Service Delivery Contract there is a process included within the Financial Mechanism Schedule that allows the Trust to make in-year change requests. These change requests fall into two categories:

Type One – where: (i) there has been an increase in the demand for the Services and/or an additional cost to the Trust that could not reasonably have been anticipated when the overall budget for the relevant Contract Year was agreed by the Parties; or (ii) a business case proposal which would require an Increase to the Contract Sum but would deliver an improvement in the Services

Type Two – where the Trust wishes to make an Invest to Save proposal which would require an increase to the Contract Sum in the short term but which would pay back to the Council in terms of a future reduction in the Contract Sum

The proposal laid out in this document would fall into the latter category, a type 2 request. The additional initial increase in the contract sum would be recovered through the life of the current MTFP, and would see saving over and above those already set out in the MTFP.

It should be noted that the Trust is committed to delivering the cost savings already outlined in the MTFP and has a cost savings program already in place for that. The purpose of the Invest to Save proposal is to enhance these savings further by reviewing the strategic LAC offering, negotiating better value supplier frameworks and contracts through strategic commissioning, developing third party relationships and establishing new service offerings which can act as a form of step down for YP in high cost provision.

## **2. Context: The Financial Risk we are seeking to minimise**

Across the country we see pressures on Councils spending on children's social care services. In the period 2009-18 children's social care spending has increased by 16% whilst spending on wider children's services has fallen (CIPFA/Institute for Government). In 2018/19 councils across England spent £770M more on children's social care than they had budgeted for (LGA).

The DfE advisor/commissioner found that Sandwell does not appear to be spending more per head of population on children in care in comparison with other Councils nationally and comparator groups. Approximately 6% of looked after children in Sandwell are placed in residential care, which is lower than the national average of 11%. Unit costs in key placement categories in comparison to some other Trusts also appear similar or lower in some forms of provision. However, recent data gathered by the West Midlands Commissioning Hub show that there are Councils in the West Midlands paying less on average for residential placements than Sandwell currently does. For example, Telford and Wrekin are paying 15% less on average for residential placements.

The new MTFP, given the level of uncertainty around the longer-term impact of COVID, is realistic in modifying expectations of further reductions in the rate per 10,000 of Children in Care. But as the DfE Commissioner described, 'Whilst the numbers of children in the care system may remain significant where you place those children when in care may be a matter of greater local determination and control'.

The new MTFP contains ambitious targets on increasing the numbers of placements available with internal foster carers, carers registered with Sandwell Children's Trusts independent fostering agency, whilst at the same time reducing those in external foster care, which will see a reduction in the overall average price of foster care. At the same time the Trust will be aiming maintain the number of children in residential at 6% of the total looked after population which we will be working actively to reduce over the life of the MTPF to 840. Combined these changes make highly significant contributions to savings in the overall care budget. This approach is described by the DfE advisor/commissioner as one that could "significantly reduce overall unit costs of foster care and enhance local placement availability at no detriment to quality".

The DfE advisor/commissioner observed that local ambitions to explore opportunities to better manage the market for residential care through the use of regional agreements, block contracting or even through developing new in-house provision although it appears that such work has not yet progressed to the point of delivery and is not having as yet a positive proactive impact on placement costs. Further to this he also identified additional actions the we could take:

- More assertive challenge of placement costs on individual cases of children in residential care.
- A local 'professional' fostering scheme (a Level 6 of current or a top level of any revised scheme) that could attract new talent to fostering, making the stretch target more deliverable whilst at the same time providing a broader range of placement options and

reducing the number of children being placed in residential care

In April 2018, when the Trust went live, it did so with no commissioning capacity. The sole commissioner remaining in children's services did not TUPE to the Trust, meaning that any commissioning work was undertaken as by staff from the procurement and placements team. The Trust created a commissioner role in December 2019, however even with this role filled there is not sufficient capacity to undertake all the work required to commission services as well as develop and implement a robust sufficiency strategy.

This bid seeks to enhance expertise and capacity within the Trust to implement a programme of transformation and efficiency linked to placements for children and young people.

### **3. The Approach that it is recommended to take:**

There is a need to enhance strategic commissioning programme delivery within the Trust and just as importantly delivery capacity particularly in the area of reshaping care provision. Whilst an embryonic sufficiency strategy exists it is clear the work could be developed further and is seen as a wider leadership priority. The goal is to move both to a more sophisticated approach to understanding demand for care and a more assertive approach to managing and reshaping the care market than exists currently.

Additional capacity must combine professional credibility with commissioning expertise, financial acumen, project management and negotiation skills whilst at the same time working alongside and enhancing the capacity and ambitions of current key leaders of service provision within the Trust. The additional capacity will also increase the potential for joint commissioning ensuring stronger planning strategically and at an individual case level with key partners including the CCG and Education.

#### **Leadership**

The new Chief Executive of the Trust will chair a Reducing Demand and Cost in Children's Social Care Board monthly. This board will ensure value for money of LAC placement costs, ensure demand on LAC and Care Leavers is effectively managed to reduce costs and ensure progress against key milestones for key projects and manage risks/issues as they arise from individual projects/workstreams

The Director of Resources will chair a monthly Recommissioning Board which will provide effective and consistent governance of the programme of major re-commissions, develop and review procurement strategy and evaluation criteria and consider how costs / efficiencies can be achieved via the commission – including savings targets.

The above boards form part of the Transformation Programme of the Trust, in particular the strategic priority of Meeting Need and Measuring Progress. The involvement of senior leadership together with a clear governance structure will give this initiative the impetus it needs to succeed where it might not have done so in the past.

Invest to save funding would be used to establish key posts working together to deliver against the objectives described in this paper.

***Role A: Strategic Commissioning Manager (Hay grade 1) experienced at developing sufficiency strategies and implementing innovative models of care provision for children and young people either directly or through block/spot contracts, A commissioner confident in negotiations internally***

*and externally including private sector providers and in ensuring individual contracts are robust and regularly reviewed for VFM. A post holder well versed in the commissioning of placements on a partnership basis. This individual should have experience of effective programme management.*

**Role B: A Social work team manager (grade 1)** able to work alongside allocated social work practitioners/reviewing officers to oversee existing placements and facilitate both amendments to existing contracts or the movement of young people to bespoke newly created local family-based placements. This role will play a lead role in enabling teams to better understand the link between finances and care (focusing on how to get the best value from each placement for the child and for the Trust). To advise commissioners on reshaping local foster provision to meet assessed need and contribute to development of overarching sufficiency and efficiency programmes. To have detailed oversight knowledge of care placements outside of the Council and alongside Post A to advise senior leaders and commissioners of the form of strategic activity necessary to ensure delivery against MTFP.

Both roles would spend equal time on the implementation of strategy as on the development of that strategy. Post A and B would be collocated together and work within commissioning function and whilst reporting to the Director of Resources they would be working on a matrix basis across the service alongside other key leaders particularly in operational services.

#### **4. The Proposed level of “invest to save” funding:**

The incumbent will be targeted to either reduce demand for high cost care, replace high cost care with lower cost alternatives and reduce the price that the Trust pays for care provision. It will focus in on external residential and external fostering provision.

Targets for the incumbent would include;

- reducing the cost of the top 10 external residential placements by 5% by considering specialist fostering provision, block contracts etc.
- stepping down 1 mother and baby residential placement to fostering
- reducing the average cost of external fostering by 5% by increasing adoption, internalization of service, reducing placement breakdowns (improving permanency)

Based on the assumption that seed investment from SMBC of £11,667 per month would begin in January 2022, the Trust would (if successful in delivering savings as demonstrated above) be generating in month savings in excess of this monthly investment figure by the end of 2022/23. The requirement is for 15 months of investment which will total £175,000. The role would continue to be funded albeit by the Trust from this point onwards via ongoing service cost reductions.

Should the Trust continue to deliver reduced costs in line with assumptions, the investment by SMBC would be **fully paid back by January 2024**. There would be flexibility within the model to pay back the investment over an extended timeframe should this become necessary however this proposed commercial dynamic both incentivizes the Trust to deliver cost led savings quickly and also reduces the investment risk to SMBC.

The Trust can not fully guarantee that the activity and savings can be fully delivered within the

timescales, given the nature of business and the fact that demand is not fully within the control of the Trust and there are a number of external dependencies.

## 5. Timescales for use

The proposals would require some lead in time to implement so it is therefore recommended that the funding is either provided as a single one-off funding or profiled across the following period which also shows the timing of proposed returns:

Timeline of investment	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Total
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
Investment by SMBC	(35,000)	(140,000)	0		(175,000)
Investment by Trust			(140,000)	(140,000)	(280,000)
Saving		93,354	269,431	411,823	774,608
<b>Net ROI</b>	<b>(35,000)</b>	<b>(46,646)</b>	<b>129,431</b>	<b>271,823</b>	<b>319,608</b>
<b>Cum ROI</b>	<b>(35,000)</b>	<b>(81,646)</b>	<b>47,785</b>	<b>319,608</b>	

January 2022 – SMBC investment of £11,667 a month commences  
 Q4 2022/23 – In month return on investment exceeds monthly investment value.  
 March 2023 – SMBC cumulative investment of £175,000 ceases  
 April 2023 – SCT begins to self-fund investment from generated demand led returns  
 January 2024 – payback of investment from project returns is complete  
 February 2024 onwards – SCT determine future of investment in role and also retain further savings generated

An example of how these savings could be delivered is detailed in **Appendix 1**.

How these savings link back to the MTFP assumptions is demonstrated in **Appendix 2**.

A draft timeline against key milestones that the investment would be tasked to achieve is as follows;

Action	Due by	Rationale
Finalise sufficiency strategy	Within 3 months	Sets out approach to providing secure, safe and appropriate accommodation to children in care and care leavers. The document identifies the key challenges faced in achieving sufficiency and sets out the strategic approach to overcoming them.
Work with Fostering Manager to increase in-house fostering placement availability	Within 6 months	Evidence shows that in-house improvement (sufficiency and savings) is possible. With the right focus on what foster carers value it should be possible to recruit and retain more carers.
Set up residential block contract	Within 12 months	Under a block contract, a provider is guaranteed a fixed payment for a number of beds whether they are used or not. Generally, this is at a lower price than would be paid if the beds were purchased on a spot purchase basis. The block contract would be to meet a full range of needs, including challenging

		behaviour, of Sandwell looked after children
Conclude first round of supplier negotiations	Within 12 months	Working collaboratively with suppliers to drive a positive outcome to contract renegotiation revisiting areas such as duration, delivery, management, solutions and cost.
Access capital funding for GAP homes initiative	Within 18 months	Aim is to fill the gap between residential care and independence, particularly for those young people that are at risk of exploitation or offer a positive exit pathway from residential for those young people whose placements are breaking down but still need significant support or don't do well in communal living/shared accommodation.
Conclude work with strategic partners re joint commissioning of placements	Within 18 months	Key enabler of integrated care provision. Joint commissioning means health, education and social care organisations collaborating and sharing responsibility for integrated care services and their outcomes. This can involve organisations working in partnership at all stages of the commissioning process, from the assessment of needs, to the planning and procuring of services, and the monitoring of outcomes.
Lead on recommissioning of WM fostering framework	Within 2 years	The current framework expires in March 2023. Sandwell Children's Trust took the lead on behalf of the region on a re-procurement exercise for a new framework in 2020. SCT should again look to take a lead role in the agreement of the framework renewal driving up quality, choice and value for money within the IFA environment.

Progress against operational and savings targets would be reported back on a monthly basis with an opportunity to monitor and review the investment after 12 months.

**6. Intended outcomes/impact of such funding:**

- Enhanced sufficiency strategy and greater confidence in market management
- MTFP targets for the care population exceeded
- Influence local market provision and value for money
- Reductions in unit costs for residential care
- Increases in local in-house fostering placements above MTFP targets
- More children and young people in local family and residential settings
- Better outcomes for children and young people
- Improved and efficient joint commissioning of placements with other partners
- Better matching of provision to requirements of YP
- Better risk management of care pathways
- Positive Ofsted inspection feedback

## 7. Monitoring/Reporting of Impact:

It is anticipated that within the Trust a new Project Board for Placement Sufficiency will be established chaired at a senior level with representation across service/partners and to which the officers identified above would specifically report.

Regular updates against progress against key targets/milestones on Placements within the context of wider MTFP will be provided to both the Operational and Strategic forums already established with the Council.

The Annual budget setting process will provide a further opportunity to monitor impact of Invest to Save funding.

## 8. Risk Analysis

Risk Description	Collective Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation through Invest to Save
<p>Lack of Availability of Sufficient Local Care Placements</p> <p>Local fostering service is not enhanced and fails to recruit more carers</p> <p>External care providers further increase fee levels</p> <p>Complexity of Care needs continues to increase</p>	Children placed at distance from Council	High	Medium
	Plans not progressed expediently	Medium/High	Medium
	Increased use of external placements	Medium/High	Medium
	Increased cost of placements	Medium/High	Low/Medium
	Non-delivery against Trust MTFP	Medium/High	Low/Medium
	Ofsted criticism	Medium/High	Low
	Reputational damage to Trust and Council	Medium/High	Low

## Appendix 1 – Monthly Analysis of Investment and Returns

	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021/22
Investment from SMBC				(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(35,000)
Investment from Trust							
<b>Total investment</b>				<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(35,000)</b>
Return							0
Residential							0
Mother and Baby Residential							0
Internal Foster Care							0
External Foster Care							0
Adoption Support							0
<b>Total return</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(35,000)</b>
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(23,333)</b>	<b>(35,000)</b>	<b>(35,000)</b>

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	2022/23
Investment from SMBC	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(140,000)
Investment from Trust													
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(140,000)</b>											
Return													
Residential	2,098	2,098	2,098	2,098	2,098	2,098	3,148	3,148	3,148	6,295	6,295	6,295	40,919
Mother and Baby Residential				4,004	4,004	4,004	4,004	4,004	4,004	4,004	4,004	4,004	36,036
Internal Foster Care													0
External Foster Care				1,640	1,640	1,640	1,640	1,640	1,640	2,186	2,186	2,186	16,398
Adoption Support													0
<b>Total return</b>	<b>2,098</b>	<b>2,098</b>	<b>2,098</b>	<b>7,742</b>	<b>7,742</b>	<b>7,742</b>	<b>8,791</b>	<b>8,791</b>	<b>8,791</b>	<b>12,486</b>	<b>12,486</b>	<b>12,486</b>	<b>93,354</b>
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>(9,568)</b>	<b>(9,568)</b>	<b>(9,568)</b>	<b>(3,924)</b>	<b>(3,924)</b>	<b>(3,924)</b>	<b>(2,875)</b>	<b>(2,875)</b>	<b>(2,875)</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>(46,646)</b>
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>(44,568)</b>	<b>(54,137)</b>	<b>(63,705)</b>	<b>(67,629)</b>	<b>(71,554)</b>	<b>(75,478)</b>	<b>(78,353)</b>	<b>(81,228)</b>	<b>(84,104)</b>	<b>(83,285)</b>	<b>(82,466)</b>	<b>(81,646)</b>	<b>(81,646)</b>

	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	2023/24
Investment from SMBC													0
Investment from Trust	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(140,000)
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(140,000)</b>											
Return													
Residential	8,394	8,394	8,394	10,072	10,072	10,072	12,591	12,591	12,591	16,787	16,787	16,787	143,532
Mother and Baby Residential	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	4,084	49,008
Internal Foster Care													0
External Foster Care	4,957	4,957	4,957	6,609	6,609	6,609	9,913	9,913	9,913	13,217	13,217	13,217	104,087
Adoption Support	(1,295)	(1,295)	(1,295)	(1,727)	(1,727)	(1,727)	(2,590)	(2,590)	(2,590)	(3,453)	(3,453)	(3,453)	(27,195)
<b>Total return</b>	<b>16,139</b>	<b>16,139</b>	<b>16,139</b>	<b>19,038</b>	<b>19,038</b>	<b>19,038</b>	<b>23,998</b>	<b>23,998</b>	<b>23,998</b>	<b>30,635</b>	<b>30,635</b>	<b>30,635</b>	<b>269,431</b>
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>4,473</b>	<b>4,473</b>	<b>4,473</b>	<b>7,372</b>	<b>7,372</b>	<b>7,372</b>	<b>12,331</b>	<b>12,331</b>	<b>12,331</b>	<b>18,969</b>	<b>18,969</b>	<b>18,969</b>	<b>129,431</b>
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>(77,174)</b>	<b>(72,701)</b>	<b>(68,229)</b>	<b>(60,857)</b>	<b>(53,485)</b>	<b>(46,114)</b>	<b>(33,783)</b>	<b>(21,452)</b>	<b>(9,121)</b>	<b>9,848</b>	<b>28,816</b>	<b>47,785</b>	<b>47,785</b>

	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	2024/25	Total
Investment from SMBC														(175,000)
Investment from Trust	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(11,667)	(140,000)	(280,000)
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>(11,667)</b>	<b>(140,000)</b>	<b>(455,000)</b>											
Return														
Residential	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	20,984	251,810	436,261
Mother and Baby Residential	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	4,165	49,980	135,024
Internal Foster Care	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(1,314)	(15,768)	(15,768)
External Foster Care	14,009	14,009	14,009	14,009	14,009	14,009	14,009	21,013	21,013	21,013	21,013	21,013	203,130	323,615
Adoption Support	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(5,284)	(63,408)	(90,603)
<b>Total return</b>	<b>32,560</b>	<b>39,565</b>	<b>39,565</b>	<b>39,565</b>	<b>39,565</b>	<b>39,565</b>	<b>425,744</b>	<b>788,529</b>						
<b>In month (cost) / return</b>	<b>20,893</b>	<b>27,898</b>	<b>27,898</b>	<b>27,898</b>	<b>27,898</b>	<b>27,898</b>	<b>285,744</b>	<b>333,529</b>						
<b>Cum (cost) / return</b>	<b>68,678</b>	<b>89,572</b>	<b>110,465</b>	<b>131,359</b>	<b>152,252</b>	<b>173,146</b>	<b>194,039</b>	<b>221,937</b>	<b>249,835</b>	<b>277,733</b>	<b>305,631</b>	<b>333,529</b>	<b>333,529</b>	<b>333,529</b>

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Contract for the Supply of Liquid Fuels – Appointment of Contractor
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Strong and Resilient Communities Councillor Crompton
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director of Borough Economy Nicholas Austin
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Corporate Procurement Services Neil Whitehouse – Procurement Officer  Environment Services Angela Harvey – Systems Information Manager

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to utilise Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) Framework 301\_20 to appoint Certas Energy UK Ltd to supply Liquid Fuels for the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2024 following the result of a procurement market review exercise undertaken in accordance with the Council’s Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules.
- 1.2 That in connection with 1 above, the Director, Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into an appropriate contract with Certas Energy Ltd.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations



- 2.1 The Council current contract is due to expire on 30 September 2021.
- 2.2 Participation in the ESPO Framework will enable the Council to continue to obtain Liquid Fuels at regional competitive rates based on the industry standard weekly lagged pricing model with supplier delivery margins fixed for the duration of the Contract.
- 2.3 The nominated contractor on the ESPO Framework for the West Midlands region is Certas Energy Ltd who are also the supplier on the current contract so there will be a seamless transfer across ensuring delivery lead times will be maintained and delivery site familiarity.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell</p> <p>The securing of a continuous contractual source of supply of bulk tanker delivered road fuels will ensure the Council's Vehicle Fleet is available to support the provision of all Council services</p>
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### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Council has an ongoing requirement for the supply of bulk tanker deliveries of Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel to the depots at Taylors Lane, Oldbury and Waterfall Lane, Cradley Heath.
- 4.2 There is also a requirement for Heating Oil to be purchased for a range of sites including Sandwell Park Farm, Redhouse Park, West Smethwick Park, Tanhouse Centre as well as the out of Borough Residential Centres.
- 4.2 Historically, the Council has undertaken a tendering exercise for these requirements in conjunction with Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. However, Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) have established a Framework Agreement (301\_20) covering the West Midlands region that has equally favourable pricing. Following discussion with these Councils, it was agreed that each Local Authority would seek approval to participate in this Framework.



4.4 It is proposed that participation in the ESPO Framework will be for the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2024 and based on current levels of expenditure will have a value of £750,000.

## 5 Alternative Options

5.1 One alternative option would be to undertake a tendering exercise on behalf of the Council in isolation or in conjunction with the other Black Country Boroughs. However, the levels of consumption would not be sufficient to improve of the pricing that can be obtained by participating in the ESPO Framework.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Based on current levels of expenditure, the estimated value of the contract for the Supply of Liquid Fuels over the proposed three-year period is £750,000. Funding will be drawn from existing service level budget provision.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The use of the ESPO Frameworks is in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Procurement & Contract Procedure Rules.
<b>Social Value</b>	When establishing the Framework, ESPO tested the suppliers' abilities to provide social value in line with the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None



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## Report to Cabinet

1 September 2021

<b>Subject:</b>	Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Millard, Cabinet Member for Connected and Accessible Sandwell
<b>Director:</b>	Tammy Stokes, Interim Director Regeneration and Growth
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Transportation Planning Officer, Oliver Ford, oliver_ford@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Strategy and Implementation Plan as set out in Appendix A.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The UK government has committed to banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030. The resultant societal shift from petrol and diesel, internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to ULEVs will require widespread support from local authorities. It is projected that there will be an additional 42,500 ULEVs within the Black Country by 2025. The Black Country ULEV strategy sets out a framework for how Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) can support this transition. Failure to support the transition would result in the borough and Black Country being left behind.



- 2.2 Adoption of the strategy would support reductions in air pollution. The whole of Sandwell has been a designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) since 2005, because of lower than average air quality across the borough. This low air quality has resulted in increased prevalence of heart and lung disease. Adoption of the strategy would support a transition away from (ICE) vehicles (the prime contributors to poor air quality) to cleaner electric ULEVs. It is forecast that a transition based on a 2030 ICE ban would, by 2025, result in a 12% reduction of transport Nitrous Dioxide (NOx) emissions and a 36.6% reduction in transport Particulate Matter (PM) emissions across the borough. By 2040 these reductions are forecast to be 83.4% and 90.1% respectively.
- 2.3 Adoption of the strategy would support emissions reduction. Following the UK Government's legislative commitment to the country reaching net-zero Carbon Dioxide (CO2) emissions by 2050, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has committed to the metropolitan area reaching net zero by 2041, a target which has been matched by SMBC for the borough. Transport is the biggest contributor to CO2 emissions nationally, regionally and locally (it is estimated that transport accounts for 38% of all emissions within Sandwell). It is forecast that a transition to ULEVs based on a 2030 ICE ban would result in a 4% decrease in transport CO2 emissions by 2025. This transition and resultant decrease in transport CO2 emissions would contribute to Sandwell meeting its own, regional and national emission reduction targets.
- 2.4. Adoption of the strategy will enable the council to use the document as a central plank for ULEV charging infrastructure bids such as the On-Street Residential Charging Scheme.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well - Transitioning to ULEVs from ICE vehicles will dramatically improve air quality throughout the borough, lessening residents' exposure to air pollution and consequent lung and cardiovascular conditions. It is forecast that within Sandwell, a 2030 ban on the sale of ICE vehicles, supported by the Black Country ULEV strategy, would reduce NOx emissions by 12% over the next five years and 83.4% over the next fifteen years. Similarly, it is forecast that PM emissions would be reduced by 37% by 2025 and 90.1% by 2040.</p>
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A connected and accessible Sandwell - The UK government has announced that the sale of all new ICE cars will be banned from 2030. Whilst modal shift away from private car use in an urban context continues to be the primary goal of local, regional and national policy, the private car remains central in providing mobility for Sandwell residents. A supported transition away from ICE cars to ULEVs, ensures that Sandwell residents will continue to have access to a range of modes, including the private car.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

### 4.1 Background:

In February 2020, Black Country Local Authorities partnered to commission Cenex to develop an evidenced ULEV Strategy, Vision and Implementation Plan, to aid in the acceleration of ULEV uptake. the objectives of the study were to:

- Build upon the existing Transport for West Midlands ULEV Strategy Report.
- Baseline the current Black Country situation;
- Develop and analyse scenarios projecting the number of ULEVs, infrastructure, energy demand and grid capacity constraints;
- Calculate the benefits associated with these scenarios;
- Create and agree a five-year ULEV vision; and
- Outline an implementation plan to deliver the vision.

The overarching vision statement is “The Black Country will lead the West Midlands on the road to net-zero by accelerating and amplifying the EV transition in anticipation of a 2035 ban on the sale of conventional vehicles”. The strategy, was approved by a leaders’ meeting of The Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) in February 2021.

### 4.2 Strategic Context:

Following the 2015 Paris agreement, in October 2017 the UK Government published the Clean Growth Strategy setting out an overarching ambition for all industrial growth in the UK to be clean, as well as reduced the nation’s reliance on fossil fuels. In July 2018, the UK Government published the Road to Zero Strategy, which states that no new conventional petrol or diesel engines will be sold from 2040 onwards. In June 2019, the 2008 Climate Change Act was amended to



legally bind the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to ‘net zero’ by 2050.

In July 2019, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) committed to setting a ‘net zero’ emissions target by 2041, with a climate action plan being approved by the WMCA board in January 2020. The WMCA Board further approved a regional ULEV strategy, in February 2020. The Black Country ULEV strategy sits under this regional document. Whilst the WMCA ULEV Strategy focusses on sharing best practice, co-ordination and possible joint delivery of a large-scale network of rapid charging ‘hubs’, the Black Country ULEV strategy takes a more granular approach, focussing on the specifics of each authority and offering a framework for the delivery of infrastructure on the ground.

#### 4.3 Key Findings:

As shown in Table 1, Sandwell, The Black Country and the West Midlands all lag behind the rest of the country when it comes to adoption of ULEVs. This is reflected in the availability of charging infrastructure across the Black Country, with around 80% of the sub-region further than one km from the nearest publicly available charge point. However, relative to median wage, all four Black Country authorities sit on or above the trend for ULEV adoption, indicating higher uptake than might be expected given the average wage across each of the four authorities.

**Table 1. National, regional and local ULEV Adoption Rates**

	Percent of cars which are ULEV
UK	0.47%
West Midlands	0.35%
Sandwell	0.20%
Dudley	0.23%
Wolverhampton	0.19%
Walsall	0.17%

The Black Country ULEV Strategy outlines the key consequences of a 2030 ban on the sale of ICE cars. These are summarised in the table below.



**Table 2. Outcomes of a 2030 Ban on the Sale of ICE Cars**

	<b>Sandwell 2025</b>	<b>Black Country 2025</b>	<b>Sandwell 2040</b>	<b>Black Country 2040</b>
Proportion of ULEVs (as approx. percentage of entire private vehicle fleet)	Note: This data has not been forecast at an individual borough level.	<b>10%</b>	Note: This data has not been forecast at an individual borough level	<b>80%</b>
Required increase in Public ULEV Charging Infrastructure (number of sockets)	7kW (Standard): 175 22kW (Fast): 49 50 kW (Rapid): 6 150kW (Ultra Rapid): 1	7kW (Standard): 761 22kW (Fast): 214 50 kW (Rapid): 15 150kW (Ultra Rapid): 14	Note: This has not been forecast as the longer term outlook is too uncertain to make a reasonable forecast.	Note: This has not been forecast as the longer term outlook is too uncertain to make a reasonable forecast.
Reduction in Carbon emissions	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>68.4%</b>	<b>67.8%</b>
Air Pollution – Reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide Emissions	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>	<b>83.4%</b>	<b>84.0%</b>
Air Pollution – Reduction in Particulate Emissions	<b>36.6%</b>	<b>36.8%</b>	<b>90.1%</b>	<b>90.4%</b>

**Note: CO2, NOx and PM figures given as reduction vs. 2019 baseline**

#### 4.4 Key Recommendations:

To meet the demand and achieve the benefits outlined above, the Black Country ULEV strategy makes several key recommendations as priorities for action by local authorities and Black Country Transport. These are outlined below:

- Installation of an additional 761 standard (7kW) and 229 fast (22-50kW) charging sockets across the Black Country by 2025;
- Use planning policy to deploy charge points at retail and business car parks;
- Procure ULEVs only for all new council cars and vans;
- Require most taxi and private hire vehicles to switch to ULEV;



- Equip all council offices, depots, car parks and sports facilities with charge points;
- Deploy measures to slow the growth of private car ownership in Sandwell
- Establish a programme to inform and encourage the public and businesses
- Coordinate with TfWM to support installation of additional rapid and ultra-rapid chargers;
- Publish a local public transport decarbonisation action plan.
- Make EVs a scored variable within road passenger transport contract tenders, so that all newly licenced Taxi/Private Hire vehicles are ULEVs within five years;
- Engage with local training providers to ensure that the local labour market is equipped to install and maintain any eventual Black Country charge point network;
- Commission a wider study to examine the ways in which journeys and the private vehicle fleet can be managed by the Black Country Authorities;
- Appoint one full time or full time equivalent officer of a management level to manage the procurement and operation of EV charging infrastructure across the Black Country.

#### 4.5 Consultation:

Following the strategy's completion and approval in principle by ABCA, the strategy went out to public consultation. The consultation ran from Monday 10th August 2020 to Friday 9th October 2020. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the consultation was carried out online, with a readout service being available to any respondents who were not able to access the consultation themselves.

The consultation was primarily promoted via the council's social media channels by the corporate communications team. Overall, the consultation received 851 responses, with 192 (23%) of these being from Sandwell residents. Key findings are outlined below:

- When asked 'do you think the Black Country ULEV Strategy does enough to support EVs across the Black Country', the results were evenly split (33% each) between 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know'.



- A clear majority (61%) of respondents stated that they were considering purchasing an electric vehicle by 2025.;
- When asked about specific policy measures to support ULEV adoption, consultees responded as follows:

**Table 3. Consultee Support for ULEV policies**

Measure	Appropriate	Not Ambitious Enough	Too Ambitious	Don't Know
500 Public charge points to be installed across the Black Country by 2025	43%	38%	14%	4%
All new taxi licenses to be granted to electric vehicles only by 2023	54%	10%	29%	8%
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>	
Should it be a planning condition for developers to install chargepoints in all new residential and commercial developments	90%	7%	3%	
Should Councils set targets for electric public transport vehicles to improve air quality in urban centres	87%	9%	4%	

**Note: Consultation was carried out before The Department for Transport announced a tighter deadline of 2030 for a ban on the sale of ICE cars, hence lower infrastructure targets outlined in table.**



The respondents demonstrated a clear consensus in favour of increased ULEV up-take, and local authority action to support this. Most criticism of the strategy centred on the theme that the strategy did not go far enough. In response to this, an updated strategy was taken to ABCA Leaders meeting in February 2021, with more ambitious infrastructure targets taking into account the new 2030 ban date.

The responses demonstrated very high levels of support for increasing public charging opportunities, electrifying public sector fleets and planning requirements for the installation of charging infrastructure.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The 2030 ban on the sale of ICE cars would remain in place at a national level regardless of the formal adoption or not of local ULEV strategies.

Not adopting the strategy at a local level would decrease local 'buy in', increasing the likelihood of Sandwell and the Black Country continuing to lag behind the rest of the UK in terms of ULEV adoption and its consequent carbon emission and air pollution reductions.

## 6 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>There are no direct financial consequences arising from the adoption of the strategy as the strategy only makes recommendations rather than commitments. However, the strategy does recommend identifying £2.5m of capital investment up to 2025 to deliver the ULEV charging infrastructure targets outlined above. Adopting the strategy does not however commit SMBC to funding this investment itself, particularly given that there are several funding schemes and ownership models which would mitigate the direct cost to the council.</p> <p>Details of any capital investment in ULEV charging infrastructure, along with assessment of the proposed ownership model and associated revenue impacts would be submitted for separate consideration by cabinet.</p> <p>The strategy also recommends appointment of a full time (or equivalent) management level officer to manage the procurement and operation of EV charging infrastructure across the Black Country.</p>
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	<p>Adoption of the strategy does not commit the council to funding this post. Following adoption, officers would identify ways this post could be funded, with the cost shared between the four Black Country authorities.</p> <p>Implementation of the strategy will require significant amounts of officer time. An indicative outline of officer time requirements is given on pg. 85 (Table 30) of the strategy. In the short to medium term it is likely that implementation of the strategy will require at least one full time equivalent from each of the four authorities, based on work on the ULEV agenda up to this point. This would be a new resource ask and work is ongoing at a Black Country level to identify potential sources for funding.</p>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	There are no direct legal or governance implications arising from adoption of the strategy. Any legal or governance considerations arising from the procurement or operation of public charging infrastructure by the council would be submitted for separate consideration by cabinet.
<b>Risk:</b>	There are no direct risk implications arising from adoption of the strategy. Any risk considerations arising from the procurement or operation of public charging infrastructure by the council would be submitted for separate consideration by cabinet.
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>This strategy primarily identifies measures which will support car owners in the borough. Sandwell has a lower than average car ownership level compared to the national average. 44% of the borough's households do not own a car, compared to 20% nationally<sup>1</sup>. Households which do not own cars are more likely to have a lower than average median income.</p> <p>However, the benefits associated with improvement in air quality and carbon emissions reduction will be felt by all residents. More deprived areas are more likely to suffer from air pollution and therefore benefit from a transition to ULEVs.</p> <p>The Black Country ULEV Strategy identifies areas which are 'most suitable' for installation of public on-street residential charging infrastructure (fig. 17, pg. 34). As part of this assessment, Cenex took into consideration several factors</p>

<sup>1</sup> RAC Foundation, Car Ownership Rate in England and Wales, 2012



	<p>including: lack of access to a driveway (most importantly), car ownership and median income. Areas with a higher than average income were more likely to be assessed as more suitable for installation of infrastructure because, given the cost ULEVs, those with higher incomes are more likely to be early adopters.</p> <p>To mitigate this, Sandwell officers asked Cenex to also assess areas with the median income factor being discounted. The resultant findings were not fundamentally different to the original, as the most important factor was lack of access to a driveway (in general those living without access to off street parking have lower incomes than those with driveways anyway).</p> <p>When identifying sites for the installation of infrastructure, officers will not solely be guided by the mapping produced by Cenex and will ensure an equitable coverage across the entire borough balancing all relevant factors when assessing locations for charging infrastructure.</p>
<p><b>Health and Wellbeing:</b></p>	<p>As stated at the start of the report, improvement in air quality is one of the primary reasons for the formation of the strategy. Adoption of the strategy would support reductions in air pollution. The whole of Sandwell has been a designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) since 2005, because of lower than average air quality across the borough. This low air quality has resulted in increased prevalence of heart and lung disease. Adoption of the strategy would support a transition away from ICE vehicles (the prime contributors to poor air quality) to cleaner ULEVs.</p> <p>It is forecast that a transition based on a 2030 ICE band would, by 2025, result in a 12% reduction of transport Nitrous Dioxide (NOx) emissions and a 36.6% reduction in transport Particulate Matter (PM) emissions across the borough. By 2040 these reductions are forecast to be 83.4% and 90.1% respectively.</p>
<p><b>Social Value</b></p>	<p>The scale of growth required in the Black Country charging network will generate additional demand for skilled labour, likely focussing on the civil and electrical engineering disciplines. These skills will be in demand to install, maintain, repair and replace EV charging infrastructure. At a national</p>



level, potentially millions of EV charge points will need installation and maintenance in the UK, so local recruitment will have considerable advantages in reducing the time and cost needed to provide an ongoing service that meets the needs of customers.

Unlike other newly emerging industries, such as software and web development, the fundamental engineering skills required to install and maintain EV charging infrastructure have been practised by electricians for decades. The education and training infrastructure is therefore well developed and highly accessible to individuals from all backgrounds.

Engaging with local training providers would maximise the local skills and employment development opportunities presented by the expansion of the EV charging infrastructure network. With a local labour market rich in electrical and civil engineering skills, the growth of the EV infrastructure network can serve to create long-term skilled labour.

## 7. Appendices

A – Black County ULEV Strategy.

B – Update of forecast based on 2030 ban.



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## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Q1 Budget Monitoring 2021/22
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Crompton – Cabinet Member for Finance, Council Sustainability and Transformation
<b>Director:</b>	Simone Hines - Director of Finance
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Charlie Davey – Business Partner (Finance) <a href="mailto:charles_davey@sandwell.gov.uk">charles_davey@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations

#### That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Receive the financial monitoring for individual directorates as at 30 June 2021 (Quarter 1 2021/22) and refer them to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment.
- 1.2 Note the projected financial position; services are projecting an over spend of £4.621m against allocated budgets and an underspend of £6.185m after adjusting for the movement on reserves, use of corporate resources and the application of centrally held Covid-19 grant funding.
- 1.3 Approve the following budget virements above the higher of £0.25m or 1% of the Gross Budget of the service area:



Virements above £0.250m or 1% of Gross Budget for approval by Cabinet	£'000	£'000
<u>Public Health</u>		
Communicable Disease - Test & Trace Grant carry forward		(1,142)
Grant funded expenditure for Test & Trace	1,142	
Communicable Disease Community Lateral Flow Testing grant		(279)
Grant funded expenditure for Lateral Flow Testing	279	
Long Term Conditions In year PHE award for Adult Weight Management.		(321)
Grant funded expenditure for Adult Weight Management Services	321	
Substance Misuse & Smoking - In year PHE award for Drug Treatment Crime and Harm reduction.		(407)
Grant funded expenditure for Drug Treatment Crime & Harm reduction.	407	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>(2,149)</b>

1.4 Approve an allocation of £514,083 to Sandwell Children’s Trust to fund Covid-19 pressures. This payment is not currently reflected in the projections within the Children’s Services monitoring (Appendix 1F).

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act requires the Chief Financial Officer to ensure the proper administration of the council’s financial affairs. Budgetary control, which includes the regular monitoring and reporting of budgets is an essential element in discharging this statutory responsibility.

## 3. How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Council’s financial status helps to underpin the Council’s Corporate Plan and the associated aspirations.</p>
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## 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Services are projecting an over spend of £4.621m against allocated budgets however, after adjusting for reserves, corporate resources, RCCO and the application of centrally held Covid-19 grant funding the adjusted projected outturn is an under spend of £6.185m.



This projected outturn is summarised in the following table, a more detailed analysis is provided in Appendices 1 to 1G and the reasons for significant variances from budget are outlined in the following narrative.

Area	Appendix	Total Budget £'000	Projected Variance from Budget £'000	(Use of) Reserves / Corporate Resources & RCCO £'000	Corporate Funding of Covid Pressures £'000	Projected Variance £'000
Corporate Management	1A	(246)	0	0	0	0
Resources	1B	19,569	2,481	(1,110)	(3,671)	(2,300)
Adult Social Care	1C	91,844	(2,058)	(1,529)	(1,118)	(4,705)
Regeneration & Growth	1D	25,741	638	(245)	(670)	(277)
Housing & Communities	1E	18,748	1,424	(122)	(824)	478
Children's Services	1F	86,156	1,764	(56)	(1,216)	492
<b>Net Service Expenditure (ex PH)</b>		<b>241,812</b>	<b>4,249</b>	<b>(3,062)</b>	<b>(7,499)</b>	<b>(6,312)</b>
Public Health	1G	300	372	(134)	(111)	127
<b>Total Net Service Expenditure</b>		<b>242,112</b>	<b>4,621</b>	<b>(3,196)</b>	<b>(7,610)</b>	<b>(6,185)</b>

## Reasons for the Variances from Budget

### 4.2 Overview

Services are continuing to experience the financial impact of Covid, most significantly a loss of income due to suspended or significantly reduced services. Pressures of £7.610m are expected to be managed through the centrally held Covid funding which is from the unused balance of grants received in 2020/21 and additional grants received or anticipated for part of 2021/22.

In addition to the Covid related issues, services are reporting a number of significant ongoing operational pressures which will need to be incorporated into the next refresh of the corporate medium term financial strategy; these issues are highlighted within the relevant directorate narrative.

### 4.3 Resources - £2.481m over spend

There have been Covid related impacts upon most areas including:

- Delays in completing the Oracle Fusion project
- Additional cost of elections
- Loss of income and additional costs within Registration Services
- Loss of income from traded activity within Legal Services



- Under spends associated with vacancies and the impact of remote working.

The financial implications of the above issues are expected to be funded from previously established earmarked reserves and the Covid Emergency Grant, the adjusted projected outturn is an under spend of £2.300m.

#### 4.4 **Adult Social Care - £2.058m under spend**

There have been continued Covid related restrictions on service delivery and when combined with the excessive deaths during 2020/21 the number of supported clients, whilst growing, remains below historic levels. To support faster hospital discharges the service has continued to receive NHS funding for the cost of the first 6 weeks of post discharge care. The prioritisation of faster discharges has significantly increased the average cost of care, an issue which could be managed given the additional NHS funding stream however, this is now tapering to 4 weeks of support and will cease from September presenting a financial risk to Adult Social Care budgets.

After the use of the Better Care Fund reserve and Covid Grant funding for loss of income (taxi licencing) and support to the external care market, the adjusted projected outturn is an under spend of £4.705m.

#### 4.5 **Regeneration & Growth - £0.638m over spend**

The most significant projected variance is Covid related; a £0.500m shortfall in income from Car Parking; a pressure which is expected to continue as home working becomes the new norm.

Operationally there are pressures related to the Property Maintenance Account and priority highway maintenance works although these are largely offset by under spends against staffing budgets.

After the use of corporate resources and Covid grant funding, the adjusted projected outturn is an under spend of £0.277m.

#### 4.6 **Housing & Communities - £1.424m over spend**

The service has experienced a significant Covid related reduction in income, particularly within Tourism, Culture and Leisure however this is expected to be funded from the central Covid grants. A number of



proposals to deliver 2020/21 budget savings were not implemented and the current projections anticipate that they will remain outstanding throughout 2021/22 while management address service restart issues. Operationally the most significant issue is an anticipated reduction in income generated from grounds maintenance activities which is not eligible for Covid grant support. After the use of earmarked reserves and the application of Covid grant funding the adjusted outturn projection is an over spend of £0.478m.

#### 4.7 **Children's Services - £1.764m over spend**

The projected variance from budget is predominantly due to the loss of income from residential centres and the cost of holiday alternatives to free school meals which will be funded from the Covid grant. However, the projected outturn variance also includes a £0.800m over spend against SEN Transport budgets. Despite a significant increase (+£3.1m) to the 2021/22 budget the cost of existing demand (850 pupils) is projected to exceed budget. Additional demand from September and delays in using the planned Dynamic Purchasing System Framework from that date will potentially increase the over spend in this area. After the application of corporate resources and Covid grant funding the adjusted outturn projection is an over spend of £0.492m.

#### 4.8 **Public Health - £0.372m over spend**

Public Health services are funded from a ring-fenced grant of £25.1m and previous under spends against the grant are held within a reserve, which is subject to the same ring-fence restrictions. After the use of specific reserves and Covid grant funding, the adjusted outturn projection is an over spend of £0.127m which is planned to be funded from the ring-fenced PH Reserve.

#### **Central Items**

4.9 The council has a number of centrally held budgets. The nature of these is such that they are not within a specific directorate's control.



The projected variance from budgets is an over spend of £12.682m, however after adjusting for the use of reserves, corporate resources and Covid funding the adjusted position is an under spend of £2.485m which predominantly relates to an under spend within the Waste Partnership of £2.371m. Further detail of the Central Items is provided in **Appendix 2**.

#### 4.10 **Individual Schools Budgets**

The Dedicated Schools Grant allocation is expected to generate an under spend of £0.343m arising from staffing vacancies. Further details are provided within **Appendix 3**.

#### **Use of Reserves**

4.11 At the end of 2020/21 £98.421m was held in earmarked reserves and it is projected that £22.578m will be used during the year, most significantly £20.245m of Covid Emergency Funding. The year-end balance of earmarked reserves is projected to be £75.843m and further detail is provided in **Appendix 4**.

#### 4.12 **Additional Grants**

Details of new grants received or announced during Quarter 1 are provided in **Appendix 5**. This represents additional resources of £23.547m, most significantly £12.955m of Covid Restart Grant to provide grant support to eligible businesses.

#### **Capital**

4.13 Expenditure on the council's capital programme is projected to be £178.51m for 2021/22 and an overview of the programme is provided within **Appendix 6**.

During Quarter 1 there have been a number of significant updates to the 2021/22 programme:

- A £2m increase in the Regeneration & Growth budget, mainly in respect of additional funding from earmarked balances to support the refurbishment of the Sandwell Council House at Oldbury.
- An increase of £1.684m in the Children's budget to reflect the use of Basic Need resources to continue various school improvement schemes.
- A decrease of £13m in the HRA budget which reflects reprofiling between financial years for High Rise Refurbishment (£6m), New Build projects (£5m) and ECO projects (£2m).



#### 4.14 **Section 106 / Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

Section 106 funds are contributions paid by developers towards the cost of providing community and social infrastructure, but they must be used for specific purposes. The council currently holds £2.520m of S106 funds and the forecast spend for 2021/22 is £0.181m leaving a projected balance of £2.339m at March 2022.

The Community Infrastructure Levy is a charge that local authorities can set on new developments to raise funds for infrastructure, facilities and services to support new homes and businesses in the area. The council holds £2.031m of capital CIL resources and no spend is projected for 2021/22.

Further details of the S106 and CIL resources are provided in **Appendix 7**.

#### 4.15 **Budget Adjustments (virements)**

In addition to the virements which Cabinet are asked to approve within recommendation 1.3 there have been smaller value budget adjustments which can be approved by Chief Officers. Details of all virements are provided in **Appendix 8**.

#### 4.16 **Performance Indicators**

Details of performance indicators related to income collection and the timeliness of creditor payments are provided in **Appendix 9**.

### 5 **Alternative Options**

5.1 There are limited decisions within the recommendations, Cabinet could vary the proposed transfer of Covid funding to the Sandwell Children's Trust or the requested virements within Public Health which reflect increases in the available resources since the 2021/22 budgets were approved.



## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Resource implications are contained within the main body of the report.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
<b>Risk:</b>	This information is contained within the main body of this report.
<b>Equality:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
<b>Social Value</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.

## 7. Appendices

- 1** Summary Outturn Projection
- 1A** Corporate Management
- 1B** Resources
- 1C** Adult Social Care
- 1D** Regeneration & Growth
- 1E** Housing & Communities
- 1F** Children's Services
- 1G** Public Health
- 1H** Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- 2** Central Items
- 3** Individual Schools Budgets (ISB)
- 4** Reserves
- 5** New Grants
- 6** Capital
- 7** S106 / CIL
- 8** Virements
- 9** Performance Indicators

## 8. Background Papers

None



2021/22 Revenue Monitoring Summary									Appendix 1
Area	Appendix	Annual Target Budget	BFwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance from Budget	(Use of) Reserves / Corporate Resources & RCCO	Corporate Funding of Covid Pressures	Projected Variance
		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Corporate Management	1A	(246)	0	(246)	(246)	0	0	0	0
Resources	1B	18,640	929	19,569	22,050	2,481	(1,110)	(3,671)	(2,300)
Adult Social Care	1C	87,116	4,728	91,844	89,786	(2,058)	(1,529)	(1,118)	(4,705)
Regeneration & Growth	1D	25,741	0	25,741	26,379	638	(245)	(670)	(277)
Housing & Communities	1E	18,656	92	18,748	20,172	1,424	(122)	(824)	478
Children's Services	1F	86,156	0	86,156	87,920	1,764	(56)	(1,216)	492
<b>Net Service Expenditure (ex PH)</b>		<b>236,063</b>	<b>5,749</b>	<b>241,812</b>	<b>246,061</b>	<b>4,249</b>	<b>(3,062)</b>	<b>(7,499)</b>	<b>(6,312)</b>
Public Health	1G	300	0	300	672	372	(134)	(111)	127
<b>Total Net Service Expenditure</b>		<b>236,363</b>	<b>5,749</b>	<b>242,112</b>	<b>246,733</b>	<b>4,621</b>	<b>(3,196)</b>	<b>(7,610)</b>	<b>(6,185)</b>
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	1H	(29,300)	0	(29,300)	(30,667)	(1,367)	750	0	(617)
Central Items	2	(5,595)	0	(5,595)	12,682	18,277	(20,001)	(761)	(2,485)
Individual Schools Budgets (ISB)	3	0	0	0	(343)	(343)	0		(343)
<b>Total Net Expenditure</b>		<b>201,468</b>	<b>5,749</b>	<b>207,217</b>	<b>228,405</b>	<b>21,188</b>	<b>(22,447)</b>	<b>(8,371)</b>	<b>(9,630)</b>

Coporate Management						APPENDIX 1A		
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Chief Executive	284	0	284	284	0	0	0	0
Corporate Management	(530)	0	(530)	(530)	0	0	0	0
			0		0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(246)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(246)</b>	<b>(246)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Directorate - Resources						APPENDIX 1B		
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Directorate	423		423	284	(139)	0	0	(139)
Communications and Service Improvement	1,272	35	1,307	1,190	(117)	0	(55)	(172)
Finance	4,021	20	4,041	5,216	1,175	(669)	(649)	(143)
Revenues and Benefits and ICT	8,295	732	9,027	9,174	147	0	(1,376)	(1,229)
Law and Governance	1,522	60	1,582	2,804	1,222	(273)	(1,328)	(379)
Human Resources	3,107	82	3,189	3,382	193	(168)	(263)	(238)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,640</b>	<b>929</b>	<b>19,569</b>	<b>22,050</b>	<b>2,481</b>	<b>(1,110)</b>	<b>(3,671)</b>	<b>(2,300)</b>

Adult Social Care							APPENDIX 1C		
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Management Team	(1,881)	4,648	2,767	2,339	(428)	0	(626)	(1,054)	
Business Management	3,952	0	3,952	3,664	(288)	0	0	(288)	
Social Work & Therapy	5,855	0	5,855	5,051	(804)	0	0	(804)	
External Placements	64,612	0	64,612	62,733	(1,879)	0	(61)	(1,940)	
Integrated Hub	477	0	477	593	116	0	0	116	
Direct Services	6,453	0	6,453	6,250	(203)	0	0	(203)	
Commissioning	4,213	80	4,293	3,979	(314)	0	0	(314)	
Better Care Fund	0	0	0	1,529	1,529	(1,529)	0	0	
Regulated Services & Transformation	3,435	0	3,435	3,648	213	0	(431)	(218)	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87,116</b>	<b>4,728</b>	<b>91,844</b>	<b>89,786</b>	<b>(2,058)</b>	<b>(1,529)</b>	<b>(1,118)</b>	<b>(4,705)</b>	

Regeneration & Growth								Appendix 1D
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Growth and Spatial Planning Service	2,149	0	2,149	2,240	91	(245)	0	(154)
Development Planning and Building	507	0	507	699	192	0	0	192
Strategic Assets and Land Service	7,165	0	7,165	7,292	127	0	(170)	(43)
Highways Services	15,250	0	15,250	15,750	500	0	(500)	0
Management	670	0	670	398	(272)	0	0	(272)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25,741</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25,741</b>	<b>26,379</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>(245)</b>	<b>(670)</b>	<b>(277)</b>

Housing & Communities								Appendix 1E
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance (£000)
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Housing Management	2,740		2,740	3,088	348	(122)	(50)	176
Tourism, Culture & Leisure	10,407		10,407	10,858	451	0	(507)	(56)
Commercial Services	4,136		4,136	4,755	619	0	(130)	489
Business Excellence	1,373	92	1,465	1,471	6	0	(137)	(131)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,656</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>18,748</b>	<b>20,172</b>	<b>1,424</b>	<b>(122)</b>	<b>(824)</b>	<b>478</b>

Childrens Services								APPENDIX 1F
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance (£000)
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Director of Education & Employment	9,379	0	9,379	9,160	(219)	(56)	0	(275)
Education Support Services	1,864	0	1,864	2,714	850	0	(832)	18
Learning Improvement	3,288	0	3,288	3,367	79	0	(60)	19
Inclusive Learning	6,384	0	6,384	7,154	770	0	0	770
Director of Children's Services	6,692	0	6,692	6,976	284	0	(324)	(40)
Sandwell Children's Trust	58,549	0	58,549	58,549	0	0	0	0
Children's Social Care	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>86,156</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>86,156</b>	<b>87,920</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>(56)</b>	<b>(1,216)</b>	<b>492</b>

Public Health						APPENDIX 1G		
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Communicable Disease	3,220		3,220	3,220	0	0	(111)	(111)
Long Term Conditions	2,370		2,370	2,177	(193)	0	0	(193)
Childrens	10,055		10,055	10,185	130	0	0	130
Substance Misuse & Smoking	3,570		3,570	3,570	0	0	0	0
Wider Determinants	4,142		4,142	4,282	140	0	0	140
Public Health Management	2,275		2,275	2,349	74	0	0	74
Public Health Grant	(25,111)		(25,111)	(25,111)	0	(134)	0	(134)
Public Health Savings Target	(222)		(222)	0	222	0	0	222
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>(134)</b>	<b>(111)</b>	<b>127</b>

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)						APPENDIX 1H		
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Asset Management & Maintenance	39,031		<b>39,031</b>	39,031	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
Business Excellence	3,357		<b>3,357</b>	3,284	<b>(73)</b>	0	0	<b>(73)</b>
Commercial Services	4,374		<b>4,374</b>	4,405	<b>31</b>	0	0	<b>31</b>
Corporate HRA	19,776		<b>19,776</b>	19,958	<b>182</b>	0	0	<b>182</b>
Housing Management	12,205		<b>12,205</b>	11,448	<b>(757)</b>	0	0	<b>(757)</b>
PFI	<b>(471)</b>		<b>(471)</b>	<b>(1,221)</b>	<b>(750)</b>	750	0	<b>0</b>
Rents & Other Charges	<b>(115,007)</b>		<b>(115,007)</b>	<b>(115,007)</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
SLA's	7,435		<b>7,435</b>	7,435	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
			<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(29,300)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(29,300)</b>	<b>(30,667)</b>	<b>(1,367)</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(617)</b>

Area	Annual Target Budget	BFwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves / Corporate Resources & RCCO	Corporate Funding of Covid Pressures	Projected Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b><u>Housing &amp; Communities</u></b>								
Waste Partnership	29,489	0	29,489	27,118	(2,371)	0	0	(2,371)
<b><u>Children's Services</u></b>								
BSF Central Item	400	0	400	400	0	0	0	0
<b><u>Resources</u></b>								
Local Authority Subscriptions	104	0	104	119	15	0	0	15
Wolverhampton: WMCC and WMRE	45	0	45	45	0	0	0	0
Combined Authority	1,373	0	1,373	1,373	0	0	0	0
External Audit Fee	144	0	144	282	138	0	0	138
New Homes Bonus Grant	(1,254)	0	(1,254)	(1,254)	0	0	0	0
No Recourse to Public Funds	531	0	531	712	181	0	0	181
Business Rates Compensation Grant	(49,948)	0	(49,948)	(50,332)	(384)	384	0	0
Corporate Projects	1,000	0	1,000	1,000	0	0	0	0
Insurance	(395)	0	(395)	(395)	0	0	0	0
Bank Charges	335	0	335	335	0	0	0	0
Airport Rent Income	(100)	0	(100)	(100)	0	0	0	0
Apprenticeship Levy	480	0	480	480	0	0	0	0
Past Service Pension Costs	5,387	0	5,387	5,387	0	0	0	0
Local Welfare Provision	0	0	0	140	140	(140)	0	0
Housing Benefits	501	0	501	501	0	0	0	0
Pensions General	4,560	0	4,560	4,560	0	0	0	0
Coroners	346	0	346	792	446	0	(290)	156
Members Allowances	1,446	0	1,446	1,272	(174)	0	0	(174)
Public Law Fees	366	0	366	366	0	0	0	0
Special Events	25	0	25	15	(10)	0	0	(10)
Templink	(429)	0	(429)	(429)	0	0	(420)	(420)
COVID19 Facilities	0	0	0	49	49	0	(49)	0
COVID19 Emergency Funding	0	0	0	20,247	20,247	(20,245)	(2)	0
			0					
Resources Total	(35,484)	0	(35,484)	(14,836)	20,648	(20,001)	(761)	(114)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>(5,595)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(5,595)</b>	<b>12,682</b>	<b>18,277</b>	<b>(20,001)</b>	<b>(761)</b>	<b>(2,485)</b>

Individual Schools Budget							APPENDIX 3		
Service Area	Annual Target Budget	B/fwd from Previous Year	Total Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO	Corporate Funding of COVID-19 Pressures	Projected Outturn Variance	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
ISB High Needs	55,738		55,738	55,395	(343)	0	0	(343)	
Early Years	24,877		24,877	24,877	0	0	0	0	
Central Services Services Block	2,249		2,249	2,249	0	0	0	0	
Schools	297,545		297,545	297,545	0	0	0	0	
Dedicated Schools Grant	(380,409)		(380,409)	(380,409)	0	0	0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(343)</b>	<b>(343)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(343)</b>	

## Appendix 4

Earmarked Reserve	Balance as at 31 March 2021 £'000	Use of / (Contribution to) Reserves £'000	Projected Balance 31 March 2022 £'000
<b><u>Corporate Management</u></b>			
Brexit Funding	(74)	0	(74)
<b><u>Adult Social Care</u></b>			
Taxi Licensing Operational	(105)	0	(105)
Adult Social Care Reserve	(1,047)	0	(1,047)
Integrated Care Record	(172)	0	(172)
Better Care Fund	(8,952)	1,529	(7,423)
<b><u>Children's Services/ISB</u></b>			
Regeneration and Economy	(90)	0	(90)
BSF FM Sinking Fund	(2,983)	0	(2,983)
BSF PFI Sinking Fund	(4,286)	0	(4,286)
<b><u>Housing &amp; Communities</u></b>			
Physical Activity Board	(24)	0	(24)
Sinking Fund - Portway Lifestyle Centre	(658)	0	(658)
Private Sector Landlord	(142)	122	(20)
Dartmouth Park HLF	(318)	0	(318)
Commonwealth Games - UoW	(100)	0	(100)
Serco Waste	(3,816)	0	(3,816)
<b><u>Public Health</u></b>			
Learning for Public Health	(405)	134	(271)
Public Health Grant Reserve	(7,862)	0	(7,862)
<b><u>Regeneration &amp; Growth</u></b>			
West Midlands Regional Research	(234)	5	(229)
Sinking Fund RBC Building	(591)	0	(591)
Sinking Fund Central 6th Building	(999)	0	(999)
<b><u>Resources - Target</u></b>			
Grants Irregularities Reserve	(1,031)	0	(1,031)
E-Business Financial Suite	(638)	638	0
P.O.C.A. (Proceeds of Crime)	(39)	0	(39)
Sandwell Children's Trust	(77)	30	(47)
Elections	(268)	259	(9)
<b><u>Resources - Central Items</u></b>			
Insurance Reserve	(8,875)	0	(8,875)
COVID Emergency Funding	(20,245)	20,245	0
S31 Business Rate Relief	(34,390)	(384)	(34,774)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(98,421)</b>	<b>22,578</b>	<b>(75,843)</b>

<b>Additional Specific Grants Announced during the Quarter</b>	<b>£'000</b>
<b><u>Resources</u></b>	
COVID19 Restart Grant	(12,955)
Cabinet Office - Police and Crime Commissioner Elections	(191)
Department for Work and Pensions - New Burdens - Delivering Welfare Reform changes in 21-22	(175)
Cabinet Office - Local Election Funding	(81)
Department for Work and Pensions - New Burdens	(61)
<b><u>Adult Social Care</u></b>	
Infection Prevention & Control Grant 3 (April to June 2021)	(1,073)
Winter Grant extension April 2021	(1,061)
Domestic Violence Grant	(892)
Rapid Testing Grant (April to June 2021)	(799)
<b><u>Regeneration &amp; Growth</u></b>	
Housing Zone - Capacity Funding - Department of Communities and Local Government	(133)
Custom Build Grant - Department of Communities and Local Government	(45)
New Burdens Grant - Department of Communities and Local Government	(28)
Historic England - Growth Fund	(17)
<b><u>Housing &amp; Communities</u></b>	
Flexible Homeless Support Grant	(2,272)
P E & Sports Strategy Team	(805)
Preventing Homelessness Grant Strict Council - CLG Communities	(345)
Housing Benefit - Department for Work and Pensions (TA)	(279)
Titford Pools - Canals & River Trust	(233)
WNF/ABG - Preventing Extremism	(176)
Community Safety - West Midlands Crime Commissioner	(165)
Housing First	(160)
External Temporary Accommodation	(100)
Housing Benefit - Department for Work and Pensions (PSL)	(85)
Countryside Management General	(46)
Managerial Support	(38)
Emergency Assistance Grant	(36)
Other small grants	(23)
<b><u>Public Health</u></b>	
Substance Misuse & Smoking - Drug Treatment Crime and Harm reduction.	(407)
Long Term Conditions - Adult Weight Management.	(321)
Communicable Disease - Community Lateral Flow Testing grant	(279)
COVID Reset & Recovery	(141)
Wider Determinants - DEFRA Air Quality Grant	(76)
HIV Prep Grant Increase	(49)
<b>Total Grants</b>	<b>(23,547)</b>

**SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL****CAPITAL MONITORING 2021/2022 - PERIOD 3 JUNE**

SUMMARY	Original Budget 2021/22 (Main Programme)	Additional Approvals / Adjustments	Re-Profile to Future Years	Revised Budget 2021/22 (Main Programme)	Self Financing	Total Budget 2021/22	2021/22			(Surplus) / Deficit for the Year
							Actual Spend to Date £'000	Remaining Spend £'000	Total Forecast Expenditure £'000	
JUNE 2021/22	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Corporate Management	6	0	0	6	0	6	0	6	6	0
Resources	5,970	0	0	5,970	33	6,003	249	5,754	6,003	0
Adults Social Care	12,881	0	0	12,881	10,556	23,437	2,440	20,997	23,437	0
Regeneration & Growth	4,236	2,193	817	7,246	13,587	20,833	3,108	17,725	20,833	0
Housing & Communities	19,250	0	0	19,250	22,106	41,356	12,053	29,303	41,356	0
Childrens Services	81	0	0	81	12,082	12,163	4,477	7,686	12,163	0
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	87,872	200	(13,349)	74,723	0	74,723	16,857	57,868	74,725	2
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>130,296</b>	<b>2,393</b>	<b>(12,532)</b>	<b>120,157</b>	<b>58,364</b>	<b>178,521</b>	<b>39,183</b>	<b>139,340</b>	<b>178,523</b>	<b>2</b>

**Section 106 & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Monitoring - Period 3 2021/22**

**APPENDIX 7**

Page 183

<b>Section 106</b>					
<b>Section 106 Scheme</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Description of Project</b>	<b>Balance Available @ 01/04/21 £</b>	<b>Forecast Expenditure £</b>	<b>Balance Remaining @ 31/03/22 £</b>
Roway Lane Development	Regeneration & Growth	Contribution to improvement works at the Fountain Lane / Bromford Road junction	48,000	0	48,000
Former Churchfields School, All Saints Way, West Bromwich	Regeneration & Growth	Erection of 182 dwellings, 3no 100m x 60m football pitches, changing room facilities together with associated road and sewer.	17,000	0	17,000
Land at Alexandra Road and Upper Church Lane, Tipton	Regeneration & Growth	Affordable Housing	603,000	0	603,000
High St / Dartmouth St West Bromwich (was Laing but now Taylor Wimpy)	Regeneration & Growth	Affordable Housing	12,000	0	12,000
Land at Seymour Road, Oldbury	Regeneration & Growth	Affordable Housing	91,000	0	91,000
Land at Summerton Road, Oldbury	Regeneration & Growth	Affordable Housing	28,000	0	28,000
Rattlechain Oldbury DC/14/57737	Regeneration & Growth	Affordable Housing	210,000	0	210,000
Land off Mill Street Tipton - DC/15/58921	Regeneration & Growth	Affordable Housing	290,000	0	290,000
Land off spon Lane West Bromwich DC/08/49057	Regeneration & Growth	Highways Contribution	447,000	0	447,000
TESCO - West Bromwich	Regeneration & Growth	Planning / Environmental Health contribution	50,000	0	50,000
Sandwell Road West Bromwich DC/09/51649	Regeneration & Growth	Public Realm / Highways contribution	175,000	0	175,000
Ashes Road Oldbury DC/14/57470	Regeneration & Growth	Ashes Road Oldbury Contribution	336,000	0	336,000
Upper Church lane Tipton DC/09/50926	Regeneration & Growth	Planning Contribution	32,000	0	32,000
Brades Green Open Space DC/05/43995	Housing & Communities	Planting scheme to improve welcoming aspect - Oldbury	5,800	5,800	0
Barnford Park DC/07/48918	Housing & Communities	Treeworks - Oldbury	3,600	3,600	0
Mary MacArthur Gardens	Housing & Communities	Fencing, Steps & Re-Painting of Infrastructure - Rowley	32,300	32,300	0
Jubilee Park DC/04/43090 & DC/06/47114	Housing & Communities	Treeworks - Tipton	8,100	8,100	0
Farley Park DC/08/50253	Housing & Communities	Play Provision improvements - Tipton	4,000	4,000	0
Norman Rd Dams DC/05/45598	Housing & Communities	Play Provision improvements	15,000	15,000	0
Charlemont Playing Fields - DC/14/56717	Housing & Communities	Improvements to Car Parking Facilities & Skate Board Park - West Bromwich	33,000	33,000	0
Redhouse Park - DC/05/45586	Housing & Communities	Scheme being developed including Entrance & Car Parking - West Bromwich	18,000	18,000	0
Yew Tree Estate - DC/13/56577	Housing & Communities	Play Provision improvements - West Bromwich	61,200	61,200	0
<b>Total Section 106</b>			<b>2,520,000</b>	<b>181,000</b>	<b>2,339,000</b>
<b>Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)</b>					
<b>CIL Scheme</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Description of Project</b>	<b>Balance Available @ 01/04/21 £</b>	<b>Forecast Expenditure for 2021/22 £</b>	<b>Balance Remaining @ 31/03/22 £</b>
Balance in CIL fund to date - not allocated to individual projects	Regeneration & Growth		2,030,900	0	2,030,900
<b>Total Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)</b>			<b>2,030,900</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,030,900</b>

## Appendix 8

<b>Virements above £0.250m or 1% of Gross Budget for approval by Cabinet</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
<u>Public Health</u>		
Communicable Disease - Test & Trace Grant carry forward		(1,142)
Grant funded expenditure for Test & Trace	1,142	
Communicable Disease Community Lateral Flow Testing grant		(279)
Grant funded expenditure for Lateral Flow Testing	279	
Long Term Conditions In year PHE award for Adult Weight Management.		(321)
Grant funded expenditure for Adult Weight Management Services	321	
Substance Misuse & Smoking - In year PHE award for Drug Treatment Crime and Harm reduction.		(407)
Grant funded expenditure for Drug Treatment Crime & Harm reduction.	407	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>(2,149)</b>
<b>Virements between Directorates/Service Areas below £0.250m for information in Cabinet Report</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
<u>Adult Social Care</u>		
Business Man - Transfer 50% vacant G post	31	
Social Work & Therapy - transfer 50% Vacant G post		31
Management Team - transfer of unused budget		22
External placements - transfer of unused budget	22	
Social Work & Therapy - transfer post from Hospital team to social work team	45	
Intergrated Hub - transfer post from hospital team to social work team.		45
<u>Housing &amp; Communities</u>		
Equipment Budget from Resources	18	
<u>Resources</u>		
Equipment Budget to H&C from Registration Services		(18)
<u>Public Health</u>		
Public Health Grant - In year increase in Public Health Grant		(190)
Additional grant funded expenditure - HIV Prep Grant Increase	48	
Additional grant funded expenditure - COVID Reset & Recovery	142	
Wider Determinants - In year DEFRA Air Quality Grant		(76)
Grant funded expenditure- Air Quality Grant	76	
Wider Determinants - LGA Behavioural Insights Grant carry forward		(18)
Grant funded expenditure LGA Behavioural Insights Grant	18	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>(284)</b>

				<b>APPENDIX 9 - Performance Indicators</b>
	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Change from 2020/21</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>REVENUE COLLECTION PERFORMANCE</b>				
Council Tax Collection Rate	28%	28%	↔	A higher figure is beneficial in improving the Council's cash flow and also reducing administration costs. This figure is as at the end of Quarter 1 and not a projection for the year. Collections reduced across all portfolios due to the council wide stop on recovery during the Corvid-19 pandemic
Business Rates Collection Rate	23%	24%	↓	A higher figure is beneficial in improving the Council's cash flow and also reducing administration costs. This figure is as at the end of Quarter 1 and not a projection for the year. Collections reduced across all portfolios due to the council wide stop on recovery during the Corvid-19 pandemic
<u>General Debtors:</u>				
Collection Rate	65%	60%	↑	A higher figure is beneficial in improving the Council's cash flow and also reducing administration costs. This figure is as at the end of Quarter 1 and not a projection for the year. Collections reduced across all portfolios due to the council wide stop on recovery during the Corvid-19 pandemic
Average No. of Days to receive payment from customers	138	116	↑	A lower figure is beneficial to the Council in relation to improved cash flow and reduced administration costs.
Credit Notes raised as a % of total customer invoices	5%	7%	↑	A lower figure helps to save time in dealing with customer queries and reduces the cost of administration. Residential & Third Party accomodation fees the Adult Services Migrated Financial Sytems to new system.However, the interim invoices produced were issued for 3 days instead of 2.
Proportion of Debt > 90 days old from invoice date	53%	50%	↑	A lower figure helps to improve the council's cash flow.
<u>Housing Rents:</u>				
Value of Rent Debit to Date	29	29	↔	Rent debit at quarter 1 has slightly increased to £29,507,416 in comparison to quarter 1 outturn for 20/21
Collection Rate	86	83	↑	A higher percentage reduces rent arrears owed to the Local Authority and supports the HRA. Quarter 1 outturn shows an increase in cash collection in comparison to quarter 1 20/21
<b>ACCOUNTS PAYABLE</b>				
Proportion of payments made by electronic means (BACS & Bank Transfers)	95%	95%	↔	A higher figure is beneficial in terms of reducing administration costs and improved processes. Suppliers of goods and services receive prompt payment of invoices and therefore improved cash flow.

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## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Use of Local Council Tax Support Grant 2021/22
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Crompton – Cabinet Member for Finance, Council Sustainability and Transformation
<b>Director:</b>	Simone Hines – Director of Finance
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes Significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sue Knowles – Head of ICT and Revenues and Benefits <a href="mailto:sue_knowles@sandwell.gov.uk">sue_knowles@sandwell.gov.uk</a> Ian Dunn – Service Manager Revenues and Benefits <a href="mailto:ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk">ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet approve the use of the Local Council Tax Support Grant 2021/22 to provide financial support to those Sandwell residents who are struggling to pay their Council Tax.
- 1.2 That the use of some of the Local Council Tax Support Grant to fund the cost of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for 2021/22 be approved.
- 1.3 That Cabinet give approval for the households and hierarchy to be considered for an award as detailed below:-

- use the Local Council Tax Support Grant funding to award up to £150 to all working age LCTRS recipients – where they have an



annual amount to pay. This could equate to 8,000 households being supported and would cost around £840,000;

- council tax support where required to residents based on the hierarchy below:
- Families in receipt of free school meals
- Residents affected by the pandemic that are in arrears with their Council Tax who contact us to advise that they are struggling to make payment and for whom a hardship payment will help to reduce or completely pay their council tax for 2021-22
- Residents affected by the pandemic identified by Revenues and Benefits, Welfare Rights, voluntary sector organisations and/or Citizens Advice Bureau who will benefit from receiving financial support to help to pay their council tax
- Make an additional award to our working-age LCTRS claimants who have already received a payment if the funding allows. In all such cases only award an amount up to the balance outstanding on the account so as not to cause a credit

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 As part of its response to Covid-19 the government announced in May 2021 that it would provide local authorities in England with new grant funding in recognition of the anticipated additional cost of the LCTRS in 2021/22.
- 2.2 Government funding was also provided in 2020/21 however the criteria for use was more rigid.
- 2.3 There is currently £500,000 remaining from the 2020/21 funding and we are using this to continue to provide support to residents who have been affected by the pandemic and are struggling to pay their Council Tax.
- 2.4 Sandwell have been allocated funding of £3,586,869 for 2021/22.



- 2.5 Government guidance on use of the grant states that the grant is being provided to local authorities in recognition of the anticipated extra cost to them of local council tax support at a time when more households are facing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic.
- 2.6 This extra cost may materialise as tax setting base reduction (leading to less available council tax income in 2021/22), or a deficit on the collection fund at the end of 2021/22, or both. The funding is not ringfenced but is provided towards expenditure incurred in respect of the provision of local council tax support in 2021/22.
- 2.7 Councils can use existing policies and schemes where necessary to deliver assistance if this is practical.
- 2.8 Sandwell's LCTRS is one of only a few schemes nationally that provides 100% support to the lowest income households and the current cost of the scheme is £30.9m for 2021/22.
- 2.9 We are aware that currently there are 58,100 people currently furloughed and this is due to end in September 2021. HMRC estimate that 15% of people furloughed could lose their job. This would equate to an additional 8,700 people being unemployed.

A proportion of these would require financial assistance through LCTRS and therefore the annual cost of the scheme would increase.

- 2.10 We therefore propose to use the Local Council Tax Support Grant funding to award up to £150 to all working age LCTRS recipients – where they have an annual amount to pay. This could equate to 8,000 households being supported and would cost around £840,000.
- 2.11 We would also provide additional council tax support where required to residents based on the hierarchy below:
- Families in receipt of free school meals
  - Residents affected by the pandemic that are in arrears with their Council Tax who contact us to advise that they are struggling to make



payment and for whom a hardship payment will help to reduce or completely pay their council tax for 2021-22

- Residents affected by the pandemic identified by Revenues and Benefits, Welfare Rights, voluntary sector organisations and/or Citizens Advice Bureau who will benefit from receiving financial support to help to pay their council tax
- Make an additional award to our working-age LCTRS claimants who have already received a payment if the funding allows. In all such cases only award an amount up to the balance outstanding on the account so as not to cause a credit

2.12 Any Local Council Tax Support Grant remaining at the end of 2021/22 can be used towards the cost of Sandwell's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?



The use of the Local Council Tax Support Grant outlined in this report will allow us to continue to support our most vulnerable residents as they seek to adjust financially following the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Given the timeframe involved there has been little stakeholder engagement on the use of the Local Council Tax Support Grant. However, the approach outlined in this report ensures support is targeted to our lowest income households and those financially impacted by the pandemic.
- 4.2 Each local authority has been issued funding based on national published LCTRS workload data.
- 4.3 The fund will be administered by the Revenues and Benefits Service. Full funding will be provided to cover the costs of the grants and a New Burdens funding has also been provided to cover the council's administration costs.



4.4 All applications will be processed in accordance with GDPR regulations.

## 5 Alternative Options

5.1 The council could just use the funding in recognition of the anticipated additional cost of LCTRS in 2021/22 however this approach would not target additional support to residents affected by the pandemic who are struggling to pay their Council Tax.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The grants will be paid by Revenues and Benefits staff. There is no impact on any council managed property or land.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Government guidance outlines appropriate use of this funding. This has been detailed in the report.
<b>Risk:</b>	Risk assessments will be undertaken and updated throughout the scheme with an emphasis on managing the risk of fraud. Pre and post payment checks will also be carried out.
<b>Equality:</b>	An equality impact assessment has already been carried out on the existing LCTRS. For the additional council tax support payment awards it is assessed that there will be no adverse impact on anyone with a protected characteristic. The proposals and approach in this report it is anticipated to have a positive impact as support is targeted at our lowest income households; It will support people who are not covered by the existing LCTRS but are experiencing hardship due to Covid. An equality impact assessment is not required for the proposals in this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The assistance we provide by way of hardship awards will help our citizens to better manage financially and will in turn aid their personal well-being.
<b>Social Value</b>	See above under 'Health and Wellbeing'.



## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None



## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Consultation on the Future of Walker Grange Extra Care Housing Scheme
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Living & Ageing Well Cllr Suzanne Hartwell
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Adult Social Care Rashpal Bishop
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Divisional Manager, Colin Marsh <a href="mailto:Colin_Marsh@Sandwell.gov.uk">Colin_Marsh@Sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to commence consultation with the tenants of Walker Grange and their relatives, on the future of Walker Grange.
- 1.2 That in connection with 1.1 above, approval be given to commence consultation with affected Council staff members.
- 1.3 That a further report be presented to Cabinet, to agree the future plans for Walker Grange following completion of the consultation.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Walker Grange, having been designed and built in the 1980s, is now becoming dated, and proving unsuitable to meet the changing care and support needs of some individuals. Rooms are not big enough to accommodate non-standard wheelchairs, and limit the equipment needed to meet peoples care and support needs, such as mobile or fixed hoists.



The layout of the building and the mechanism of the entrances and exits do not provide suitable infrastructure to best support tenants with dementia, and do not offer best practice in dementia specialisms.

- 2.2 In addition, bathroom and toilet facilities within the accommodation units are not able to accommodate people with or who develop very complex needs, and there are increasing needs for wet rooms over more traditional bathrooms.
- 2.3 The Council has tried to maintain the quality of the accommodation, with recent investment in the internal décor, but significant investment will be required if Walker Grange is going to continue to offer Extra Care provision in the future. Any modernisation of the fabric and infrastructure of the buildings will require temporary closure of the scheme, people would have to be moved to alternative accommodation, which would reduce capacity elsewhere in the system, and create additional financial pressure for the Authority. This is also a concern for the future of staff employed as, during any period of closure, the staff team would need to be redeployed to other services where suitable alternatives are available.
- 2.4 Consideration of the lifespan of Manifoldia Grange, Holly Grange and Walker Grange, as well as the development of Willow Gardens and Knowle, has highlighted a need to integrate the accommodation strategy for Extra Care Housing around new and existing developments.
- 2.5 A previous valuation of the Walker Grange site indicated that the market value of the freehold interest of the site based upon the indicative layout is in the region of £500,000. The Officer undertaking this valuation provided the following information at the time of the valuation in 2019:
- 2.6 In terms of redevelopment, it is considered that residential use would be appropriate in this predominantly residential area.
- 2.7 An option for redevelopment has been prepared to illustrate the development potential of the site. This option has a development capacity of twenty units comprising five two-bedroomed dwellings, eight three bedroomed dwellings, six four-bedroom dwellings and one 2 bed bungalow dwellings.



2.8 The Covid 19 Pandemic has impacted the ASC market considerably and the recommendations within this report could provide an opportunity to explore how we could shape future service provision. This could ensure that Sandwell citizens have the best possible housing options available to meet their needs whilst also looking at securing budget savings to ensure the long-term viability of key services.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well - Willow Gardens or other modern ECH Schemes would provide high quality housing with on-site support allowing our 'older' citizens the opportunity to remain within a community setting as opposed to residential care.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities - ECH offers housing that accommodates a community of mixed needs but also provides strong links to the wider community.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods The Willow Gardens development provides quality housing for Older People with care and/or support needs.</p>

### 4 Context and Key Issues

#### Current Situation to be part of the consultation:

4.1 Whilst Walker Grange has capacity for 39 properties, there are currently only 22 tenants in situ. This is as a result of decreased demand in recent years, exacerbated by the closure to admissions because of the Covid 19 Pandemic. Similarly, the onsite day service has capacity for 20 attendees per day, 7 days per week. Prior to the pandemic 8 to 15 people attended daily with 26 people registered. The day service has not operated throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. When day service clients have been contacted there has only been a small number who have wanted to consider day care options in the future once these services are back and operational. As part of the consultation process, we would look to support anyone wishing to continue with some form of day care to explore all available options at the appropriate time.



- 4.2 Of the 17 properties unoccupied only 2 of these have undergone voids work and are in a ready to let position. 15 properties are awaiting housing voids work, however, this has currently been paused. Rent loss over the last 12 months is in the region of £74,000.
- 4.3 In addition, Walker Grange provides accommodation to Healthwatch Sandwell as part of the contract for that service. The accommodation is offered via peppercorn rent and is due for renewal/extension in March 2022 with an option of a rollover to 2024. As part of the consultation process we would wish to engage Healthwatch on future accommodation options for their service.

### Alternative Provision:

- 4.4 There are a number of other Extra Care Schemes in Sandwell and three in Tipton in close proximity to Walker Grange, which could accommodate existing tenants if required:

Scheme	Capacity	Current Voids
Exon Court (Tipton)	38	10
Goldfield Court (West Bromwich)	63	0
Millennium Forge (Tipton)	17	5
Willow Gardens (Rowley Regis)	90	Opens late 2021
Oakley Gardens (West Bromwich)	81	0
Penmakers Court (Smethwick)	51	5
Queensridge Court (Oldbury)	88	0
Swallow Fields (Tipton)	62	10
Walker Grange (Tipton)	39	17



## Consultation:

- 4.5 The proposed consultation will involve existing tenants and day care service users, staff and wider stakeholders, and would be carried out in line with existing Council policies.
- 4.6 Staff and tenants will be supported throughout the consultation process, in line with the approaches and learning from similar consultation exercises conducted previously, and will include face to face discussions, Independent Advocacy, drop in sessions and an online questionnaire.
- 4.7 This report proposes an overall 12-week consultation period for tenants and a 30-day consultation period for the affected staff group. This will be developed to encourage and facilitate participation by all affected parties.

## Staff Consultation:

- a) Trade Union colleagues will be presented with the proposal at a Special JCC in August 2021.
- b) Staff will be presented with the proposal in August 2021.
- c) Adult Social Care will arrange for further appropriate consultation to take place during this period in line with Council Policy, if Cabinet approve the recommendations in this report.
- d) It is proposed that should a decision be taken following consultation to cease Extra Care provision from Walker Grange, the affected staff will be transferred to alternative Council services.
- e) As part of the proposal there are no proposed redundancies. Consideration will be given to approaching staff in related care activities about possible interest in a job swap scheme, as an alternative to transfer for the affected staff group.
- 4.10 Following completion of the consultation with tenants, stakeholders and affected staff, a further report will be presented to Cabinet where a decision will be sought to agree the future of Walker Grange.



## 5 Alternative Options

### Options Appraisal:

Option 1 – Do nothing – continue to provide Extra Care Housing at Walker Grange.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
There will be no immediate impact for tenants.	Missed opportunity to alleviate expected issues that would arise from natural closure of Walker Grange in the future.
There will be no immediate impact for staff.	Out of 44 potential ECH vacancies in the Tipton area, there is only current demand (i.e. someone is in the process of becoming a Tenant in 1 of these Schemes) for 21.
There will be no risk of adverse publicity.	Staff would need to be placed At Risk and alternative job opportunities would need to be sought. However, should this not be viable it could lead to the need for staff redundancies in the future if the Scheme has to close and there are no alternative job opportunities.
There would be continued ECH provision in Tipton to support people with Dementia.	There may not be sufficient capacity across the ECH market in the future, especially LA owned/managed ECH services. Therefore, this would impact on the ability to move people in their support/friendship groups.
Potentially continue Day Service provision in the Tipton area for people with Dementia (This is however, linked to the on-going COVID situation).	As the Scheme continues to deteriorate we would expect further decreased demand as there are better alternatives on the market.
	If a decision isn't taken in the near future, then a full refurbishment would be required which could be costly.



	Ongoing void costs due to decreased demand
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Option 2 – Look at the closure of Walker Grange & the transfer of Tenants to Willow Gardens or other suitable ECH provision.

<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>
Opportunity to re-provide accommodation for people living at Walker Grange, as this building is coming to the end of its natural life span.	Tenants who have a secured Council tenancy would be expected to move due to the closure of the Scheme.
If people wish to remain in the Tipton area, there is a high number of available voids. Out of 44 potential ECH vacancies in the Tipton area, there is only current demand (i.e. someone is in the process of becoming a Tenant in 1 of these Schemes) for 21.	Even though the ECH stock is being increased with the opening of Willow Gardens, if Walker Grange was to close there would be a total loss of 19 units of ECH accommodation with the combined closures of Walker, Manifoldia and Holly Granges.
Opportunity for existing Tenants to relocate to brand new accommodation and maintain existing friendship groups.	There could be adverse publicity or unhappy/disgruntled tenants and staff.
Opportunity to sell land and realise capital receipts or look at re-purpose in line with Corporate objectives either of these opportunities would provide potential benefits to both ASC & Housing.	
The staffing complement released would support the staffing structure required for other services.	

Option 3 – Look at Upgrading Walker Grange to ensure it is fit for purpose for the future.



ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
No loss of service in the short-term.	For a full refurbishment to take place then it would be likely that the tenants would have to move out whilst this work was undertaken. This would mean both tenants and staff would be displaced.
No adverse publicity or unhappy/disgruntled tenants or staff.	Sufficient budget would have to be found to finance this requirement.
Upgrading Walker Grange may generate interest in lettings.	Whilst awaiting any upgrade the Scheme is currently carrying 17 voids which is generating significant void loss.

3 Options were explored, and the advantages and disadvantages can be seen in the above tables. Based on the above summary, Option 2 is recommended as the most viable option.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	<p>A previous valuation of the site indicated that the market value of the freehold interest of the site based upon the indicative layout is in the region of £500,000.</p> <p>The annual budget for the existing service is £1.152 million; after funding alternative provision for existing users of the extra care and day care services there will be a significant balance available to support the directorate's priorities and delivery of the medium term financial strategy.</p> <p>As with previous Scheme closures we would look to provide each tenant with a relocation grant to cover the cost of decoration and moving. Based on a grant of £1,500 per person, and current occupancy numbers, this would cost £33,000 and could be met from the expected under spend against the 2021/22 Adult Social Care budget.</p>
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**Legal and Governance:**

We will consult on the proposals for the future of Walker Grange and the responses to the consultation will be considered in the decision-making process. Failure to do so would expose the Council to heightened risk of the decision being challenged, and subject to and overturned by a Judicial Review process.

In order to comply with the Gunning Principles, which set a legal framework to situations of this nature, the Council's consultation will:

1. Be carried out at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.
2. Offer sufficient reasons for the proposals to permit intelligent consideration.
3. Allow adequate time for consideration and response.

In presenting this report to Cabinet, the authors are of the understanding that the 3 points above have been, or will be, fully met.

The employer must undertake informed and meaningful consultation with trade unions, and the affected staffing group.

Under Section 188 of the Trade Union Labour relations Act 1992, for the purposes of consultation, the employer must satisfy and disclose in writing the following:

- a) The reason for the proposal.
- b) The total number of employees of any such description employed by the employer at the establishment in question.
- c) The number of agency workers temporarily for, and under, the supervision of the employer.
- d) Those employees on fixed term contracts will be treated no less favourably than permanent employees, pursuant to the Fixed Term Employees Prevention on Less Favourable Treatment Regulations 2002.

In presenting this report to Cabinet, the authors are of the understanding that the points above have been, or will be, fully met.



	The principles of the Equality Act 2010 will be adhered to, in respect of applying Council policies.
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) will continue to be complied with throughout, in identifying and assessing risks associated with this strategic proposal. A risk register has been produced covering the main strategic risks for this particular part of the consultation.</p> <p>There are arrangements in place to manage and mitigate these effectively. The Risk Register will be kept up to date at all times for the duration of the project.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>When making a decision as to changes in service provision, the local authority must comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and, in particular, section 149 (the Public-Sector Equality Duty).</p> <p>The protected characteristics to which the duty applies includes age, as well as disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief and sex.</p> <p>In order to ensure that the PSED is complied with an Equality Impact Assessment will be maintained and updated during the consultation period and will form part of the report to Cabinet with the proposal on the future of Walker Grange, following the proposed consultation process.</p>

## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None



## Equality Impact Assessment Template

Please complete this template using the [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance document](#)

**Version 4: January 2019**

Title of proposal (include forward plan reference if available)	Consultation on the Future of Walker Grange Extra Care Housing Scheme
Directorate and Service Area	Adult Social Care
Name and title of Lead Officer completing this EIA	Helen Green, Commissioning Manager
Contact Details	<a href="mailto:Helen.Green@Sandwell.gov.uk">Helen.Green@Sandwell.gov.uk</a> 07971 073978
Names and titles of other officers involved in completing this EIA	Sue Johnson, Operations Manager
Partners involved with the EIA where jointly completed	None
Date EIA completed	7 June 2021
Date EIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EIA	
Date EIA considered by Cabinet Member	

See [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance](#) for key prompts that must be addressed for all questions

**1. The purpose of the proposal or decision required  
(Please provide as much information as possible)**

1. That approval be given to commence consultation with the tenants of Walker Grange and their relatives, on the proposed closure of Walker Grange and the transfer to Willow Gardens, or alternative Extra Care accommodation within the Borough by early 2022.

2. That approval be given to commence consultation with affected Council staff members.

3. That a further report be presented to Cabinet, to agree the future plans for Walker Grange following completion of the consultation.

**2. Evidence used/considered**

Extra Care Housing is supported housing accommodation specifically for people aged 55 years or above who require care and/or support to live independently.

The overall aim is to promote and maximise independence and choice, with personalised support through the use of assistive technology and on-site flexible care and support services available 24 hours per day.

It provides an environment that is stimulating, enabling people to maintain, develop and rediscover skills, maintain social relationships and make new relationships with their neighbours. Taking into account individual needs in terms of disability and age, culture, race, customs, language, religion, background, lifestyle, sexual orientation and gender.

Extra Care Housing is proven to promote positive attitudes to ageing and gives a real alternative to Residential and long-term care. There are currently 9 Extra Care schemes in Sandwell.

Analysis of internal systems (LAS, AXIS and SAVE), have been analysed to demonstrate current and future capacity, movement and expected demand across the Extra Care market.

Analysis of Staff profiles from SBS will also be undertaken if approval to consult is granted.

### **3. Consultation**

Commissioners have identified individuals and groups who will be consulted if approval is given to do so. These will include:

Stakeholders

Staff

Tenants, with the use of advocates if needed

Families and carers

Unions

Approval is sought for a 12-week consultation period, c. However, an initial meeting is also scheduled to inform affected parties of the forthcoming cabinet report.

A further paper will then be brought back to Cabinet in 2022 outlining the result of the consultation, and further proposals.

### **4. Assess likely impact**

At this stage as we are only looking to consult we expect the impact to be limited.

However, Consultation will be mindful of the possible uncertainty for both tenants and staff as a result of proposals being discussed.

Moving forwards all likely impacts, both adverse or positive will be listed in this section.

When we undertake the consultation we will ensure that we provide a breakdown of tenants and staff by protected characteristics.

The protected characteristics most likely to impact on the Tenants are age and disability.

**Please complete the table below at 4a to identify the likely impact on specific protected characteristics**

**4a. Use the table to show:**

- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality strands (protected characteristics), that is it could disadvantage them or if there is no impact, please note the evidence and/or reasons for this.
- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality, equal opportunities or improving relationships within equality characteristics.

Protected Characteristic	Positive Impact ✓	Negative Impact ✓	No Impact ✓	Reason and evidence (Provide details of specific groups affected even for no impact and where negative impact has been identified what mitigating actions can we take?)
Age		✓		Possible uncertainty for both tenants and staff as a result of proposals being discussed.
Disability	✓			Proposals include the potential for tenants to be better supported through more modern and appropriate Extra Care Provision

<b>Gender reassignment</b>			✓	
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	✓			Proposals include the potential for tenants to be better supported through more modern and appropriate Extra Care Provision, including larger 2 bed accommodation which would benefit couples.
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>			✓	
<b>Race</b>			✓	
<b>Religion or belief</b>			✓	

<b>Sex</b>			✓	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>			✓	
<b>Other</b>			✓	

Does this EIA require a full impact assessment? Yes  No

Full EIA is not required at this time, however a full EIA will be undertaken in due course.

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then you do not need to go any further. You have completed the screening stage. You must, however, complete sections 7 and 9 and publish the EIA as it stands.

If you have answered yes to the above, please complete the questions below referring to the guidance document.

**5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?**

**6. As a result of the EIA what decision or actions are being proposed in relation to the original proposals?**

**7. Monitoring arrangements**

The Project Group overseeing the consultation, will report into the Accommodation and Support Strategy Group, who will have full governance of the project.

The Project Group will include HR and Communication representatives who will ensure adequate monitoring of their relevant areas.

**8. Action planning**

You may wish to use the action plan template below



**9. Publish the EIA**

## **Where can I get additional information, advice and guidance?**

In the first instance, please consult the accompanying guide “Equality Impact Assessment Guidance”

### **Practical advice, guidance and support**

Help and advice on undertaking an EIA or receiving training related to equalities legislation and EIAs is available to **all managers** across the council from officers within Service Improvement. The officers within Service Improvement will also provide overview quality assurance checks on completed EIA documents.

**Please contact:**

Kashmir Singh - 0121 569 3828

## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Premises 106/107/108 High Street, West Bromwich – Approval to accept surrender of lease prior to the break date of 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2024
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Iqbal Padda Cabinet Member for Strong and Inclusive Economy
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director for Regeneration and Growth Tammy Stokes
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Stefan Hemming - Principal Lead Commercial Property stefan_hemming@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations

That Cabinet

- 1.1 Authorise the Interim Director of Regeneration and Growth to conclude negotiations with the lessee's agents to agree a surrender premium for a surrender of the lease of 106/107/108 High Street, West Bromwich with effect from 10 September 2021.
- 1.2 That in connection with 1.1 above, authorise the Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to prepare and agree formal surrender documents to allow the Council to obtain vacant possession of the premises.
- 1.3 Authorise the Director of Finance to make an adjustment to the income target for Strategic Assets and Land to reflect the loss of income.



## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 An opportunity has arisen to obtain vacant possession of 106/107/108 High Street West Bromwich, currently owned by the Council and leased to Argos on a lease which runs to 2029. By taking the opportunity to obtain vacant possession now the Council will avoid significant costs in having to acquire a leasehold interest later. Vacant possession of the properties is highly likely to be necessary to relocate the indoor market and to deliver the emerging West Bromwich Masterplan.
- 2.2 Should a surrender not be pursued at this stage then we understand that Argos will pursue plans to sublet the property. If the Council then wishes to obtain vacant possession before the lease expires in June 2029 it will be necessary to agree terms with the subtenant and with Argos and this is likely to involve the payment of significant premiums to them.
- 2.3 Whilst the opportunity to take a surrender of the lease has arisen earlier than ideal (i.e. before a full business case has been prepared for the market relocation) it is clear that this is a time-limited opportunity and that obtaining possession at a later date will be much more difficult and much more expensive.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>The surrender of the lease by Argos could assist the delivery of a new indoor market facility located within the premises that are in the freehold ownership of the Council. It will re-energise the current failing market and protect businesses suffering the current disconnect between the indoor and outdoor markets.</p>
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## 4.0 Context and Key Issues

### Background

- 4.1 A Masterplan for West Bromwich Town Centre is currently being prepared which aims to address the economic challenges being experienced in the retail sector. The aim is to create a vibrant mixed-use town centre which is economically sustainable, and this means focusing on high quality retail, leisure and cultural activities that will drive footfall whilst also introducing new uses including residential, together with high quality public spaces. Consultation for the masterplan commenced 22 July and public consultation will continue until 20 August 2021. Thereafter, it is anticipated that the the preferred option will be submitted to Cabinet during November 2021.
- 4.2 A central element in the masterplan will be the relocation of the indoor market to a more central location where it can benefit from, and also contribute to, an increased level of footfall.
- 4.3 The new indoor market is a critical element of the Retail Diversification Programme which forms part of the Council's Towns Fund programme. This programme initially focuses on: Bull Street (incorporating the Queen Square Shopping Centre) and the Kings Square Shopping Centre (incorporating the Indoor Market and former Kings Square Cinema). This equates to circa 4.4 ha of land for regeneration. The programme aims to kickstart regeneration and transformation of the West Bromwich retail submarket through site assembly and demolition.
- 4.4 The current indoor market in the Kings Square Shopping Centre was opened in 1973. It has served visitors and residents of West Bromwich for over forty years. Whilst there has been some maintenance work, including electrical rewiring, new floor surfaces, painting and the creation of a new entrance, the building has remained substantially unchanged since it was opened. Although the market still has a loyal customer base and a good range of trade lines to attract customers, the number of vacant stalls has been increasing in recent years and, therefore, the income to the Council from stall rents has been steadily declining.
- 4.5 In 2018 the council undertook a review of the indoor market which concluded that the existing facility is not fit for purpose and that options should be explored to redevelop it to recover its commercial viability.



At a cabinet workshop on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018, cabinet members agreed that an indoor market should be retained in West Bromwich but that it must be sustainable and contribute to the broader regeneration of the town centre. Officers then explored several options for the development of the existing site including a new modern building with food, leisure and cultural uses, managed workspace and residential above, but no viable scheme could be identified.

- 4.6 Specialist consultants will soon be procured to prepare a detailed business plan for a new, relocated indoor market. Drawing on local knowledge as well as best practice from elsewhere, this business plan will detail how the new indoor market will operate and how it will contribute to the vision of a vibrant and economically sustainable town centre.
- 4.7 Whilst this business plan is still to be prepared, it is clear from discussions with market traders, with the market managers and also with the appointed masterplanning team, that relocating the indoor market to 106/107/108 High Street is a strong option. The market traders have specifically expressed a desire to locate to a High Street location close to the outdoor market, and the Argos premises has been specifically referenced by traders as their preferred location.
- 4.8 Obtaining vacant possession of 106/107/108 High Street is strategically important to the delivery of the proposed Masterplan. A key aim of the Masterplan is the creation of a pedestrian route leading from the Metro station into a new public space and meeting point at the heart of the retail area – effectively creating a new gateway to the town centre for people arriving by Metro. This is shown on the plan in Appendix 2. The subject properties sit immediately adjacent to this space, and by obtaining vacant possession and by ensuring that the most suitable uses go into these units (whether that be the indoor market or, if the business case is not approved, another appropriate use) the Council will ensure that this key aim is achieved.
- 4.9 Obtaining vacant possession of town centre property for regeneration purposes is usually difficult and expensive.



It often involves using compulsory purchase powers to acquire leasehold interests and relocate retailers and it almost always involves paying out substantial amounts of compensation to cover business relocation costs. The only time when this isn't the case is when property is already vacant or when councils have, in anticipation of regeneration plans, been opportunistic in acquiring properties when they come to the market or accepting lease surrenders from tenants when approached by the tenant.

### Property Ownerships and Lease Negotiations To Date

- 4.10 The Council own the freehold of premises 103 to 108 High Street West Bromwich. The current indoor market is shaded grey on the plan. 103 is currently vacant; shaded blue on the plan. 104 -105 is currently occupied by the Council's Revenues and Benefits and Cashiers Services; shaded orange on the plan. 106/107/108 are on a 10 year lease to Argos; shaded pink on the plan.
- 4.11 The Argos lease of 106/107/108 is for a term of 10 years from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. It is on internal repairing terms and the passing rent is £75,000 plus service charge. Business rates of £61,461.04 per annum are payable. There is a tenant's only break option included within the lease that can be exercised (by the tenant) on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 subject to the service of not less than 6 months formal written notice.
- 4.12 Sainsbury's acquired Argos in 2016 and as part of its property portfolio rationalisation programme has closed a number of Argos stores or located them within Sainsbury's superstores. Avison Young, acting on behalf of Argos, approached the Council to determine if there is an appetite to accept an early surrender of the lease of 106/107/108. They initially offered to pay the council a premium of £90,000 but following negotiation this was increased to £140,000 as a one-off payment in respect of rental, business rates and in lieu of a schedule of condition.
- 4.13 Avison Young on behalf of Argos have confirmed the offer is open until 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021.



They have also confirmed that they have received expressions of interest from local traders to take an under lease of part of the space and are preparing heads of terms with two interested parties, which they will progress if the Council does not accept the surrender.

- 4.14 There have been discussions internally with the Council service in 104 105 about a remodelled service as part of the proposals but these are at an early stage.
- 4.15 The existing indoor market site would, if vacated, create a regeneration opportunity which would be brought forward as part of the masterplan delivery. It would play a key part in improving pedestrian links to the town centre from the West Bromwich Central Metro Stop, which is a key aim of the masterplan. The timing of the move, the timing of redevelopment and the possibility of short-term uses of the building prior to redevelopment will all be considered in parallel with the production of the business plan.

#### Financial Implications and Risks

- 4.16 If Argos were to continue in occupation until the tenant's break in June 2024 then rent in the sum of circa £225,000 (ie £75,000 per annum) would be received, and in addition business rates would be payable in the sum of £184,383 (ie £62,464 per annum). This revenue income will be lost if the surrender proceeds as recommended. [Note that this break is a Tenants break, and if they did not choose to exercise it then they would remain in possession until 2029].
- 4.17 If SMBC chose not to accept the surrender, given Argos's stated wish to vacate, it is highly likely that they would exercise their break in 2024 in which case the rental and business rate income would be lost to SMBC at that stage. If the properties were underlet, or if they could be re-let, then this income might be reinstated but this is not certain at this stage.
- 4.17 Avison Young have indicated that the premium sum of £140,000 is their final offer. The figure equates to just under two years rental income.



- 4.18 It is anticipated that the market will be relocated within two years, although this depends on a satisfactory business plan being prepared and approved by Cabinet. Assuming that it takes two years before the new market is occupied and income-producing, the rental income and business rates that the Council would forego up to that point would total £274,928. This would be partly offset by the £140,000 premium received from Argos but a £134,928 deficit would remain. It might be possible to secure a short-term letting of the units in order to reduce this deficit; (Avison Young on behalf of Argos have provided evidence of two proposed short term underlettings that they have been negotiating for Argos, one at £1500 pcm on a rolling 4 week agreement, the other for £60,000 per annum on a more permanent lease arrangement). If the surrender proceeds then efforts will be made to secure a letting for circa 1 year on terms that will help reduce the deficit whilst not hindering the programme for the market relocation.
- 4.19 External advice has been obtained from Savills, and their recommendation is that the Council should proceed with the surrender on the terms agreed.
- 4.20 The Council has recently been awarded £25m Towns Fund. This is subject to a Full Business Case (due November 2021). Subject to this and subject to Cabinet approving the business case for the market relocation it is anticipated that the cost of relocating the market will be met by the Towns Fund.
- 4.21 In the event that the business plan for the relocation of the market is not satisfactory and Cabinet does not approve the market relocation, the units would be re-marketed and alternative high quality occupiers would be identified which would support the Masterplan objectives.

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Council could decline to accept the offer of a surrender at this stage and delay the decision until the West Bromwich Masterplan is approved and a full business case is developed for the market relocation.



However in this scenario Argos would almost certainly assign the lease or sublet, and a new occupier may be unwilling to surrender. Negotiations to obtain early vacant possession would then involve the Council paying a premium rather than receiving one, if indeed terms could be agreed at all.

- 5.2 The Council could consider acquiring another similar property in the town centre for the new indoor market. This would involve negotiating with property owners and tenants and would involve the Council paying premiums to tenants rather than receiving one.
- 5.3 The Council could consider the construction of a new market hall on an alternative site as part of the masterplan. This would inevitably be more expensive and might damage the viability of the masterplan as it would displace alternative uses eg residential or leisure.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Accepting a surrender of the lease from 10th September 2021 at a premium of £140,000 will provide certainty of income and business rates for 12 months. Thereafter and until such time the indoor market is relocated there will be a loss of income and a business rate liability.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	A future Cabinet report will be submitted outlining the full business case to commence the relocation of the indoor market.
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>The risk of not progressing the matter at this stage is that the opportunity may pass and should the Council decide after it business planning this is the preferred location, a reverse premium would have to be paid to the lessee's Argos to encourage them to provide vacant possession. This would incur further expense to the Council.</p> <p>If the indoor market relocation does not proceed then the premises will be re-marketed and a new tenant identified. However given the deterioration of retail rental values this could be at a lower rent than that currently paid by Argos.</p>



<b>Equality:</b>	Any development of the site is subject to planning approval, and as such customers and stakeholders will be consulted.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	No Implications
<b>Social Value</b>	<p>Markets contribute to social interaction and social inclusion and can be viewed community hubs, community spaces and 'people's places', as crucial parts of communities.</p> <p>Traders describe markets as a social gathering, a social event, a day out, a meeting place and create an attraction and reason to visit town centres.</p>

## 7. Appendices

1. Location plan
2. Masterplan extract

## 8. Background Papers

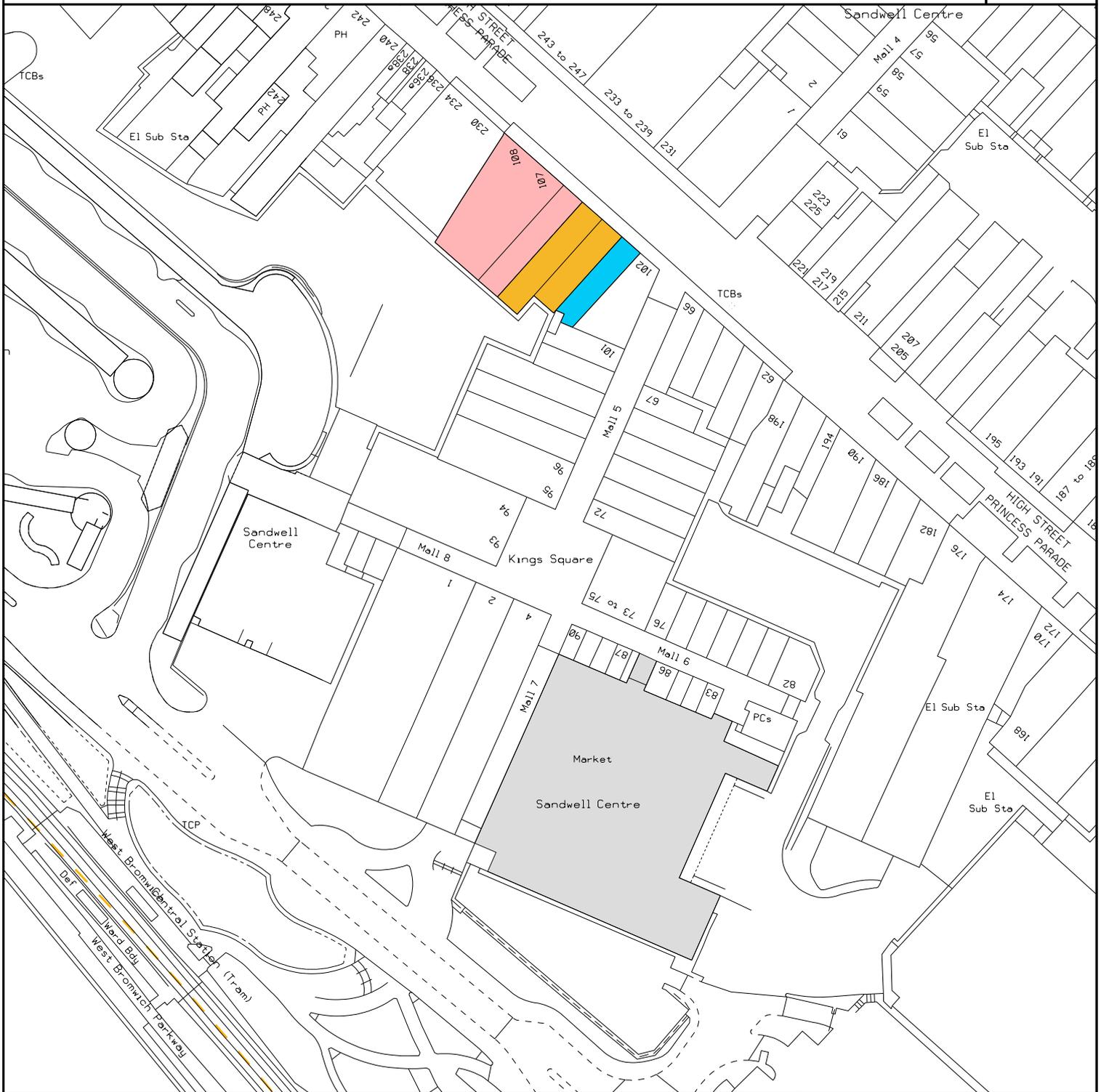
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# REGENERATION AND PLANNING

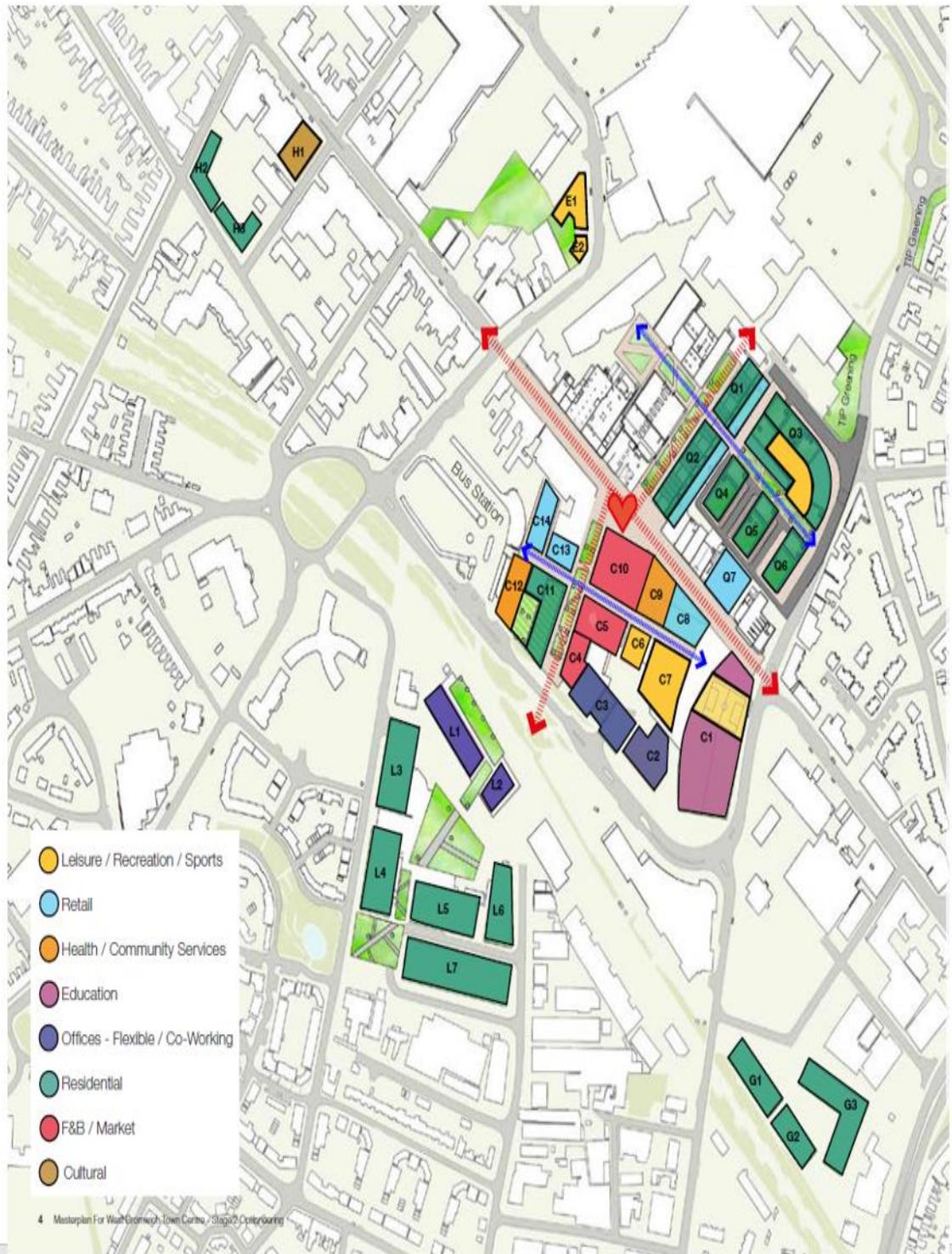
STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT



<b>LEGEND</b>   <b>Sandwell</b> Metropolitan Borough Council Page 225	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>  WEST BROMWICH INDOOR MARKET PROPOSALS	<b>SANDWELL</b> SP0091SE	<b>TERRIER</b> 198
	<b>AREA</b>  PLAN NUMBER N/A	<b>SCALE</b> 1:1250	<b>CENTROID</b> 400555/291040
		<b>DRAWN</b> DM	<b>THIS MAP IS BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY MATERIAL WITH THE PERMISSION OF ORDNANCE SURVEY ON BEHALF OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE</b> ©CROWN COPYRIGHT UNAUTHORISED REPRODUCTION INFRINGES CROWN COPYRIGHT AND MAY LEAD TO PROSECUTION OR CIVIL PROCEEDINGS SANDWELL MBC LICENCE NO 100032119 2021

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# MAXIMUM INTERVENTION- PREFERRED OPTION



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## Report to Cabinet

**1 September 2021**

<b>Subject:</b>	Award of a Framework Agreement for the Provision of Tree Maintenance & Arboricultural Services
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Strong and Resilient Communities Councillor Crompton
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director of Borough Economy Nicholas Austin
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Business Manager – Parks and Grounds Maintenance Jayne Weaver Jayne_weaver@sandwell.gov.uk

### 1 Recommendations

1.1 That the Interim Director – Borough Economy is authorised to award the Framework Agreement for the Provision of Tree Maintenance & Arboricultural Services for the period 9 September 2021 to 31 July 2025 (subject to satisfactory performance and price competitiveness) to the following Contractors.

- Acorn Environmental Management Group
- Beechwood Trees and Landscapes Ltd
- Midland Forestry Ltd



1.2 That in connection with 1.1 above, the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter in to appropriate contracts with Acorn Environmental Management Group, Beechwood Trees and Landscapes Ltd and Midland Forestry Ltd.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 This report seeks approval to award the Framework Agreement and appoint the aforementioned contractors for the Provision of Tree Maintenance & Arboricultural Services.

2.2 The Framework Agreement will include, but is not limited to provision of the following tree maintenance services and Arboricultural services:

- Tree pruning / cutting / clearing
- Hedge cutting / pruning
- Crown reduction
- Tree / large shrub removal (felling, sectional, dismantling, crane assisted)
- Stump removal / chemical treatment
- Associated waste removal
- Emergency call out and make safe 24 hour response
- Arboricultural advice and tree surveys

2.3 The Framework Agreement approach ensures continuity of service, including during peak times, i.e. storms, high winds and also encourages competitive pricing schedules.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>To support in making Sandwell a better place to live, work, learn and spend leisure time in. The Framework Agreement will provide improved highways, parks and open spaces making it easier and more attractive for local people and visitors to get around.</p>
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## A strong and inclusive economy

The Framework Agreement will adhere to the council's social value benefits providing opportunities to meet the council's key criteria requirements by providing value for money in terms of generating benefits to society and the economy e.g. employment and skills, health and wellbeing, whilst minimising the impact to the environment.

## 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Urban Forestry Service is a small service with 1 x full time Manager, 1 x full time Inspector and 1 x part time inspector. There is also a small internal team of 3 employees who carry out minor tree works (i.e. feathering, clearance, chainsaw works which does not require climbing).

On behalf of the council the Service has responsibility for the following trees:

- Highways Street Trees
- Trees in Parks, Open Spaces and Leisure Sites
- Sandwell Neighbourhood's Residents Front and Back Garden Trees
- Educational and Children's Services Sites
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Woodlands – Plantation Copses
- Social Inclusion Accommodations and Resource Centres
- Corporate Property Trees

The Services carries out the tree management for Highways, Parks, Communal Areas and housing front and back gardens. This includes proactive and reactive tree works.

The Service also carries out the procurement of all tree works and surveys for all council departments.

In line with the Urban Forestry Tree Policy the Service:

- Protect existing trees wherever possible
- Encourage and enable better understanding of the management of trees in order to promote greater community ownership/awareness



- Endeavour to fulfil its obligation to ensure the safety of people and property
- Consult with all interested parties of any proposed major tree works
- Seek to resolve tree root related problems in a timely manner. Healthy trees will only be removed where no sound urban forestry or engineering solution can be found
- Seek a replacement of all felled trees
- Survey all its tree stock on a structured basis
- Provide tree related advice to members of the public for both council owned and private trees
- Provide an out of hour's emergency service
- Remove a street tree for the establishment of a footway crossing at the customers cost and a replacement tree at the customers cost will be planted elsewhere in the borough in a suitable location

4.3 The total expenditure over the four year life of the Framework Agreement is estimated to be £2.4m.

4.4 The Framework Agreement was procured in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 following an EU compliant open tender process. Contractors were invited to submit tenders on a 70% price and 30% quality basis with the top three submissions being appointed to the Framework Agreement.

4.5 In response to the tender advertisement, five (5) compliant tender submissions were returned by the deadline of 8 January 2021.

4.6 Tender submissions were scored in accordance with the stated evaluation criteria by officers from the Council's Corporate Procurement Service and Urban Forestry Unit. An evaluation summary is attached in Appendix 1 of this report.

4.6 The three highest scoring tenders were those submitted by Acorn Environmental Group Ltd, Beechwood Trees and Landscapes Ltd and Midland Forestry Ltd.

4.7 Social Value considerations formed part of the evaluation criteria and the commitments made will be monitored during the lifetime of Framework Agreement to ensure works deliver a positive impact.



## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Do nothing. The current agreement lapses and the Council would then have to go out for quote/tender for individual tree work requests. This would result in numerous independent Tree Contractors working within the Borough and with the loss of the Framework Agreement prices and Officers time to deal with this would increase significantly.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	<p>Financial, staffing, land/building implications</p> <p>There are no direct strategic resource implications arising from this report.</p> <p>The actual service to be delivered through the Framework Agreement will be determined by each year's approved budget and although no guarantee of expenditure is given to Contractors it is estimated that the services to be procured by the council over the potential life of the Framework Agreement is estimated to be between £2m and £2.4m.</p>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<p>Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions</p> <p>The procurement exercise has been concluded in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p> <p>There are no direct risk implications as tree works will still have to take place, albeit at an increased cost in finances and resources</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <p>There are no equality implications</p>
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	<p>Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities</p>



	There are no health and wellbeing implications
<b>Social Value</b>	<p>Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)</p> <p>The Framework Agreement will adhere to the Councils social value policy by providing opportunities to meet the Councils key criteria requirements to by providing value for money in terms of generating benefits to society and the economy e.g. employment and skills, health and wellbeing, whilst minimising the impact to the environment.</p>



## Appendix 1 – Tender Evaluation Summary

		Acorn	Beechwood	Tender X	Midland Forestry	Tender Y
<b>Total Tender Score</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>53.63</b>	<b>97.50</b>	<b>25.10</b>	<b>94.07</b>	<b>21.64</b>
<b>Pricing</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>25.63</b>	<b>70.00</b>	<b>20.85</b>	<b>64.07</b>	<b>15.64</b>
<b>Quality</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>28.00</b>	<b>27.50</b>	<b>4.25</b>	<b>30.00</b>	<b>6.00</b>



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## Report to Cabinet

1 September 2021

<b>Subject:</b>	Schools Capital Programme 2021-2024
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life, Councillor Simms Cabinet Member for Finance, Council Sustainability and Transformation, Councillor Crompton
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger Director of Finance, Simone Hines
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Martyn Roberts, School Place Planning and Capital Manager <a href="mailto:martyn_roberts@sandwell.gov.uk">martyn_roberts@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations

Cabinet are recommended to:

- 1.1 approve a sum of £1.5m of the School Condition allocation to be used to support cyclical maintenance.
- 1.2 approve the allocation of an additional £200,000 from the council's Special Education Needs and Disability capital grant to fund extension works to The Meadows School (9-19), Dudley Road East, Oldbury B69 3BU;



- 1.3 approve the allocation of £4,575,000 from the Department of Education (DfE) Basic Need allocation to fund remodelling and refurbishment at Health Futures University Technical College, 350 High Street, West Bromwich B70 8DJ as part of the Schools Capital Programme 2021–2024; and
- 1.4 in connection with 1.3, approve the allocation of £2,035,000 from the council’s School Condition balances to enable works to be completed.
- 1.5 require in connection with 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 above, that the following actions are implemented to reduce any risk to the council:-
- In connection with School Condition, ensure that repair / maintenance work for schools is undertaken following an analysis of pre-determined criteria and that records are maintained to demonstrate the priority need of each school;
  - Maintain project programmes for each scheme within the Schools Capital Programme to ensure that effective project monitoring can be undertaken to aid the timely delivery of the programme;
  - Ensure that corporate Risk Registers are maintained and reviewed for all projects, and ensure all risks are appropriately identified and assessed, with adequate mitigation;
  - That cost estimates are reviewed to ensure that any future costs can be managed within the allocated funding;
  - Ensure rigorous financial monitoring is undertaken on the Schools Capital Programme to ensure future funding needs can be met;
  - Ensure that the Council enters into such form of legal agreements as required to allow capital works on all proposed sites; and
  - Post project evaluation should include specific outcomes, to monitor the successful delivery of each project, along with benchmarking of final costs to ensure value for money is achieved; and



- Project evaluation information is reported at an appropriate level for accountability and to ensure future improvements in programme implementation.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report seeks approval to allocate School Condition Allocation funding for cyclical maintenance to support maintained schools. The balance will be retained for a future school replacement building programme.
- 2.2 Following Cabinet approval on 17 March 2021 (Minute No.79/21 of Cabinet refers), to allocate £850,000 from the council’s Special Education Needs and Disability capital grant to fund extension works at The Meadows School (9-19), detailed design and survey work has now been completed, and full planning consent obtained. In particular, the survey work has now established significant ground works are required to enable construction, including an alternative foundation piling solution, and safe disposal of contaminated waste, which were unknown at the time of the initial approval. Commencement of the works have now been delayed until mid-September.
- 2.3 Basic Need Allocation is for providing new places in the borough. Data shows by the academic year 2023/24 there will be a shortfall in secondary places. It is the Local Authority’s statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><b>Best start in life for children and young people</b></p> <p>The recommendation in this report supports the desire of the council to focus resources on the specific needs and aspirations of the community. This contributes to the Council’s Vision 2030 Ambition 1 – Raising aspirations and resilience, Ambition 3 – Young people to have skills for the future, Ambition 4 – Raising the quality of schools.</p>
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## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Obtain approval to the report recommendations so works can begin on the Schools Capital Programme 2021–24.
- 4.2 The DfE has confirmed a new allocation of £10,733,158 Basic Need capital grant funding to the Authority.
- 4.3 Cabinet Decision No.59/20(2), ‘Schools Capital Programme 2020/21-22/23’, approved the allocation of £8,192,624 from the council’s School Condition balances to enable construction works within the programme. Following the new announcement, the council now has a balance of £2,540,534 Basic Need funding to fund the Schools Capital Programme 2021/22-23/24. It is proposed to allocate an additional £2.035m from School Condition balances to enable works to be completed.
- 4.4 It is currently projected that an additional 828 places will be required in secondary schools by September 2024. The project at Health Futures University Technology College (UTC) will provide 360 of those places. The shortfall is in addition to the proposed opening of two new secondary free schools that are due to be opened by the DfE in September 2022 and 2023 respectively.
- 4.5 Whilst the unprecedented growth in the birth rate experienced over recent years has started to ease, the Borough continues to receive a high demand for school places, attributable to the recent rise in migration and retention rates.
- 4.6 The Schools Capital Programme aligns to service needs so that the council is able to meet its statutory responsibility of ensuring every child in Sandwell has access to a good school place by seeking to build on its commitment to expand successful and popular schools.
- 4.7 It is proposed to meet the estimated capital cost for the projects of £6.3m through existing available Basic Need, School Condition and SEND Capital Grant balances:



	£m
Basic Need Allocation (June 2021) less £8.2m reimbursement to School Condition	<b>2.54</b>
Cyclical Maintenance:	
School Condition balance	8.2
School Condition allocation 2021/22	5.3
Sub-Total	<b>13.5</b>
SEND Capital Grant	<b>1.5</b>
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>17.54</b>

4.8 Cabinet are requested to approve allocation of the capital funding as follows:

Project	Contractor £000's	Design £000's	F&E £000's	Total £000's
Health Futures UTC	3,500	520	157	4,177
Project Risk (10%)	398	0	0	398
<b>Total (Basic Need)</b>	<b>3,898</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>4,575</b>
The Meadows School (9-19)	200	0	0	200
<b>Total (SEND Capital)</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>200</b>
School Condition	1,275	225	0	1,500
<b>Total (School Condition)</b>	<b>1,275</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,500</b>
	<b>5,373</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>6,275</b>



4.9 Full financial appraisal has been undertaken by Strategic Finance for the Basic Need capital project, and the School Condition allocation, and a short appraisal for The Meadows School (9-19). The appraisal process recorded scores of 67% for Health Futures UTC, and 68% for School Condition.

The short appraisal for The Meadows School (9-19) concluded that the additional funding of £200,000 be approved, and the project does not present a major risk to the Council's resources.

Copies of the reports can be found at Appendix 1. Some risks have been identified as a result of the appraisals and action points recommended to mitigate these risks.

4.10 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) initial screening has been undertaken. The screening identified that there will be no adverse impact on people or groups with protected characteristics as a result of the proposals contained within the report. A full EIA is not therefore required. However, it has revealed that as the council has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of school places for all children in Sandwell, all groups are potentially affected by the policy of expansion. This proposal demonstrates that this is uniformly applied in response to where pupil demand is expected although size and type of expansion is restrictive as it is dependent on the availability of government capital funding.

#### 4.11 **The current position**

4.12 In late April the DfE announced the Authority's School Condition allocation for 2021/22 in the sum of £5,346,162.00.

4.13 Urban Design and Building Services has a schedule of proposed works for maintenance of maintained schools in the borough. The list is included in Appendix 1, 'Strategic Investment Capital Appraisal'.

4.14 Detailed site investigations, a building design, and full planning consent has been obtained for extension works at The Meadows School (9-19). Works were scheduled to commence early June 2021. The new classrooms are required to support the admission of an additional 18 pupils at the school from September 2021.



A contract for the works has not been awarded due to the additional abnormal project costs that will now be incurred as referenced in paragraph 2.4 above. Approval is required to allocate additional SEND capital grant funding to fund the scheme.

- 4.15 The DfE has approved the Multi Academy Trust (MAT), Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust to become the sponsor of the Health Futures UTC. As part of the UTC joining the MAT the age range will increase from 14–18 years to 11–18 years. The age range increase will provide an additional 360 places statutory school places in West Bromwich. Works are required to remodel the UTC to accommodate the increased pupil intake.
- 4.16 Secondary feasibility work on future schemes will need to continue upon approval of the recommendations to ensure a sufficient supply of school places are provided to meet projected demand in future years.

#### 4.17 **Consultation (Customers and other Stakeholders)**

Where necessary, consultation will be undertaken by the respective Academy Trust and the Authority for the prospective increased pupil intakes. Consultees include the Regional Schools Commissioner, schools, local community, parents/carers and pupils.

### 5 **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 There are either no alternative options, or options have already been discounted through project development:

- The terms of the School Condition Allocation mean funds have to be spent on maintained school's cyclical maintenance.

Within the maintained schools sector, it is the primary school building stock that will also require a programme of replacement to commence shortly. The deteriorating condition of school buildings will otherwise continue to be a drain on the School Repair Account.



- Early feasibility at The Meadows School identified the proposed location for the extension works as the most suitable and appropriate. The Authority does not have an alternative secondary special school to admit the additional pupils to, that could meet their individual special needs.
- Health Futures UTC – the alternative option would be the Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust sponsored secondary free school proposed for West Bromwich Town Centre in partnership with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra that has already been approved by the DfE and will provide 750 additional secondary school places required in the town.

## 6 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p><b>Financial implications:</b></p> <p>The direct allocation of Basic Need funding received from the DfE is based on the annual School Capacity return submitted to the Department.</p> <p>Total Basic Need funding currently available to the Authority to fund the Schools Capital Programme is £2.54m.</p> <p>A balance of £13.5m of School Condition is available to support the capital works.</p> <p>School Condition funding continues to be allocated on a yearly basis and is based on the number of maintained schools the council remains responsible for. School Condition allocation for 2021/22 has been confirmed as £5.3m. The resources are not ring fenced and there is no time limit to expend.</p> <p>Over recent years capital funding allocations by Central Government have primarily focussed upon</p>
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	<p>the provision of new school places through Basic Need, but limited in respect to condition spend for the existing school estate. The government announced after the second round of its Priority Schools Building Programme in 2014, that it could not confirm whether there would be a further round of the programme. The programme has now been replaced with the School Rebuilding Programme, targeting the worst 500 school buildings nationally.</p> <p>Strategic Finance have confirmed that there are sufficient resources within the SEND capital grant allocated by central government to fund the additional costs for the project at The Meadows School (9-19).</p> <p>Staffing implications: none</p> <p>Land implications: no change to LA's land holding. Programmed works will add value to LA asset.</p> <p>Building implications: improvement and or replacement of existing school buildings.</p>
<p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p>	<p>In accordance with the Education Act 1996 the council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient schools available for the children of Sandwell. Any school organisation changes arising out of the development of the project will be subject to the relevant statutory processes.</p> <p>The council shall ensure that any procurement of contracts necessary for this proposal are undertaken in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules.</p>



<p><b>Risk:</b></p>	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision / project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.</p> <p>Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that for the significant risks that have been identified, arrangements are in place to manage and mitigate these effectively.</p> <p>If this report is not agreed, then the council will risk having an insufficient level of school places which is contrary to the council's statutory responsibility. If there is an insufficiency of school places this will have a detrimental impact on children's future access to school places within Sandwell and the council's reputation will be detrimentally affected.</p> <p>The council's directorate risk register currently includes an amber risk in respect of school place planning. The recommendations above if approved, will assist in the continued mitigation of this risk.</p> <p>In addition, improvements to the conditions of school buildings may assist in mitigating some of the risks arising from insured perils (such as storms, floods, fire etc) and therefore mitigate the financial costs associated with such events.</p> <p>Project Risk Registers will continue to be prepared and managed during the lifetime of the projects to ensure that time, cost and quality are continually monitored to mitigate any risk to the council once projects are finalised. There are currently no significant risks identified.</p>
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<b>Equality:</b>	An Equality Impact Assessment initial screening has been undertaken and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	These project proposals will build upon established Academy provision, where strong links at popular and oversubscribed schools have been developed.  There will be a positive impact for young people because it'll provide school places at good and outstanding schools.
<b>Social Value</b>	In supporting the provision of sufficient school places for children and young people, the new and refurbished facilities at Health Futures UTC, The Meadows School (9-19) and existing maintained schools will enhance and improve the teaching environments for all.

## 7. Appendices

7.1 Appraisal Report.

## 8. Background Papers

None.



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# Financial Appraisal Report – Schools Capital Life Cycle Programme 2021/22

## Report to Cabinet

Date Issued: 30th July 2021

### Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Issues Arising

## 1 Executive Summary

### Introduction

Education Skills & Employment, Children’s Services are seeking approval to allocate £1.5m of Schools Condition funding for repair and maintenance of the authority’s school buildings.

It is the council’s responsibility to maintain its school building stock in good order to ensure that schools remain operational and provide the statutory requirement for teaching.

Strategic Finance has been asked to carry out an appraisal of the funding application, which has been evaluated against HM Treasury Green Book guidance. The appraisal process recorded a score of 68%, with some areas of risk identified.

### Project Objectives

- To support cyclical maintenance/replacement and improvements to schools across the borough
- To support the Council’s Vision 2030, where Sandwell “children benefit from a high-quality education throughout their school careers...”

### Project Details

The School’s Capital Life Cycle Replacement Programme 2021/22 will deliver cyclical repairs and maintenance at 36 primary schools, along with three larger scale heating and boiler replacements at Rood End, Ryders Green and Uplands Manor Primary Schools.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



## Scope and objectives of financial appraisal

The purpose of financial appraisals is to consider the guidance provided by HM Treasury in evaluating business case proposals and assessing the potential risk to the Council in achieving its objectives. The following components and risks are assessed:

HM Treasury Green Book	Potential Risks
<u>Strategic Case</u> Objective, need, demand and reasonableness	Insufficient justification for project/will not meet strategic objectives
<u>Economic case</u> Option analysis and risk	Poor use of council resources & excessive risk to Council
<u>Commercial Case</u> Legal and statutory implications	Project may contravene legal/statutory regulations
<u>Financial Case</u> Affordability	Proposals are not affordable or realistic
<u>Management Case</u> Governance, project management, monitoring and evaluation	Non-delivery of project and outputs
Limitations to scope of appraisal	Information provided by Project Officer

### LEVEL OF ASSURANCE GAINED FROM FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

Limited (0%-65%)	Satisfactory (66%-80%)	Substantial (81%-100%)
There is a high risk of objectives not being met due to insufficient assurance within the project proposals. There is limited evidence to confirm that the risks to the Council could be adequately mitigated.	There is adequate assurance that objectives could be met, but further actions are required to adequately mitigate the risk to the Council.	There is good assurance that objectives will be met, with little risk to council resources.

## Overall Conclusion

The appraisal scored 68% and provides **satisfactory assurance** over the adequacy of the proposals.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



Financial appraisals will identify the following levels of issues:

### **Fundamental**

Action is imperative to ensure that the objectives of the project are met

### **Significant**

Action is required to avoid exposure to significant risks in achieving objectives

### **Merits Attention**

Action is advised to enhance operational efficiency

## Summary of key issues identified

- The financial appraisal has identified NO 'fundamental' issues
- The financial appraisal has identified 1 'significant' issues
- The financial appraisal has identified 4 'merits attention' issues

## 2 Issues Arising

Action is required to avoid exposure to significant risks in achieving objectives  
**Significant**

### 2.1 Economic Case – Option Analysis

It is advised that spend from the Schools Repair Account for cyclical maintenance is prioritised on the basis of individual school needs. Whilst evidence of the process for assessing schools condition against pre-determined criteria was provided, limited information was provided on the condition of all LEA school buildings.

#### **Implication:**

That maintenance/repair work on schools may not be correctly prioritised.

#### **Recommended Action:**

- Ensure that records are maintained to demonstrate the priority need of all schools.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



**2.2 Economic Case – Risks** – Whilst general risks to schools' capital projects were identified by Building Services, a corporate risk register had not been produced and specific risks for individual projects were not recognised.

**Implication:**

Risks to the projects may not be identified and mitigated sufficiently, resulting in non-delivery of the objectives and financial implications to the Council.

**Recommended Action:**

- That corporate risk registers are produced for all projects to ensure all risks are identified and can be adequately mitigated.

**2.3 Management Case – Project Plan** – Project programmes have been provided to support the proposed works at Rood End, Ryders Green and Uplands Manor Primary Schools. However, whilst estimated timescales were provided for the works at the remaining schools, no detailed programmes were available.

**Implication:**

The projects cannot be adequately monitored to ensure timely completion of the schemes within proposed timescales.

**Recommended Action:**

- That project programmes are produced for each scheme to ensure that effective project monitoring can be undertaken to aid the timely delivery of the programme.

**2.4 Management Case – Project Evaluation of Outcomes** – No specific outcomes have been included within the appraisal application.

**Implication:**

It may not be possible to undertake effective programme evaluation without pre-determined outcomes to monitor against.

**Recommended Action:**

- Ensure post project evaluation include specific outcomes, along with benchmarking of final costs to ensure value for money.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



## 2.5 Management Case – Reporting of Project Evaluation

It is advised that post project evaluation is undertaken and reported to the Project Manager, but it is not clear whether any higher-level reporting is undertaken.

### **Implication:**

Results of projects and their timeliness in adhering to project timescales may not be reported to a senior level to understand what improvements are required for future projects.

### **Recommended Action:**

- That project evaluation information is reported at an appropriate level for accountability and to ensure future improvements in programme implementation.

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# Financial Appraisal Report – Schools Capital programme – Health Futures University Technical College, West Bromwich

## Report to Cabinet

### 1 Executive Summary

#### Introduction

Education Skills & Employment, Children’s Services are seeking approval for a capital project to convert the Health Futures University Technology College in West Bromwich to a secondary school.

Due to an increase in birth rates since 2006, it is projected that an additional 828 new secondary school places will be required across Sandwell by September 2024.

The Published Admission Numbers (PAN) across Sandwell for September 2022 is 23,341 and Numbers on Role (NOR) requiring places are 22,931. Whilst the number of places is currently adequate, it does not allow for the DFE’s recommended 5% surplus of school places. It is also projected that the secondary school population in Sandwell will increase further, by 9.44% between now and 2024/25. Without further school expansion there will be insufficient school places to meet future demand.

Demand for school places will ultimately depend on parental preference but the Council aims to provide a sufficient supply of school places at good and outstanding schools.

Strategic Finance has been asked to carry out an appraisal of the funding application, which has been evaluated against HM Treasury Green Book guidance. The appraisal process recorded a score of 67%, with some areas of risk identified.

#### Project Objectives

- To provide sufficient school places in ‘good’ schools.

Date Issued: 11th August 2021

#### Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Issues Arising

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



- To support the Council’s Vision 2030, where Sandwell “children benefit from a high-quality education throughout their school careers...”

### Project Details

In July 2021, the Department for Education approved Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust to become the sponsor of the Health Futures University Technical College. The Academy Trust now propose to convert the UTC into a secondary school, with the age range changing from 14–18 years to 11–18 years.

Works are therefore required to remodel the UTC to accommodate the increased pupil intake, to provide an additional 360 statutory school places in West Bromwich.

The conversion of the UTC will provide 120 school places for Year 7 pupils from September 2022 with the remaining 240 being available by September 2023.

The re-modelling of the UTC will deliver the following:

- 5 general classrooms
- 2 maths classrooms
- Behaviour Management suite
- Laboratory
- Music room
- Activity studio
- Multi use games arena
- Hall/Lecture theatre
- New entrance & mezzanine floor for 3 classrooms

The total project cost for the conversion of the UTC is estimated to be in the region of £4.575m and will be procured as a design and build contract. It is advised that due to lower than expected allocations of Basic Need funding over several years, there is an insufficient amount of such funding to fully cover the cost of re-modelling and refurbishment of the UTC. It is therefore proposed that £2.540m will be funded via the council’s Basic Need allocation, with the remaining £2.035m provided by Schools Condition funding in the short term.

The Academy Trust will be responsible for future management and maintenance of the facility and there will not be any future financial implications for the Council.

### Scope and objectives of financial appraisal

The purpose of financial appraisals is to consider the guidance provided by HM Treasury in evaluating business case proposals and assessing the potential risk to the Council in achieving its objectives. The following components and risks are assessed:

HM Treasury Green Book	Potential Risks
<u>Strategic Case</u>	Insufficient justification for project/will not meet strategic objectives

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



Objective, need, demand and reasonableness	
<u>Economic case</u> Option analysis and risk	Poor use of council resources & excessive risk to Council
<u>Commercial Case</u> Legal and statutory implications	Project may contravene legal/statutory regulations
<u>Financial Case</u> Affordability	Proposals are not affordable or realistic
<u>Management Case</u> Governance, project management, monitoring and evaluation	Non-delivery of project and outputs
Limitations to scope of appraisal	Information provided by Project Officer

#### LEVEL OF ASSURANCE GAINED FROM FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

Limited (0%-65%)	Satisfactory (66%-80%)	Substantial (81%-100%)
There is a high risk of objectives not being met due to insufficient assurance within the project proposals. There is limited evidence to confirm that the risks to the Council could be adequately mitigated.	There is adequate assurance that objectives could be met, but further actions are required to adequately mitigate the risk to the Council.	There is good assurance that objectives will be met, with little risk to council resources.

### Overall Conclusion

The appraisal scored 67% and provides **satisfactory assurance** over the adequacy of the proposals.

Financial appraisals will identify the following levels of issues:

#### Fundamental

Action is imperative to ensure that the objectives of the project are met

#### Significant

Action is required to avoid exposure to significant risks in achieving objectives

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



## Merits Attention

Action is advised to enhance operational efficiency

### Summary of key issues identified

- The financial appraisal has identified NO 'fundamental' issues
- The financial appraisal has identified 2 'significant' issues
- The financial appraisal has identified 1 'merits attention' issues

## 2 Issues Arising

Action is required to avoid exposure to significant risks in achieving objectives  
**Significant**

### 2.1 Financial Case – Funding

Capital costs of £4.575m will be funded from the Schools Capital Programme. Funding streams within the Schools Capital Programme consist of Basic Need Allocations for school expansion projects and Schools Condition grant funding which is normally utilised for building repairs and maintenance.

It is advised that there are currently insufficient funds available within the Basic Need Allocation and therefore Schools Condition grant funding will need to be utilised in the short term to fund the project.

#### **Implication:**

The use of the Schools Condition grant to fund construction will increase pressure on resources if demand/costs for emergency repairs of schools exceed the current allocation.

#### **Recommended Action:**

Ensure rigorous financial monitoring is undertaken on the Schools Capital Programme to ensure future funding needs can be met.

### 2.2 Financial Case – Reasonableness of Costs

- (a) Whilst a basic breakdown of estimated costs was provided as part of a high-level costing exercise, there was no formal cost estimate or detailed breakdown to support it. It was unclear whether potential changes to specifications etc. could be managed within the allocated funding.
- (b) No financial sensitivity analysis has been undertaken on the project and it was therefore not possible to determine the effect on the overall cost of the programme should there be fluctuations in the cost drivers of the project, e.g. construction costs.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]



**Implication:**

Without a detailed breakdown of costs and sensitivity analysis, the reasonableness of the estimates cannot be confirmed and there is a risk that additional costs may be incurred, and further funding required.

**Recommended Action:**

- That cost estimates are reviewed to ensure that any future costs can be managed within the allocated funding.

Action is advised to enhance operational efficiency  
**Merits Attention**

**2.3 Economic Case – Risks**

A corporate Risk Register was provided to support the re-modelling and refurbishment of the University Technical College. However, only one risk was identified; that being the overall non-delivery of the project. Further detailed risks appear to have been identified as mitigating actions for the non-delivery of the project and did not adequately assess the level of risk to the project.

**Implication:**

Risks to the project may not be adequately assessed and mitigated, resulting in non-delivery of the objectives and financial implications to the Council.

**Recommended Action:**

- That the corporate risk register is reviewed to ensure that all risks are appropriately identified and assessed, with adequate mitigation.

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## Minutes of Cabinet Petitions Committee

**23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021 at 5:00pm**  
**Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Millard (Chair);  
Councillors Hartwell and Simms.

**In attendance:** Councillors Ahmed, S Gill and Shackleton.

**Also present:** John Satchwell [Dartmouth Park Project Officer, Parks and Countryside, Cultural Services] and Suky Suthi-Nagra [Democratic Services Manager].

### 5/21 **Minutes**

**Agreed** that the minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 be deferred for approval at a future meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee.

### 6/21 **Progress Report**

Details were submitted of petitions received and of the action taken or proposed in each case, as detailed in the Appendix.

**Agreed** that the action taken or proposed, as detailed in the second column of the Appendix, be approved.

Meeting ended at 5:52 pm

## Appendix

Petition Received From	Action Taken/Proposed
<p>1. Residents of West Park Road concerning the new entrance and exit for West Smethwick Park.</p>	<p>Officers confirmed that significant consultation had been undertaken prior to the project commencing. Furthermore, whilst officers from Highways were consulted and no concerns were raised, discussions were now in place to address the concerns highlighted by the residents. Officers continued to work alongside partners in the local community to address the issues raised. The issues highlighted were addressed as part of the local town forum in order to identify what measures could be adopted to mitigate any concerns. All existing entrances into the Park would be improved as part of the restoration project, with an exception of the existing car park entrance which was proposed to be relocated. Residents of West Park Road received letters in relation to the Planning Application in 2017. New litter bins would be installed as part of the restoration project and officers continued to deal with any flytipping and littering as it arose. Officers intended to commence work on the new entrance way with immediate effect to allow access and egress for construction traffic. Having considered the objections raised by the head petitioner and local ward member, the Committee were minded to agree that Highways undertook an impact assessment of the traffic calming measures on surrounding roads of West Smethwick Park and inspect the new entrance on West Park Road following its completion and that a further update be provided to the next meeting of the Petitions Committee.</p>

<b>Petition Received From</b>	<b>Action Taken/Proposed</b>
<p>2. Residents of Haysech requesting the pedestrian gate to be locked at night</p>	<p>Officers confirmed that, should a temporary camera be installed, the site would be monitored for any issues and a decision would be made based on the findings. To ensure that protocol for deployment of cameras was adhered to, the request for CCTV had been referred to the Rowley Regis town tasking meeting for consideration and discussion with partners and local community. The site presented difficulties in deploying a camera as there was a lot of tree cover that hindered camera images and a kink in the road would not enable a full view of the road. However, there was a suitable column on the junction of The Crescent and Haysech that provided a better view of the road towards the entrance to the park on the left. Information from the police and ASB colleagues had also been requested. Having considered representations from the head petitioner and local ward member, the Committee requested that the gates be locked and officers gave consideration to giving the key for the gate to the head petitioner or resuming the Council's responsibility to lock the gate as done pre-pandemic. Subject to this, the petition would be closed. The head petitioner had been informed.</p>

<p>3. Residents of Church Road, Smethwick, requesting a residents parking scheme</p>	<p>A residents' parking scheme had been considered for part of Church Road, Smethwick between the junctions of Bearwood Road and Stanhope Road. The on-street parking space available was not deemed adequate for a permit scheme. Approximately 120 metres of on-street parking space was available for permit bays along the south side of Church Road. This did not provide one parking space per household. Due to the width of Church Road, parking bays would not be installed on the north side. In view of this, it was not possible to design a permit scheme on this occasion. Having considered representations from the head petitioner, it was agreed that the matter be deferred to the next meeting to enable photographs of the site to be shared with the Petitions Committee.</p>
<p>4. Residents of Dudley Road requesting repositioning of the pedestrian crossing on Doulton Road/Dudley Road</p>	<p>The crossing facility in place in the vicinity of no. 68 Dudley Road helped to provide a safe crossing place for pedestrians. Consideration could not be given to removing this crossing facility for the purpose of creating extra parking spaces as it was likely to result in an increase in injury collisions on the highway. A number of surveys had been conducted before crossing facilities were installed, including pedestrian movement surveys. This helped to identify the best position for a crossing facility in terms of where pedestrians need to walk. i.e. routes to shops, bus stops, schools, etc. They had been installed in accordance with visibility requirements and in consultation with local residents. Replacing the zebra crossing with a crossing facility at the traffic signals on the junction of Doulton Road would not assist residents on the north east side of Dudley Road if they wished to visit the</p>

	<p>shops etc. It was not considered feasible to replace a zebra crossing, however, it was considered that further signage at the site should be erected to inform drivers of the pedestrian crossing and to slow down. It was agreed to close the petition, however, with regard to the issue of lack of parking at the site, officers were requested to revisit the matter and provided a response to the head petitioner.</p>
<p>5. Residents of Smethwick regarding removal of trees on Smethwick High Street</p>	<p>An update was provided on the proposed pedestrian and cycleway scheme along Tollhouse Way and Smethwick High Street, being delivered as part of Sandwell's successful Accelerated Towns Fund programme funding bid. The Tollhouse Way scheme detailed design had been assessed and was currently continuing to be monitored by the Urban Forestry Manager. With regards to the concerns around the impact on trees, for every tree felled as part of this scheme, two new semi-mature trees would be planted. The trees to be felled were along a short section of the overall Tollhouse Way scheme and the new total tree planting scheme consisted of 46 new trees, doubling what was there previously. Works were in progress to determine suitable locations within the High Street area for the new trees which would be implemented during Autumn 2021. Where possible, replanting would take place as close as possible to where the current trees are to be felled. Doubling the number of trees at this location would assist in absorbing more CO2 whilst providing an alternative means of travel to vehicle journeys aimed to reduce vehicle emissions and improve Air Quality.</p>

	<p>Having considered representations made by the head petitioner, the Committee requested that further details be provided on the consultation process undertaken by officers be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee.</p>
<p>6. Residents of Old Warley requesting a pedestrian crossing system at Bleakhouse Road/Castle Road West Junction.</p>	<p>In accordance with Sandwell's Strategic Road Safety Plan, the location mentioned did not meet the criteria for a crossing facility. This was because the funding made available for road safety measures, such as crossing facilities, was targeted in areas where treatable injury collisions are occurring. A three-year injury collision analysis for the junction showed there hadn't been any recorded injury collisions in the last 3 years. However, enquiries were currently being made as to whether there was any money available through walking and cycling funding streams. An update would be provided to a future meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee.</p>
<p>7. Road users and residents in Wednesbury requesting a traffic light system at the junction of Park Lane/Manor House Road and Hobs Road/ Hawthorn Road, Wednesbury</p>	<p>The funding for road safety schemes, such as traffic signals was prioritised where injury accidents were occurring. A five-year injury accident analysis showed there had been three recorded injury accidents during this period which was low when compared to other locations that were being considered for major traffic calming schemes. Although this junction did not meet the criteria for the installation of traffic signals, a road safety scheme to implement additional carriageway markings and vehicle activated speed signs either side of the junction would be undertaken, which would help to warn drivers and reduce vehicle speeds on the approach to the junction. The Committee requested that the junction be monitored to ensure that the traffic calming</p>

	<p>measures made a difference. Arrangements had been made for a further traffic survey to be undertaken along Park Lane. The data would then be compared to the traffic survey which was undertaken prior to the installation of the vehicle activated speed sign. The traffic surveys had to be rearranged due to the pandemic which resulted in reduced traffic levels and would be undertaken as soon as vehicle numbers returned to normal levels. An update would be provided to a future meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee.</p>
<p>8. Residents of View Point, Tividale requesting installation of night and day gates in the gulley located at View Point.</p>	<p>Greenbelt Group wished to assist in reducing anti-social behaviour and would not oppose the installation of gates in principle, if this represented the wishes of the 299 households which were currently billed in respect of the areas. However, Greenbelt Group had specified that the Council would need to be responsible for the maintenance thereafter, agree to indemnify Greenbelt Group in respect of the gates (e.g. to cover any injury) and agree to fund the removal of the gates, if and when required. The head petitioner had advised that residents were not prepared to contribute. As the land was not in Council ownership the Council could not take on the liability or maintenance of the gates. No further action was proposed by the Council. Following representations, further investigation would be undertaken, and a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee.</p>

<p>9. Residents of Queens Road, Smethwick regarding speeding and traffic accidents on Queens Road, Smethwick.</p>	<p>A seven-day traffic survey had been undertaken for Queens Road between Basons Lane and the traffic island at the junction with Warley Road. It showed that 85% of vehicles were travelling at 32.8mph or less (both directions). A three-year injury collision analysis had also been undertaken and it showed there had been one recorded injury collision. When Queens Road was compared to other roads in Sandwell it had a very low number of injury collisions and did not therefore meet the criteria for the implementation of a traffic calming scheme. Although the vehicle speeds were slightly higher than the 30mph speed limit, this was still within the parameters of 35mph set by the Police for enforcement purposes. However, a carriageway lining scheme was implemented in October last year in response to enquiries received from residents at Queens Road. Following representations submitted to the Committee, a further traffic survey would be undertaken in spring/summer and compared to the survey results from the winter. Arrangements would be made for a traffic survey to be undertaken as soon as traffic levels return to normal. An update would be provided to a future meeting of the Cabinet Petitions Committee.</p>
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<p>10. Residents of Timbertree Crescent, Cradley Heath regarding concerns over the height of trees and damage to property.</p>	<p>Officers confirmed that, following a site visit and conversations with the head petitioner, contractors had carried out the required work. Furthermore, following a quality inspection, officers were satisfied with the work that had been completed. Consequently, the Committee agreed to close this petition.</p>
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