

Agenda

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Monday 14 November 2022 at 5.30 pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

- | | | |
|----------|--|---------|
| 1 | Apologies for Absence | 7 - 8 |
| | To receive any apologies for absence. | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest | 9 - 10 |
| | Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting. | |
| 3 | Minutes | 11 - 20 |
| | To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2022 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 Transition Education Partnership Service | 21 - 36 |
| | To consider and comment on the impact of the Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service. | |



6 **Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group Report and Recommendations** 37 - 80

That members receive the Working Group report on the Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group and determine the recommendations they wish to submit to Cabinet.

7 **Scrutiny Action Tracker** 81 - 92

Standing item to consider and note the responses and updates to the action tracker log.

8 **Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan** 93 - 102

Standing item to consider the Children's Services and Education Work Programme and future items on the Forward Plan.

Kim Bromley-Derry CBE DL
Managing Director Commissioner
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution

Councillor Shackleton (Chair)
Councillors Hinchliff, Akhtar, Chambers, Dhariwal, Dunn, W Gill, Mayo,
McVittie, Preece, Uddin and Co-opted Member K Heeley

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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Committee.



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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Declarations of Interests

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



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Minutes of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**Monday 10 October 2022 at 5.30pm
at the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Hinchliff (Chair)
Councillors Dhariwal, Dunn, W Gill, McVittie, Preece and Uddin

Officers: Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Education)
Sue Moore (Assistant Director Education and Support Services)
Jacqui Smith (Chair of Sandwell Children' Trust)
Emma Taylor (Chief Executive of Chair of Sandwell Children'
Trust)
Sally Giles (Strategic Partnerships and Commissioning Manager)
Mandip Chahal (Senior Joint Commissioning Manager)
Lynn Noble (Interim Head of Service Adoption@Heart)
Mark Davies (Chief Executive SCVO)
Stephnie Hancock (Senior Democratic Services Officer)
Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer)

20/22 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akhtar and Shackleton, and Co-opted member Kelly Heeley.

21/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.



22/22 **Minutes**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

23/22 **Urgent Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

24/22 **Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2021/2022**

The Board received the Regional Adoption Agency's Annual Report for 2021/22.

The following headline data for Sandwell was noted:-

- 34 Children had been granted adoption orders as of 31 March 2022. This was a slight reduction compared to previous years, but was a national trend as more children were being placed with relatives.
- 38 Placement Orders had been granted - eight children were subject to a change of care plan, three were on hold waiting further assessment and four children had been linked to families but not formally matched. The agency was proactively family finding for the remaining 23.
- 29 children had been placed with adoptive families, of which 17 were in-house. This compared to 35 the previous year.
- 'Foster to adopt' placements had increased significantly since the establishment of the agency.
- There was an increase in permanence across the Adoption@Heart agency. This was also reflected in national data.
- The use of in-house adopters had increased within the agency, which had resulted in a reduction in the inter-agency budget from 55% to 35%.
- The number of days for children entering care and moving in with the adoptive family was below the national threshold of 426 days, but this was in line with regional performance.



- The number of days from receiving a Placement Order and the agency agreeing a match with an adoptive family was above the government threshold of 121 days, however, this also reflected national performance.
- Children who waited longer to be placed for adoption were typically those in sibling groups, with complex needs and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- There had been 57 adopters approved over 2021/22. This was a reduction but was also replicated nationally.
- 43 assessments for adoption support had been approved. Adoption support funding was a key factor in the success of any placement.
- Adoption@Heart was part of a national pilot, ending in March 2023, trialling digital methods of post-adoption contact (keeping in touch).
- There had been three formal complaints regarding adoption support and allowances.
- Governance arrangements had been streamlined with the creation of one Strategic Partnership Board (SPB) replacing both the Management Board and the Strategic Commissioning Board, with effect in January 2023.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- Waiting times for children to be placed for adoption averaged out over the three year period.
- There had been significant increase in those from the LGBT community and single people coming forward to adopt. The agency was working hard to reach the whole community and dispel the myth that adoption was just for middle class people.
- Adoption@Heart was reliant on partners to refer birth parents for support. 29 had been referred in 2021/22. There was a continued effort to engage with birth parents, but disengagement was an ongoing concern. Partners had been asked to refer birth parents as soon as possible for creation of the child's life story book and to provide support.
- The digital contact pilot was for those where face to face contact was not appropriate and it provided an opportunity for information to be shared more frequently than twice a year.
- The decision to streamline governance arrangements was as a result of the good progress made by the agency.



- ‘You Can Adopt’ was a national campaign to increase adoption focused on finding families for those children who waited longer.
- There was an ongoing conversation about the financial support offered to adopters to encourage people to take up adoption and overcome financial barriers.
- Both informal and formal complaints were taken seriously and practice and policy reviewed where necessary.

The Board received the Annual Report and the Chair would provide a summary feedback to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

25/22

Sandwell Children’s Trust Performance Update

Further to Minute No. 06/22 (Monday 14 February 2022, when the last update was presented to the Scrutiny Board) the Board received a performance update from Sandwell Children’s Trust for the period July 2021 up to July 2022.

Ofsted had carried out an inspection in May 2022, which had been delayed from 2020 as a result of the pandemic. The Trust’s Ofsted rating had improved from *Inadequate* to *Requires Improvement to be Good* in all areas. The Trust had refreshed its Improvement Plan, utilising the feedback provided by Ofsted.

The Board noted the following headlines:-

- Referrals had reduced to 523 per 10,000, this was down from 650 per 10,000 the previous year. The figures put Sandwell lower than statistical neighbours and more in line with the West Midlands’ average.
- The rate of re-referrals had reduced from 22.6% last year to 20%. The rate was 0.8% lower than statistical neighbours and 2.7% lower than the England average.
- The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days had fluctuated, from 90% in July 2021 to 56.5% in February 2022 to 62.3% in July 2022. On average it had been around 70%, below the statistical neighbour and West Midland average.



- The rate of Single Assessments per 10,000 over the last 12 months had reduced from 718 to 520, which was now below statistical neighbours.
- Section 47 enquiries had reduced from 312 in 2018/19 to 178 per 10,000.
- Initial Child Protection Conferences had reduced from 96.9 per 10,000 to 56 per 10,000.
- The number of Child Protection Plans had reduced from 52.2 per 10,000 in 2021 to 48.8 per 10,000.
- There were currently 13 children (which represented seven families) who had been the subject of a Child Protection Plan for longer than two years.
- As of July 2022, 837 children were in care (100.8 per 10,000) which was a reduction from 853 previous year (102.8 per 10,000). At the time of reporting this had decreased to 818. This was a significant achievement.
- Over the last 12 months 187 Children had re-entered care with 192 Children leaving care.
- Over 90 care leavers were in suitable accommodation and there was a focus on increasing the number in education or training.
- OFSTED had been impressed with the children's voice being at the centre of the Trust' work.
- Workforce challenges continued and reflected the national picture.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted: -

- The response to children suffering neglect was a partnership responsibility and the Trust relied on partners to identify needs as soon as possible and focus on Early Help. Ofsted had found that some children's plans had not been progressed as quickly as they should have, however, there was evidence that the Trust was getting better at getting children out of the care system sooner and identifying pregnant moms earlier.
- There were currently 203 social workers across the Trust. There were 27 vacancies as of October 2022. Workforce was the single largest problem that the Trust faced and was raised with the Department for Education at every opportunity. There was an effort to retain and recruit social workers with attractive conditions and benefits along with learning and development opportunities.



- The SCT had established within the Trust the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Academy to act as an internal support, development and learning for newly qualified social workers in their first year of work. There were 31 social workers on the programme.
- Exit interview information indicated that social workers were leaving the Trust in favour of agency work, along with issues around work life balance and personal reasons.
- The government had recognised the impact that agencies, and their rapacious methods of targeting staff, had on the workforce.
- It had been anticipated that the Trust would have received a *Good* rating from Ofsted had the inspection gone ahead in 2020. The objective of the Trust's leadership remained to get to *Outstanding*.
- The Director of Children and Education undertook to ensure that this Board was provided with financial performance information in future, as well as the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board.
- Ofsted in their report noted the good practices across the SCT but this good practice was not necessarily replicated across the whole Trust. Getting to *Good* required that consistency.
- It was recognised that Independent Reviewing Officers needed to get better at challenging decisions.
- There was a concern that the 'cost of living crisis' could lead to an increase in families accessing services and more children coming into the system. The Trust was working with the Council.
- Every safeguarding referral was taken seriously, the reduction in the referral rate was positive, and there been no reduction in contact rate. Working with partners there had been a lot more scrutiny of referrals. Previously a lot of referrals did not have consent, now the Trust was working on the 'front door' approach and working closely with partners. The service was focused on bringing the right children into the statutory system and working to provide the necessary support at the 'front door'.

The Board also noted a spotlight report on children in care. It was noted that there had been a steady decline in the number of children in care since the establishment of the Trust. The numbers had peaked in July 2019 with just over 930 children and young people in care, the figures had now reduced to just over 830. The



demographic breakdown of those 830 children and young people demonstrated that 52% were male and 48% were female, 54% were white while 26% were mixed, 9% were black/black British and 8% were Asian/Asian British.

The number of children becoming looked after had reduced significantly since 2018/19. With the exception of 2018/19 the numbers of children entering care was below statistical neighbours. The number of children leaving care had also remained fairly consistent over the last three years and on par with statistical neighbours.

Foster placements for those children in internal and external foster care was 462 as of July 2022. This number accounted for 55% of those children who were in care. 165 children were in foster placements with family and friends ('connected care'), which represented just under 20% of the overall number. 57 children were in residential homes. The remaining children were placed with parents (97), living independently (33), placed for adoption (19) within other placements (3), and within the NHS system (1).

There had been, and continued to be, a focus on prevention with an increase in family group conferencing. The Family Solutions Team had had a 100% success rate in preventing children entering care. The Multi-Systemic Therapy Team had supported 39 children and 89% of these remained with their families. The Trust's focus was on permanency from the outset, which did not just mean adoption. To support this a joined-up approach between Early Help, Care Planning and Edge of Care Interventions was crucial.

26/22

Covid Funding Update

The Board received a report detailing how Covid Emergency Funding had been used to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

It was widely acknowledged that the pandemic had had a detrimental impact on children and young people. The Cabinet had approved proposals on how to tackle this by Cabinet in 2021/2022 (Minute No. 161/21 of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 29



September 2021). Some initiatives had started later than anticipated and some were not delivered in the 2021/22 financial year, however there had been agreement for these to be carried forward and used in 2022/23 and 2024/25.

To support the rising demand for services, the Cabinet had also approved further initiatives, including for those children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities at its meeting on Wednesday 22 June 2022 (Minute No. 124/22). These were agreed for 2022/23 and with longer-term demand to be reviewed at Budget Board post September 2022.

The Strategic Partnerships and Commissioning Manager reported that a consultation with children and young people had revealed the pandemic had impacted them negatively reporting that:-

- they had missed out on education and were not prepared for exams;
- their mental health had been negatively affected, they felt anxious and were concerned with returning to school;
- social media was having a negative impact on their self-image;
- they missed their friends and peers and felt isolated.

A significant proportion of the Covid Recovery funding (£1.1m) had been allocated to supporting the increased emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of young people before they escalated and required more intensive services. The purpose of the funding was to increase capacity within the voluntary sector to meet this increased demand as quickly as possible. Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations was managing the funding on behalf of the Council via a grant aid agreement. A multi-agency panel with representatives from CAMHS, the Council, Public Health, Sandwell Children's Trust, Education Psychology and the Charter Mark team had been set up to establish criteria for the programme, agree the projects and monitor programme implementation.

To date there had been a range of activity and impact. 13 providers had received grant funding and delivered a range of activities across the six towns. Over 2,000 individuals had accessed the support sessions.



The support provided to children and young people was ongoing as the impact of the pandemic became more understood work had continued with partners to best identify areas that needed additional support. Work was being undertaken to identify those schools who needed additional support and Public Health had been undertaking needs assessments to support ongoing commissioning. Feedback had been received from young people and work was now underway to identify how to meet their needs going forward.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted: -

- Schools could apply for funding independently and were not obligated to inform Council.
- Schools were unaware of the support available. A network of schools and mental health professionals was being created to showcase good practice.
- SCVO had spent a proportion of the funding to appoint a project officer dedicated to the children's support agenda. Regular reports were submitted to the Council on expenditure and activities to ensure that economies of scale were achieved, and funding impact was maximised.
- Most organisations were working across the six towns.
- The service was working to better understand the impact of the pandemic. The recommendations arising from the Board's review on the impact of lockdown on children and families would be coming to the Board's next meeting for final approval before submission to the Cabinet.
- The terms of reference of the multi-agency panel ensured that due diligence was undertaken.

27/22

Response from the Cabinet in respect of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Elective Home Education

Further to Minute No. 40/21 of Scrutiny Board meeting on 29 November 2021, the Board received the response from the Cabinet in respect of the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Review of Elective Home Education (EHE).



The Cabinet had accepted all of the recommendations, which had now been actioned/implemented. The Board also noted that, in addition, a new EHE Team Structure was now in place from September 2022 to increase capacity and two higher level teacher assistants (HLTA's) had been appointed to support the EHE Advisory Teacher. The team would also get additional support from the Attendance Support Service with an allocated "children not in school" officer.

28/22 **Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Board noted an update on progress on previous actions and recommendations.

A further update on progress relating to the SEND Transport model recommendations (Minutes No. 35/21, Monday 27 September 2021 and Minute No. 07/22 of Monday 14 February 2022) would be provided at the next Board meeting.

29/22 **Forward Plan - Children's Services Items**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.

30/22 **Children's Services and Education Work Programme**

The Board noted its work programme for 2022/23.

Meeting ended at 7.26pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk



Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

14 November 2022

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Subject: | Sandwell Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker |
| Director: | Director of Children and Education Michael Jarrett |
| Contact Officer: | Executive Head Teacher of STEPS and LACE Virtual School, Balwant Bains balwant_bains@sandwell.gov.uk |

1 Recommendations




- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the impact of Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS) in supporting New to the UK children and families.
- 1.2 The Board considers the risks to the community and pressures on schools if the centre’s financial support ends.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The work undertaken by Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS) has been a crucial service providing education to the most vulnerable in our community. The Scrutiny Board requested an overview of the service to better understand how it operates and impacts the outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

| | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.</p> <p>When reflecting on our priority: ‘best start in life for children and YP’ we think about Sandwell children 0 to 5; for migrant children STEPS provided their best start in life irrespective of their age, gender identity, nationality or creed. We give families a positive experience so that they are safe, settled and want to become residence with high aspirations, able to contribute to the local economy.</p> |
|  | <p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.</p> <p>For many of our International Families STEPS is their first interaction with council services. We give them direction and by linking services across the LA we can direct the appropriate support (homelessness and rental arrears, benefits support, Education Health and Care Plans applications, travel assistance)</p> |
|  | <p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>Our motto reflects the councils Corporate Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DREAM (our families dream of a better future) • GROW (in their learning, confidence and practical application) • THRIVE (in Sandwell and make positive economic and social contributions) |



4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS) is based at Cooper's Lane, Smethwick B67 7DW. It is a school-like setting for 75 children aged 5-16 and was launched in February 2017 as a local authority pilot. Since then, more than 2,000 children representing 64 nationalities have attended and there have been over 4000 service users.
- 4.2 The Centre supports Sandwell's school admissions process. STEPS is a frontline service that provides continuity in learning. Early intervention helps us safeguard vulnerable children and families quickly and prevents them being exploited, be this via rogue landlords, attendance at unregistered schools, modern day slavery or child sexual exploitation. The average length of stay is 16 days.
- 4.3 A Cost Benefit Analysis indicates that with an investment of £868,667 into STEPS; the saving to the public purse has been £8,131,372 in truancy aversion and improved families and children's wellbeing (RHCS independent evaluation January 2020); over a 32-month period.
- 4.4 Furthermore, STEPS is Sandwell's front-line service supporting the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP scheme, launched April 2021); relocation or assistance to former UK employed staff in Afghanistan.

The Home Office placed 85 individuals (including 11 families) in a 'Holding Hotel' in Sandwell on 17 September 2021, STEPS has been instrumental in supporting these families and have sourced schooling/education for:

- 5 reception aged children
- 14 primary aged children
- 10 secondary aged pupils
- 2 post 16 pupils

Recently STEPS has hosted 9 Ukrainian children who have fled the war in their country.



4.5 At present we are directing services to protect the most vulnerable of our families from the cost of living crises:

- We are a Sandwell Food Bank Voucher issuer online and on paper. 6 have been issued and staff have taken families to the foodbank.
- 2 emergency donations of £20 have been issued (sourced by donations to the centre); one for gas and electricity and one for emergency food (that led to a food bank solution).
- 6 referrals to Welfare Rights Advisers have been made (through community Navigators).
- 1 homeless housing application – current rental rates unaffordable to a family with a disabled child being evicted.
- 3 families signposted to Disability Living Allowance applications.
- Uniform bought for Ukrainian and Afghani refugees.
- 5 council applications for travel assistance completed with families.
- We provide support for all children who are entitled to Free School Meals in submitting the application for meals at mainstream schools.
- We make schools aware of children/families that have “No Recourse to Public Funds”, as these are the most vulnerable to the increasing cost of living.

4.6 All of this work was recognised at the National MJ Awards and this council service was awarded winners in the category Innovation in Children’s Service’s.



- 4.7 Based on our successful pilot, STEPS was recognised by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in February 2018, with a 24-month funding grant of £868,667 through the Migration Fund.
- 4.8 The centre remained open for families throughout the pandemic and we have budgetary security until September 2023.

5 Implications

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Resources: | <p>A Cost Benefit Analysis indicates that with an investment of £868,667 into STEPS; the saving to the public purse has been £8,131,372 in truancy aversion and improved families and children’s wellbeing (RHCS independent evaluation January 2020); over a 32-month period.</p> <p>We are based at the Hollies Centre (Smethwick), purposefully resourced as a school site. There is a staffing compliment of 7.3.</p> |
| Legal and Governance: | Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions |
| Risk: | Staff are made redundant if no further funding is resource and the building is ‘returned’ (lease hold) to council use. |
| Equality: | The centre delivers a ‘British Values’ curriculum whilst respecting faith and cultural diversity. |
| Health and Wellbeing: | At the initial meeting with families we make sure they are registered with a GP and have access to local dentists, A&E etc resources. |
| Social Value | <p>We provide work experience for Sandwell school children, volunteering opportunities and work placement opportunities.</p> <p>Additionally, we have delivered ESOL classes, Sexual Health classes, anti-natal classes and delivered the ‘changes’ programme that prepares adults for a life int eh UK.</p> <p>We are respected by schools and have strong relationships with local charities.</p> |
| Climate Change: | Implications for climate change outcomes and any potential impact on the environment (e.g. impact on emissions, resource use, or the natural environment) |

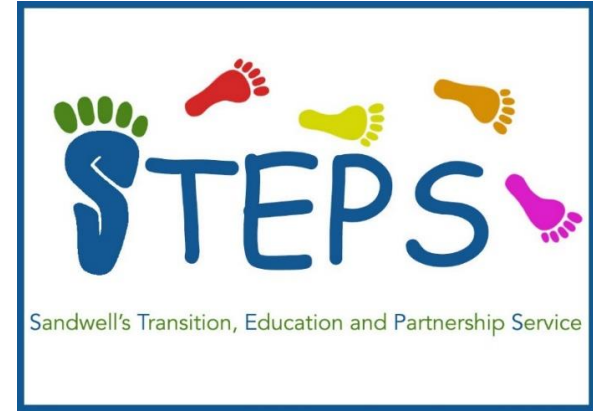


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CSE SCRUTINY BOARD

SANDWELL'S AWARD WINNING STEPS CENTRE

We know our children
and safeguard them
from exploitation



OUR CHILDREN WANT TO SAY HELLO



CHALLENGES

Page 29

- **Rising Population statistics – International New Arrivals / Asylum seekers**
- **13th most deprived ward in the UK**
- **Head Teachers Concerns**
- **July 2016, SMBC SNAP hosted a ‘Newcomer Event’**
- **Funding required – Equalities ACT 2010new**



OBJECTIVES AND AIMS

Page 30

- **Safeguarding in a school like setting - 75 children age 5 to 16**
- **Focus on Community Cohesion in multi cultural Britain**
- **Aim – Robust Information on families and a smooth transition into school**
- **One-Stop-Shop**
- **EAL Networks**



OBJECTIVES AND AIMS

Page 31

Strong resilient communities

Our motto reflects the councils Corporate Commitments:

DREAM (our families dream of a better future)

GROW (in their learning, confidence and practical application)

THRIVE (in Sandwell and make positive economic and social contributions)



Page 32

CONNECTIVITY - Local & National partnerships formed and cemented



| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children Missing Education Data Intelligence Admissions and Hard to Place Sandwell Mobile Library Service SAFL Family Learning Mothership Sandwell Rights and Equalities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion Support-Sensory Support & SEND Sandwell Social Care Trust Children's Therapy Service Primary/Secondary Schools Local Authority Asylum Seeking Support Officers NHS Brook family planning NashDom – Easter European Speaking Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing – Rogue Landlords Sandwell Safeguarding Children's Board Sandwell Virtual School for LAC Sandwell Connexions Brushstrokes Charity – food vouchers |
|--|---|---|



OUR SUCCESS

Page 33

'The teaching is good at the centre' - 100% strongly agree/agree feedback from parent's questionnaire.

'Sometimes I don't understand anything, but it's very useful'

'We are very happy for the assistance we received from STEPS Centre, we appreciate you all. Thanks' and well done!

Work Experience and Volunteering - 'I know it takes time out of your already busy schedule to organise and support people on work experience, we really appreciate it' - N Latham Hub Manager University of Wolverhampton

'Good discussion, good sharing of ideas' – **Teacher, EAL network meeting**

Dream

Grow

Thrive



OUR SUCCESS

Page 34

Confidence in the Centre- securing £868,667 from the Controlling migration **Fund (CMF)**; [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#) in January 2018 to April 2020.

Cost Benefit Analysis indicates that through STEPS work, the **cost of the public purse** has been **£44,415 cost of truancy aversion and £5,376,500 cost of truancy** for families and **children's wellbeing** (RHCS independent evaluation Jan 2020).

Throughout the life of Migration Fund (32 months) **total £8,131,372.**

National MJ award Winners – Innovation 2020.



Dream

Grow

Thrive



SUPPORTING AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT AND UKRAINIAN MIGRATION.

Page 45

The Home Office placed 85 individuals in Sandwell 17th September 2021, STEPS has been instrumental in supporting these families and have sourced schooling/education for:

- 5 reception aged children
- 14 primary aged children
- 10 secondary aged pupils
- 2 post 16 pupils

Recently STEPS has hosted 9 Ukrainian children who have fled the war in their country.

STEPS is a small provision achieving big results by taking the fear out of the unknown for our new arrival families. It was a huge honour to be 2020 MJ winners for Innovators in Children's Services.

VISION
2030
SANDWELL



Cost of Living Challenge

- STEPs is a Sandwell Food Bank Voucher issuer and staff have signposted families to the foodbank.
- Emergency funding (donated to the centre) has been given to support families
- Referrals to Welfare Rights Advisers (through community Navigators).
- Support with homeless housing applications
- Supporting families with applications for Disability Living Allowance.
- Uniform bought for Ukrainian and Afghani refugees.
- Supporting families and children with council applications for travel assistance.
- All children who are entitled to Free School Meals are supported to apply for Free School Meals at mainstream schools.
- Ensuring schools are aware of which children are affected by No Recourse to Public Funds, as these are the most vulnerable to the increasing cost of living.

Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

14 November 2022

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Subject: | Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group |
| Director: | Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett |
| Contact Officer: | Democratic Services Officer, Connor Robinson Connor1_Robinson@sandwell.gov.uk |

1 Recommendations

That the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board considers the Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group report and debate whether to make any recommendations to the Cabinet on the following:

1.1 That the Council:

- 1.1a). Welcomes the Borough’s designation as an Education Investment Area by the Government and work co-operatively with the Department for Education to improve the education standards of children and young people;
- 1.1b). Be proactive in working with schools in the area to consider the creation or adoption of multi-academy trusts;
- 1c). Be proactive in considering suitable locations in the Borough for specialist sixth-form free schools which are funded by central government;



Join the Department for Education's 1-2-1 attendance mentoring pilot to monitor issues in schools across the Borough.

- 1.2 That, the Cabinet Member for Children and Education attend the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board at least three times per municipal year to:
- 1.2a). Present an overview of their work in relation to their Cabinet portfolio;
 - 1.2b). Produce and present a report on the Council's progress to deliver Ambition 1 of the Council's Vision 2030 in particular the delivery of raising aspirations and resilience, young people to have skills for the future and raising the quality of schools.

That, the Council pledge to improve and increase the Borough's educational assessment data in line with the national average by 2027, in line with the aims and objectives of Vision 2030.

That, the Government engage with education practitioners to understand the long-term problems caused by the national pandemic and prepare appropriate resources to help children and young people recover academically, socially and psychologically.

- 1.3 The Council encourages and supports schools in the Borough to provide sports programmes and extracurricular activities to help children catch up in all areas of lost learning, experiences and to improve mental and physical health;

That, the Government should provide specific monetary assistance to children eligible for free school meals to take part in extracurricular activities;

That, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive a future report on the implications of the Government's white paper on 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child';



That, the Council review its partnership working with education providers and the Sandwell Children's Trust to ensure that actions, outcomes and best practice work are shared to ensure we are working cohesively together.

- 1.4 That, the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust:
- 4a). Ensure that all SEND children in Sandwell have access to the right services, provisions and support;
 - 4b). Continue to monitor the progress of SEND and EHCP children in regard to educational attainment;
 - 4c). Examine ways to effectively and appropriately communicate with parents and carers of families with SEND or EHCP children to ensure they are not alone and have the right support;
 - 4d). Assess and capture lessons learned data following the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.5 That the Council investigates ways to connect with young people and offer extra support, mentoring and encouragement such as:
- 1.5a). Establish a peer mentoring programme;
 - 1.5b). Encourage social youth work, sports, drama, and outdoor activities;
 - 1.5c). Encourage and support volunteering;
 - 1.5d). Engage with local businesses to improve the number of available apprenticeships;
 - 1.5e). Support a holistic youth services experience which accompanies physical and digital offer;
 - 1.5f). Support and Champion a new Eco Bus with young people involvement.




- 1.6 That, the Government be requested to provide adequate, realistic funding to address young peoples' recovery to support academic improvement, socialisation, conversation, mental health and wellbeing;
- That, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board undertake a review and monitors the recovery strategy of mental health services within the Borough.
- 1.7 The Council in partnership with Sandwell Children's Trust continue to monitor the challenges facing the industry including the recruitment and retention of social workers;
- The Council and Sandwell Children's Trust continue to support the Borough's children in care and care leavers in their post-pandemic recovery.
- 1.8 That, the Council works with our multi-agency partners to support, engage and monitor the stability within the early years setting;
- That, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive regular assurance on the Covid-19 Recovery Plan of the Council, Children's Trust and relevant partner agencies.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

For the Board to consider the findings and conclusions of the working group and make any recommendations as applicable to the Cabinet.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

| | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Best start in life for children and young people The Covid-19 pandemic had and continues to have an impact upon children and families across Sandwell. The Scrutiny Board wanted to examine the impact of the pandemic and understand the key pressures now facing children and young people.</p> |
|---|--|



4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At its meeting on 23 August 2021, the Board established a working group to consider the educational and social impact of the national lockdown on children and families in the Borough.
- 4.2 The working group has engaged with multiple stakeholders to gain further understanding of the issues within the education sector.
- 4.3 The final report details the findings of the Working Group and recommendations for Cabinet to consider. The report is attached at Appendix 1 for approval by the Board.

5 Implications

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Resources: | There are no resource implications as a result of this report. |
| Legal and Governance: | Overview and Scrutiny Board can make recommendations to the Cabinet in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 |
| Risk: | There are no risk implications. |
| Equality: | There are no equality implications. |
| Health and Wellbeing: | There are no health and wellbeing implications. |
| Social Value: | There are no social value implications. |
| Climate Change: | There are no climate change implications. |

6 Appendices

Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group – Final Report and appendices.



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Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families

Summary Report



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14 November 2022

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

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Chairs Introduction

The Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group was established in response and impact of the national lockdown on children and families. It was both crucial and timely for Scrutiny to focus on this issue to fully understand the impact on our young people's development and education.

The Group investigated several topics including impact of the lockdown on exam results, child poverty and social care. Members each had a specific work-stream on which to focus and were able to interview relevant officers and key witnesses to help their research.

The gap in educational achievement has widened for our most disadvantaged children particularly in the Early Years and it is hoped that the recommendations will help, without delay, to reduce this gap.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to discussions and evidence gathering.

Councillors Ann Shackleton and William Gill
Co-Chairs of the Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families Working Group

Introduction

The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board (the Board), on 23 August 2021 resolved to establish a Working Group (the Group) to consider the educational and social impact of the national lockdown on children and families in the Borough.

Terms of Reference

Draft terms of references were discussed and agreed by the Board on 29th November 2021.

Lead Officers

The Group was supported by primarily the following officers:

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Matt Powis | Senior Democratic Services Officer |
| Connor Robinson | Democratic Services Officer |
| Melanie Barnett | Group Head of Inclusive Learning |

Membership

The Group consisted of the following Councillors:

Councillor Ann Shackleton (Co-Chair)
Councillor William Gill (Co-Chair)
Councillor Ian Chambers
Councillor Elizabeth Giles
Councillor Nicky Hinchliff
Councillor Richard McVittie
Councillor Kay Millar
Councillor Vicki Smith
Councillor Julie Webb
Kelly Heeley – Primary School Governor Representative
Kate Kujawa-Sogbesan – Secondary School Governor Representative

Methodology

The Group has held three formal meetings during its investigation. Each Member carried out their individual workstreams and interviewed a number of witnesses during the Group's investigation.

Working Group Meetings

The Working Group held three meetings where Members had the opportunity to ask questions from a number of different Council officers and partner organisations. The meetings focused on the following areas:

21 February 2022

Developments from Member workstreams and providing feedback from witness interviews.

28 March 2022

The Group received reports from Youth Services and Learning Advisory Support and provided questions.

25 April 2022

The Group received presentations from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and Sandwell Children's Trust.

Return to School Survey

The Group commissioned a survey on the educational impact of the national lockdown on students, schools and parents since the start the Covid-19 pandemic.

Final responses and statistical information in relation to the survey can be viewed in the appendix.

Background and Context

In 2020, the UK was plunged into a national lockdown due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. Whilst all Local Authorities and education providers across the country struggled with the continuation of education for children, the disruption caused was clear and profound.

On 23 August 2021, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board considered a presentation on the Council's pandemic response and the wider impact of the national lockdown on children and families.

Whilst the report and presentation highlighted the proactive response from the Council and education providers to support children and families, there was still an appetite to understand the wider impact of the pandemic. This included interviewing and surveying children and families at the ground level. Therefore, there was a consensus that a working group was required in order to investigate and review recovery activity across multiple areas in education and social care.

The Board considered the draft Terms of Reference for the Group and agreed to undertake a review on the following:

- To understand and capture how the Council and Schools have progressed with recovery plans to improve standards and educational attainment.
- Identify methods and strategies employed by schools/academies to shrink
- The educational attainment gap and uplift standards.
- To understand the impact of the lockdown on exam results.
- To get a crosscutting picture of the impact of the lockdown on education attainment from a wide range of stakeholders.
- To investigate child poverty rates and mitigating measures.
- To understand the increasing pressure on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and those children and young people requiring EHCPs.

The Group expressed their gratitude to all the witnesses and officers that gave their time to support and help produce this report. This report is a broad summary of the group's findings and conclusions.

2.1 Education Attainment

Education attainment was a particular concern for the Group due to the long period of disruption in the education system.

Due to the pandemic, all primary assessments in 2020 and 2021 were cancelled. In addition, examination results in Key Stage 4 and 5 were based on centre assessment grades. This had meant that there was no performance tables or data officially available. The Group, therefore, relied on information and data provided by school leaders which was collated by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in March 2022¹.

The Group acknowledged general trends from the NFER which investigated several studies conducted on Covid-19 impacts on educational attainment. Following key findings were identified:

- At Key Stage 1, there was consistently a greater negative impact of the pandemic on Year 1 pupils. This emphasises the need for time and resources to be focused on the early literacy and numeracy skills of the youngest children at this critical stage in their development.
- In Key Stage 2, it was mathematics attainment that was impacted the most and which also showed slower recovery than reading.
- The evidence suggests that interventions and resources would be best targeted at the development of reading in Key Stage 1 and identifying areas of the Key Stage 2 mathematics curriculum with which pupils are struggling.
- There should be a renewed focus on reducing the disadvantage gap. There is strong evidence that this disadvantage gap has widened during the pandemic. This appears to have been greater in mathematics than in reading in most primary year groups.
- There is limited evidence concerning the impact of the pandemic on secondary-aged pupils, and in particular Key Stage 3.

By the Summer of 2022, the Government had introduced key policies to respond to attainment challenges such as a funding package to target and transform education opportunities for the most disadvantaged. In addition, the Government designated 55 local authorities as Educational Investment Areas, which included Sandwell.

¹https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4877/the_impact_of_covid_19_on_pupil_attainment.pdf - The Impact of Covid-19 on pupil attainment, Published in March 2022.

Juniper Education conducted research on behalf of 6,000 schools which compared the attainment of primary school children in autumn 2019 with data from autumn 2021². The Group noted the key findings:

- All primary year groups have been affected by the prolonged disruption of the pandemic. However, it is the youngest children whose learning has been hit the hardest (a particular reference to Year 3 pupils).
- All year groups have seen bigger drops in writing than in the other subjects. The biggest fall in writing attainment was for Year 3.
- The gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils has widened over the course of the pandemic, with the attainment gaps growing for all primary cohorts, and wider gaps forming for Year 3.
- The gap between younger children with SEN and their classmates has widened during the pandemic (a particular reference to Year 3). Some of the gaps for children with SEN are closing, particularly for children in Year 6.
- It is the Year 6 cohort which has shown the greatest resilience in learning, where there have been some signs of improvement.

The Group recognised the importance of elective home education and noted the previous Scrutiny review into the matter. During the pandemic, many parents felt confident in 'home-schooling' their children and wished to continue the practice even when there was a return to school. This would reduce childcare costs where parents were working from home. It was highlighted that the increase in home-schooled children had increased nationally. However, the Group welcomed proposals for a national register of children registered as home educated.

The Group were informed of the impact as a result of the changes to educational assessments in 2020 and 2021. It was noted that there was a record pass rate for GCSE English and Maths not only for England but for Sandwell.

² <https://junipereducation.org/blog/the-national-dataset-report-2022/> - Published 16 March 2022

Percentage achieving 9-4 in English & mathematics (from 2016/17 (academic) to 2020/21 (academic)) for Sandwell

| Period | % achieving 9-4 in English and maths | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | % | | | |
| | Sandwell | Minimum for All English single tier local authorities | Mean for All English single tier local authorities | Maximum for All English single tier local authorities |
| 2015/16 (academic) | no value | no value | no value | no value |
| 2016/17 (academic) | 52.2 | 47.5 | 63.6 | 84.2 |
| 2017/18 (academic) | 50.7 | 41.9 | 64.0 | 93.3 |
| 2018/19 (academic) | 54.4 | 40.8 | 64.2 | 80.1 |
| 2019/20 (academic) | 61.2 | 0.0 | 70.1 | 84.4 |
| 2020/21 (academic) | 61.6 | 51.9 | 71.8 | 84.8 |

Source:
Department for Education

Powered by LG Inform

There was an acknowledgement that the increased pass rates in both core subjects could encourage more students to progress onto A-Level and vocational courses. Pandemic challenges had also impacted apprenticeship availability for post-16 students due to the pressures on the labour market.

Recommendation 1

That, the Council:

Welcomes the Borough’s designation as an Education Investment Area by the Government and works co-operatively with the Department for Education to improve the education standards of children and young people;

Be proactive in working with schools in the area to consider the creation or adoption of multi-academy trusts;

Be proactive in considering suitable locations in the Borough for specialist sixth-form free schools which are funded by central government;

Join the Department for Education 1-2-1 attendance mentoring pilot to monitor issues in schools across the Borough.

Recommendation 2

That, the Cabinet Member for Children and Education attend the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board at least three times per municipal year to:

- a. Present an overview of their work in relation to their Cabinet portfolio;**
- b. Produce and present a report on the Council's progress to deliver Ambition 1 of the Council's Vision 2030 in particular the delivery of raising aspirations and resilience, young people to have skills for the future and raising the quality of schools.**

That, the Council pledge to improve and increase the Borough's educational assessment data in line with the national average by 2027, in line with the aims and objectives of Vision 2030.

That, the Government engage with education practitioners to understand the long-term problems caused by the national pandemic and prepare appropriate resources to help children and young people recover academically, socially and psychologically.

2.2 Child Development Journey and Virtual School

There was a view that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated general inequalities in education. There was a consensus that parents in the Borough were overwhelmed by the prospect of supporting children with their schoolwork, some did nothing, and there was the reality that not every school-aged pupil had access to online learning materials.

Feedback provided to the Group highlighted that many parents working from home had mixed loyalties to either help their children or to work from home and maintain their employment status, so many children were left to their own devices to spend the day, sometimes without getting dressed, on phones, playing games or communicating with their friends.

The Group recognise that the aforementioned issues usually relate to low-income families which can have a direct correlation to attainment results overall. An article from *The Guardian* from August 2022 highlighted that ‘despite decades of policy attention, there has been virtually no changes in the disadvantage gap in GCSE attainment over the past 20 years. While GCSE attainment has been increasing over time, 16-year-olds who are eligible for free school meals are still around 27 percentage points less likely to earn good GCSEs than less disadvantaged peers.’

The article goes on to explain that ‘the Covid-19 pandemic put the education system under enormous strain, with significant learning loss overall and a huge increase in educational inequalities.’³

This was echoed by research carried out by the London School of Economics, Centre for Economic Performance, which confirmed ‘pupils across the UK have lost out on a third of their learning time since the pandemic started, even once learning at home is taken into account. Learning loss accounted for 61 days of schooling on average between March 2020 and April 2021’.⁴

In response to the challenges faced by the pandemic, the Government announced a package worth £4.9 billion for school recovery. A large proportion of the funding was earmarked for 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged pupils. Subsequently in the Autumn Spending Review, funding was allocated to Recovery Premium to invest in non-academic programmes of particular significance is the launch of the National

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/aug/16/no-improvement-in-school-attainment-gap-in-england-for-20-years-report-says> - Published, 16 August 2022

⁴ <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/new/publications/abstract.asp?index=8228> – Learning loss since lockdown: variations across the home nations – Published, July 2021

Programme to further assist young people most affected by the pandemic.

The Group had concerns and questions relating to the Government recovery fund and national programme. As such there was a consensus for the Council to receive assurances on the following issues:

- Effective monitoring of the success of programmes related to the National Programme.
- Personal specifications and qualification requirements of the tutors.
- Identification of the most affected age groups.
- Identification of where the gaps in learning have been identified and responded to positively and funds used appropriately and at the other end of the scale where monies and support packages have not been successful.
- Evaluation of existing Government initiatives and use of Council resources.
- Benchmarking other Local Authorities and other countries that have put in place to address this common agenda of ensuring the Council can help children to make up for the loss of learning during the pandemic.

The Group then considered the impact of Virtual School, it was noted that this was a statutory service which exists to support and challenge all those that are involved in supporting the education of looked after children. The Sandwell Virtual School (LACE) was paramount to the success of making sure that staff, children, families and the Borough's looked after children were supported during the lockdown. This success was highlighted as follows:

- Assessments took place as usual with an emphasis on the most vulnerable children.
- 380 looked after children of school age were prioritised for computers and 170 were distributed to children outside of Sandwell.
- Education Resource Packs were delivered to 16 homes.
- Year 11 were supported with College applications.
- Personal Education Plans (PEP) continued in and out of Borough with over 90% of the plans completed.
- Pupils falling behind before the national lockdown had the opportunity to liaise with Social Workers, carers and school staff.
- Government Grants helped with the purchase of laptops and tutors.
- 92 children received packs for creative activities based on 'laziness.'
- Key workers were utilised to effectively support young people. These workers provided consistency, availability and stability during a period of uncertainty.

The Group noted the success of LACE as evidenced by Ofsted and other relevant bodies that continue to praise the work of the Virtual School. This served a consistent and meaningful factor in the lives of so many children and families. There was recognition of the Government's White Paper on 'opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child'. This paper suggested an increase in the 'school day' to 32.5 hours a week. It was therefore recommended for the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board to receive a future report on the implications of such a proposal once formally published by the Government.

There is no doubt that LACE played a significant role in ensuring that Children in Care (CIC) received the best possible support from all relevant agencies, often face to face but more often through the online process. However, based on feedback obtained, attainment levels suffered, and effort made to get the children back on track.

In addition to Virtual School, the Group recognised the success of the Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS). This service provides necessary support and advice to families coming from overseas to ensure they can integrate and settle into their new life in the Borough. The work of the STEPs centre had been instrumental in supporting the needs of the community. It was all driven by the needs of the cohort, the context and the community challenge.

It was highlighted that there were noticeable attainment gaps in learning in Year 8 pupils from STEPS. These children had missed out on effective transitioning from primary to secondary school. As a result, building and maintaining relationships with peers presented major challenges and in particular a barrier to learning.

Recommendation 3

The Council encourages and supports schools in the Borough to provide sports programmes and extracurricular activities to help children catch up in all areas of lost learning and experiences and to improve mental and physical health;

That, the Government should provide specific monetary assistance to children eligible for free school meals to take part in extracurricular activities;

That, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive a future report on the implications of the Government's white paper on 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child';

That, the Council review it's partnership working with education providers and the Sandwell Children's Trust to ensure that actions, outcomes and best practice work are shared to ensure we are working cohesively together.

2.3 Education Health and Care Plans and SEND

Since the introduction of the SEND Reforms in 2014, the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) has nearly doubled. In 2021 maintained over 2700 EHCP's and this number continues to grow. Over the pandemic, the Council in partnership with Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) continued to engage with early years providers and education establishments. This engagement was vital, and enabled providers to receive information on risk assessments, remote learning and free school meal arrangements as well as much more.

Due to the pandemic, like many services across the Council, areas of children's services and education had to adapt and innovate. Such innovations included the Council successfully carrying out virtual school admission appeal hearings and developing a Return to School Support Strategy. As a result, the Council was awarded the 'Innovation in Children's Services Award 2020' from the MJ Awards.

Despite the success of the Council's streamlining services, if the current growth in population continues it was predicted that there could be an estimated 3500 children or young people, in Sandwell, with an EHCP by 2025. Whilst this increase was a national trend and not unique to Sandwell, it remained concerning.

Members were keen to identify personal experiences from parents and carers in the Borough. Using an online survey, the Group began to identify the following themes:

- There was a lack of specialist support available in schools during lockdowns.
- Several children were identified as have struggled with a lack of routine whilst not attending school.
- There was a noticeable regression in speech and language.

- There were noticeable concerns around emotional, social and mental health with children feeling isolated, experiencing anxiety and frustration.
- Children had minimal contact with school staff with some children only interacting with school staff once per week at most.

Whilst there were a number of concerns raised, a small number of parents and carers had positive experiences and said that they enjoyed having their child/children at home and that their child/children actively benefitted from this.

Members of the Group engaged with a number of Council officers and partners on the support available to children, parents and schools during the pandemic. It was noted that most school lessons were held online using Microsoft Teams and Zoom however, for vulnerable children, physical arrangements were put in place as required. For children who did attend school, they experienced:

- A lack of specialised or inconsistency of staff due to Covid-19;
- Issues with face masks making lip reading impossible for deaf and hard-of-hearing children;
- A lack of at-home aid equipment which would usually be provided in a school environment;
- Increases in social and emotional needs;
- Not using hearing aids and screen readers causes further impact on their development.

The Group noted the experiences gathered by Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) with particular regard to the impact on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and children and families. During the national lockdown, children were unable to access short breaks, personal assistant care support or respite. However, some carers accessed homes, but only for nursing care if medically essential. The inability to access usual care and respite provision put a noticeable strain on parents, carers and families in the Borough.

Whilst all children and young people with SEND/Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were classed as 'vulnerable' during the lockdown and were able to go to school, this only happened in 20-30% of cases, as attendance was not compulsory in this category. It was noted that all Sandwell Special Schools remained open during the pandemic.

The Sandwell Parents of Disabled Children group continued throughout the pandemic and adjusted the service accordingly to meet the expectations and requirements of Government guidance. This involved stopping peer-to-peer support, arranging Zoom interactions and offering

one-to-one doorstep support as a replacement. This service had been commended by parents, especially for the use of well-being and activity packs provided to children and carers despite the challenges faced during the pandemic.

An article in The Independent from August 2022 highlighted that the 'National Deaf Children's Society urged the Government to use its review of how children with special educational needs and disabilities are supported in schools'.⁵

There was a consensus in the Group that parents, carers and families with children who have SEND need more support, more quickly and from a variety of sources. The lack of respite and short breaks impacted a decline in the mental health of children and their carers. This is in addition to the wider impact of children with SEND being adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

The Parent Voice:

"My son is on spectrum of autism and asperges. Being away from everybody made him actually quite happy. However, I have felt that progress that school did with him before Covid stopped and actually went back. It is like he lost whole work he done so far".

"Daughter in mainstream secondary school with an EHCP. Initially worksheets sent by school, but these were not age appropriate. Daughter struggled and stopped engaging. A once a week phone call (welfare check) Schools could have done more. Lack of support for SEND kids. January – Easter 2021 Lessons went online, but they were generic lessons, not differentiated. Some teachers lacking in IT equipment and IT skills. Teaching assistant in the background online, but not seen. No contact from SENCO at all. EHCP ignored, no value at all during 2021/2021. The support was not there".

"First lockdown, no online lessons just homework set by email. Not enough structure, my child couldn't cope. He had lots of frustration and meltdowns. Second lockdown better, he had online lessons. Son has EHCP so needed extra support, but missed out on this".

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/society-gcse-department-for-education-gcse-results-government-b2151271.html> – Published, 24 August 2022

Recommendation 4

That, the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust:

Ensure that all SEND children in Sandwell have access to the right services, provisions and support;

Continue to monitor the progress of SEND and EHCP children in regard to educational attainment;

Examine ways to effectively and appropriately communicate with parents and carers of families with SEND or EHCP children to ensure they are not alone and have the right support;

Assess and capture lessons learned data following the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4 Young People

The impact on young people was an area of concern for the Group, especially with the difficulties of accessing services as a result of the pandemic. The Group welcomed and received the Council's Young People's Survey 2020 which was produced by Shafaq Hussain, Senior Youth Officer for Smethwick and Oldbury.

This report outlined a snapshot of the experiences of young people throughout the pandemic which outlined 8 recommendations for the Council and applicable partners outlined below:

1. the Council and partners need to use social media more effectively in supporting young people. Too often Facebook and Twitter are used instead of more popular platforms among young people, such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Whatsapp and Snapchat.
2. There needs to be more opportunities for young people to engage meaningfully in decision making processes, where they can see their value and influence in shaping and making changes to services. It may be worthwhile doing a follow up survey in the autumn with young people as they return to full time education, to see how they are feeling and what their support needs are during this transition period.
3. To establish a digital leaders group for young people to shape digital communication strategies and how services engage with them.

4. Organisations and services should take account of how young people value family and friends and how services work holistically with the individual and their support networks.
5. The recommendation is for partners who have lead responsibility around loneliness, mental health and wellbeing to lead further work around tackling this problem and a working group initiated to discuss ways partners can work more effectively together to tackle this issue and support young people. Another recommendation is to build on resilience and independence within both the schools' Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and youth service curriculum but also in other settings, where young people may be able to enhance these skills.
6. The recommendation is for school leaders to acknowledge that for some young people the education gap will be wider than for others as a result of the pandemic and the lack of home schooling and access to resources and therefore a more concerted effort will need to support these young people to catch up. A partnership approach will also need to look at wrap around support for young people outside of school to ensure the needs of young people and families are identified and addressed.
7. Partners need to look at providing a joint up offer of support during the summer and beyond to ensure access to services. This should include fun, enjoyable, sports, arts, youth and play activities with support on ways to cope with Coronavirus and its effect and impact on people's lives. The Council and partners should look at how they embed this new-found passion for the arts, culture and sports in future youth programmes and strategies. Services need to improve how they market and promote themselves to young people using existing and new mechanisms to enable this to happen.
8. The Council needs to continue investing in detached youth work to reach those young people who choose not to engage in other youth work settings. Often youth workers may be the only significant other 'trusted' adult in a young person's life and the positive relationship between young person and youth worker should be utilised to provide support and address issues and concerns at the earliest opportunity, to avoid escalation of need. It is evident that those young people that access youth provision value this and the relationship they have with workers. Further work needs to be done around promoting and marketing the youth offer, identifying gaps and maximising resources to provide the right provision in the right locations in collaboration with young people.

Whilst the Group welcomed the continued engagement with young people, there was a desire to investigate the long-term impact of the pandemic on young people. Following research, interviews and discoveries carried out by the Group are outlined as follows:

Youth Impact

- Youth unemployment during the pandemic had increased significantly due to the industries that were particularly vulnerable e.g. hospitality sector.
- There was a consensus that more young people stayed in education due to the uncertain employment situation and reduction in the number of apprenticeships, work experience placements and internships.
- Acknowledged and welcomed the Government's Youth Review response which confirmed that 'by 2025 every young person will have access to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and volunteering opportunities'⁶.
- Research carried out by Brock University and the University of Glasgow concluded that 'digital platforms don't in themselves bridge geographical, socio-economic or cultural differences. The way people navigate digital spaces – their experience of being online doing something - depends on their experiences, their geographical locations or contexts and their preferred way of expressing themselves'⁷.
- Youth work and engagement were vital in ensuring many children and young people have the best start in life. In this respect, the Group supported the recommendations from UK Youth's Benefits of youth work to current Government priorities: August 2021⁸

Sandwell Connexions

- There had been reductions in usual marketing and career fayre activity.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-review-summary-findings-and-government-response/youth-review-summary-findings-and-government-response> – Published, 1 February 2022

⁷ <https://theconversation.com/digital-platforms-alone-dont-bridge-youth-divides-121222> - Published, 3 May 2020

⁸ <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Benefits-of-youth-work-to-current-govt-priorities.pdf> – Published, August 2021.

- There had been some positive examples of cross partnerships working to offer work experience to young people. Project Search was highlighted as an example of good practice.
- Some education providers were not prioritising career advice.
- Connexion advisors still remained in every Borough secondary academy and maintained school.
- The Connexions service adapted its virtual service offer and working practices for schools.

Mental Health

- There were concerns that the increase of social isolation had increased peer group pressure, digital exclusion, poverty and issues of self-worth.
- Uncertainty around work experience, internships and apprenticeship placements had increased anxiety amongst young people.
- Impact on wider mental health as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions ending.
- Concerns around wider societal pressures and alienation with hybrid work.

The Group acknowledged that the full effects of the pandemic with young people had still yet to be fully understood. However, there was a consensus that the changes within the education system, increased cost of living, education costs especially in higher education and changes in qualifications would further distance young people from mainstream services and work opportunities.

Therefore, it was recommended that the Council identify pathways to support, mentor and encourage young people in the Borough.

Recommendation 5

That the Council investigates ways to connect with young people and offer extra support, mentoring and encouragement such as:

- a. Establish a peer mentoring programme;**
- b. Encourage social youth work, sports, drama, and outdoor activities;**
- c. Encourage and support volunteering;**
- d. Engage with local businesses to improve the number of available apprenticeships;**
- e. Support a holistic youth services experience which accompanies physical and digital offer;**
- f. Support and Champion a new Eco Bus with young people's involvement.**

2.5 Emotional Health and Wellbeing Support

Emotional health and wellbeing support was highlighted as a concern for the Group given the increased prominence of mental health issues amongst children and young people. A recent Government survey found that in 2020 one in six young people identified as having a probable mental health disorder⁹. The Group sought to understand the correlation between mental health referrals and the wider impact of local and national lockdowns.

The University of Strathclyde Glasgow published a study on the impacts of lockdown on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, which found that:

1. Direct impacts on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing – the evidence on the direct impact of lockdown on mental health and wellbeing of children and young people yields mixed findings, with some studies indicating an increased likelihood of PTSD symptoms in quarantined children. Overall, studies point to increased levels of distress, worry and anxiety. Some likely reasons include increased feelings of loneliness and worries about school and the future.

⁹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmhealth/17/report.html> – Published, 9

2. Impacts within the family context – the evidence on the mental health and wellbeing impacts for parents/carers points to family contexts where the experiences of lockdown may have been particularly difficult for children and young people. These groups include families where parents/carers are key workers, are younger, and have a history of mental health/physical health conditions. More generally, those families within disadvantaged communities, black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, and those affected by violence are more likely to be negatively affected by lockdown.
3. Impacts within the context of education – the evidence reviewed suggests that many of the worries and anxieties children and young people have been experiencing relate to returning to school, missing school, and the future. Moreover, some evidence suggests that engagement with the curriculum has been disrupted for many children and young people, including those without sufficient digital access, physical space, and other resources to support their learning.

The Group noted the study by the University of Strathclyde Glasgow and were informed of the delivery of emotional health and well-being support was provided by the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

Pre- and post-analysis of CAMHS referrals was conducted which outlined that referrals into mental health services such as Kaleidoscope and Kooth had increased month on month from June 2020 onwards. This had been a direct result of general increases in referrals into the service as well as turnovers of specialist staff members. This meant that average waiting times for a first initial assessment within specialist Sandwell CAMHS was 11 weeks before March 2020, this then decreased to 5 weeks during Covid-19 and increased to 11 weeks in January 2022. Whilst referral rates had fluctuated across the Borough, increases had mirrored a national picture of increases across mental health services.

Since the publication of the transforming children and young people's mental health green paper in 2017, the Government expanded the reach of mental health services into education environments. This allowed new Educational Mental Health Practitioners (EMHP) to be created and trained on how to handle evidence-based interventions in school environments. Interventions would work in tandem with counselling, inclusion, school nurse services and CAMHs. Whilst the full deployment of EMHP staffing was ongoing, there were areas of concern on the viability of the deployment of the practitioners as there were delays in the rollout due to the pandemic, recruitment shortages in the sector and consistency of the delivery model.

There was some progress in alleviating some of the issues to address recruitment shortages such as changing the delivery model to integrating Educational Psychologists and establishing a Sandwell Steering Group for Mental Health Support Teams which would comprise School Representatives, School Nursing and other relevant officers.

Feedback received from both practitioners, children and young people, highlighted the following post Covid-19 concerns across the sector:

- Increases in the number of referrals lead to excessive wait times across mental health services.
- Struggles to recruit and maintain long-term practitioners in the sector.
- Worries about the limitation of mental health services to only virtual appointments.
- Children and young people have increases in anxiety and a reduction in confidence levels since the national lockdown.
- Young people report worries about self-esteem and isolation as a result of the national lockdown, relationships and general insecurities.
- The establishment of the Department for Education (DfE) link programme delivered by the Anna Freud Centre was highlighted as a success by bringing partner agencies together to improve awareness of services and build relationships to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The Group received assurances from the Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) about its commitment to learn from the national lockdown and improve the outcomes for children and young families. An example included the promotion of learning from the National Panel of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

There had been some progress made within the sector on adapting and using more virtual and telephone solutions for appointments, especially with prevention and early intervention services. The Group noted the Voluntary Sector Emotional Wellbeing Programme which was established from June 2021 to August 2022 with the intention of delivering targeting support to children and young people. The programme had the following delivery requirements:

- Emotional well-being support strategies to children and young people in Sandwell through personal strategies to build confidence and resilience.
- Targeting children and young people with additional support requirements that are not currently accessing services.

- Providing support for children and young people identified as being impacted by domestic abuse including family support.
- Delivering immediate support to ensure pace keeps up with the demand of the service.

This programme encompassed a number of funded projects within the Borough that were successfully delivering emotional health and well-being support for children and young people. Whilst there had been successful programme delivery for mental health services in Sandwell, concerns still remained on the increased prominence of mental health among children and young people.

The Parent Voice:

“I’ve lost both of my parents to Covid. They died within a month from each other. My son had difficulty with processing this. Then three months after we lost my dad, I become poorly with Covid. I did not have to go to hospital just isolated at home. My son was so scared that something is going to happen to me that he slept on the floor by my bedroom doors. Even now year after recovery if I cough or say I am not feeling very well he is panicking and want to call ambulance. He become very clingy and anxious”.

Recommendation 6

That, the Government be requested to provide adequate, realistic funding to address young peoples’ recovery to support the Council’s ambition to improve academic performance, socialisation, conversation, mental health and wellbeing;

That, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board monitors the recovery strategy of mental health services within the Borough.

2.6 Child Poverty and Pupil Premium

The Group noted that child poverty rates have increased generally across Sandwell since 2015 according to *Action for Children*. The West Midlands in particular had the third highest child poverty rates in 2019/20 in England with Birmingham and London identified as cities with the greatest concentration of child poverty. Given the proximity of Birmingham to Sandwell, there were that parts of the Borough that had above-average child poverty rates.

In particular, the constituency of Warley had more than 11,445 children living in poverty between 2019 - 20 which represented more than 48% of children living in the constituency¹⁰.

Due to the pandemic and the limited ability to collate data, it remained unclear whether overall poverty rates across Sandwell and the UK had continued to increase post-2020 pandemic. The Joseph Roundtree Foundation outlined the key risk areas between 2020 and 2024 with child poverty¹¹:

| Driver | Effect of increase | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|-------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Employment | Generally, poverty reducing | Increasing rents but eviction freezes and falling mortgage costs because of falling interest rates and mortgage holidays | Small increases In employment but still below 2019/20, with a limited further reduction in employment expected from furlough ending | Uncertain but Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) projections show rising employment throughout the year |
| Earnings | Ambiguous – can increase poverty if benefitting middle income households more than low-income | Broadly flat on average in real terms, protected by furlough scheme | Broadly flat on average in real terms, protected by furlough scheme | Increasing in cash terms with a high increase in the National Living Wage, but increases eaten away by high inflation and increases in National Insurance |
| Benefits | Generally poverty reducing | Increased especially £20 uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits, and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reset to actual rents | Six months of increased Universal Credit, followed by improved Universal Credit rates for working families but cut for | Improved Universal Credit rates for working families, Universal Credit cut for workless families means those rates are lowest for 30 years in real |

¹⁰ https://take.actionforchildren.org.uk/page/82559/action/1?ea.tracking.id=afc_website_blog&ga=2.157051323.1242259437.1655302672-813208746.1655302672 – Published July 2022

¹¹ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022> - Published January 2022

| | | | | |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| | | | workless families, reset LHA frozen | terms, mitigations in Northern Ireland and the introduction of new benefits in Scotland reduce further increases in poverty, reset LHA frozen |
| Housing Costs | Generally poverty increasing | Increasing rents but eviction freezes and falling mortgage costs because of falling interest rates and mortgage holidays | Ending or rolling back of temporary pandemic measures, support towards rent arrears introduced, rents continuing to increase | Rents continuing to increase and mortgages increasing due to likely higher interest rates |
| Inflation | Limited effect on relative poverty but will increase cost of living | Overall rate flat, but key components of food, housing and utility costs rising | Large increases projected to over 4% by end of period | Projected to remain above 3% throughout year |

As mentioned previously, the £20 increase to Universal Credit (UC) and other benefits which was implemented from March 2020 to October 2021 was positively received by many families across the country and highlighted as an area of positive benefit for families. Given the period during the pandemic, the number of new claimants for UC had increased from less than 200,000 to over 1.2m. Whilst the numbers of new claimants of UC have dropped to pre-pandemic levels, the overall number of those of UC remains high compared to pre-pandemic levels with 5.6 million claimants as of January 2022 compared to 3 million in March 2020¹².

The Group was mindful of the link between the rate of UC claimant numbers with the levels of child poverty and pupil premium figures.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-13-january-2022/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-13-january-2022#people-on-uc-header> – Published 15 February 2022

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)¹³ undertook research in respect of the pandemic's impact on pupil disadvantage. This study investigated pupil premium and free school meals (FSM) data, key findings of this study included:

- The transitional arrangements introduced by the Government to smooth the roll-out of UC are significantly increasing the number of FSM-eligible pupils.
- The Covid-19 pandemic precipitated a sharp increase in the number of families in poverty, with the number of FSM eligible pupils increasing by almost 300,000 between January 2020 and 2021.
- The pupils who became newly FSM eligible in January 2021 were mainly from families in the lower half of the income distribution.

The Government announcement of the Covid-19 Winter Scheme at the end of 2020 allocated £1.4m to the Borough's most vulnerable households. The scheme ring-fenced 80% of the Borough's allocation to vulnerable households with children. This support enabled families to cover the cost of food, utilities and other essentials. In addition to the Winter Scheme, the Council took the decision to approve the provision of free school meal vouchers during the October 2021 half-term holiday.

Whilst the Group noted the work carried out by the Government and the Council to reduce child poverty, concerns remained on the long-term impact of social security funding, national inflation and cost of living.

The Parent Voice:

"My kids did not have proper hot meal for good six months. We were so broke that I could not afford to buy good quality of food. All we had was school meal vouchers. Did you ever try to feed family of 4 for £30 a week? And 2 of them are growing teenagers?"

"My husband was only breadwinner in our family and when he lost his job we found our self in very difficult situation. Before Covid we never lived expensive life, but I never was scared how I will pay all our bills or will I have food for my kids. Now we were struggling. There were times when I had to make decision will we eat or have bill paid. Kids could see it and even though we did not speak about this with them they knew we are not doing great. At some point we were unable to pay for out internet bill and we were cut off for nearly a month. Kids later admit to us that they were made fun of as someone guessed why they were absent in online classes".

¹³ <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/investigating-the-changing-landscape-of-pupil-disadvantage/> - Published

2.7 Children's Social Care

Since 2018, Children's Social Care in Sandwell has been managed by the Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) following a statutory direction by Government. The Council supports the Trust to deliver the necessary responsibilities for children's social care and targeted early help services. However, the Council remains overall statutory responsibility for the delivery of children's social care. As a result, the Council maintains a close working relationship to ensure all children and young people remain safe. This responsibility was particularly imperative during the pandemic. The Group noted the following success stories from the Council's and SCT cooperation during the pandemic:

- The Council enabled the Trust to access its various grants to support increased costs as a result of the pandemic and fast-tracked agile IT for social workers.
- Services across the Council and SCT continued their engagement work with children and young people despite pandemic challenges.
- Additional resources were allocated to services to support domestic abuse, emotional health and wellbeing and internet safety training.
- In addition to the Department for Education (DfE) funding for remote education technology, an additional 1800 IT devices were allocated to vulnerable children who had not accessed DfE equipment.
- Services across the Council and Trust innovated as a result of the pandemic and in some cases, improved service performance.
- The Corporate Parenting Board continued to engage throughout the pandemic via virtual communication channels.
- Ofsted Assurance Visits in 2021 highlighted improvements to the Trust's technology offer and support to Foster Carers.

The Group was keen to ascertain information on SCT's recovery planning following the challenges of the pandemic and to understand the longer-term impact of social care.

The challenges which faced SCT had mirrored those faced by Local Authorities nationally and the issue of remaining in contact with children to ensure their overall wellbeing. The Group noted the following points raised by the Trust as part of their recovery plans:

- Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers was an issue which had persisted prior to the pandemic. However, the Trust was working to increase the levels of permanent social workers and decrease the rates of agency staff employed.
- Multi-agency working remains restrictive with services and visits to children continuing to work virtually.

- The Local Offer which identifies SEND provision from across the sector has reduced due to many providers struggling to recruit staff within local communities.
- Review of engagement method with Child Protection Conferences as there was a view from families that felt more engaged with a virtual appointment rather than face to face.
- SCT continues to utilise home working whilst including a phased return into the office.
- Building on the good practices throughout the pandemic, SCT had worked to create staffing rotas to prioritise front-line social work teams.
- Social Workers had reverted to visiting children and families face to face thus improving direct work rather than virtual communication.
- Deep dives into Practice Reviews had been undertaken to test the quality of safeguarding practices.

Whilst challenges remained in the sector, the Council and SCT had demonstrated close partnership working through challenging periods. The Group remained confident that the Trust would recover from the pandemic despite issues arising in relation to social worker agency costs.

In respect of the Corporate Parenting Board, it was noted that the Board continued to ensure that Children in Care and Care Leavers were as far as possible supported during the pandemic. The Group welcomed feedback provided by care leavers and gained useful insight into their experiences from the pandemic. This can be viewed in the report's appendices.

Recommendation 7

The Council in partnership with Sandwell Children's Trust continue to monitor the challenges facing the industry including the recruitment and retention of social workers;

The Council and Sandwell Children's Trust continue to support the Borough's children in care and care leavers in their post-pandemic recovery.

2.8 Early Years

The Group were informed that the number of children attending early years settings were significantly impacted due to the pandemic.

Following the initial lockdown period in 2020 as the UK was transitioning into Covid-19 restrictions, it took time to reset sessions for families. Attendance figures in children centres gradually rose and centres across the Borough were inundated with families wanting to gain access, meet other people and socialise. This was particularly important for the Borough's disadvantaged 2-year-old children where it was noted that uptake funding dropped to 56% during the pandemic.

This was a consensus that measures should be put in place to ensure the attainment gap is closed for disadvantaged children that were severely impacted by the pandemic. This task involves partners and organisations reaching out and engaging with families. A study on the implications of Covid-19 for Early Childhood Education and Care in England found that 'the pandemic has highlighted the pivotal role of early education in children's social, emotional and cognitive development. But children from disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds, who are most likely to benefit from formal early learning, are also the children most likely to miss out. The inequality gap has widened, with a likely consequence being that the attainment gap also widens. If this trend is to be reversed, there needs to be more funding from the Government to ensure that disadvantaged children have equity of access to quality early years education, including new statutory responsibilities and funding for local authorities to ensure high-quality and accessible childcare provision is a key component of the local offer to families with young children – across the country'.¹⁴

Whilst uptake funding had dropped locally, comparative national data identified that take-up funding had decreased from 69% to 62% in the period between January 2020 and January 2021. However, the biggest impact on children could be seen with both personal and social development (PSD) and communication, language and literacy development (CLL).

It was noted that a multi-agency CLL pathway works with speech and language therapy and the Inclusion Support team to ensure children access the necessary interventions they need.

¹⁴ <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/concern-inequality-gap-has-increased-children-ethnic-minority-and-disadvantaged-backgrounds-miss-out?page=2> – Published 20 June 2022

Initiatives such as Wellcomm Toolkit, I Can Early talk boost, Tots talker and the Nuffield Early Language Toolkit were highlighted as examples of good practice in the sector.

In respect of family support, the Outcomes Star was outlined as a meaningful way of measuring the well-being of families with evidence-based tools. This method was overlaid with internal audits, supervision of staff and regular data collection.

New initiatives were launched such as 'Train the Trainer' using National Literacy Trust strategies. This initiative was particularly important to develop the confidence of practitioners and providers as the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework was introduced during this period.

Training and development of intervention strategies have a key role in the early identification of SEND children as a useful tool for practitioners. Practitioners within children's centres undertake speech and language assessments at around the two-year-old mark which allows centres to identify those children with potential development delays and support accordingly using the Council's watchful eye programme. However, when families were not attending as a result of the pandemic, the identification of children that were showing signs of development delay reduced.

Due to the pandemic, virtual screening was carried out with some success by the children's centre staff and the actual screening sessions were the first to recommence after lockdown. Any highlighted concerns were identified with practitioners such as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) and Health Visitors etc and then followed up with families.

The Group noted the following concerns from research and interviewed carried out within early years settings:

- There was a reported rise in the number of speech and language assessments showing red scores (significant delay in development).
- Staff were reporting that children are more anxious due to the lack of socialisation such as being clingier to their parents, reluctant to engage with other children, and gross motor skills are less developed.
- Emphasis on managing children's behaviour – setting routines and boundaries; getting children back to school.
- Providing reassurance to parents and children about the safeguards put in place to reduce infection risks. There was a consensus that some schools found that parents reacted positively to the increased

use of videos, text messaging and social media as a form of communication between the school and families.

- Support through Children Centres continued throughout the pandemic with referrals to key partner agencies as appropriate.
- A fragile childcare market was impacted by parents working from home and only taking up 15 hours as opposed to 30 hours. It was noted that some nurseries in the Borough reduced their staffing to term time only.
- There had been a reduction of nurseries which had been seen locally and nationally.
- There had been a significant increase in EHCPs requests within the early years group. Before March 2020, there was an average of 12 referrals a week. This figure had increased to an average of 38 requests a week.

A snapshot of specific experiences and issues from Children's Centres can be viewed in the report appendices.

There was recognition of the Specialist Early and Sensory Support teams which worked incredibly hard to reduce the number of referral caseloads and to ensure that the highest priorities are referred to the Child Development Centre rather than some partner agencies such as NHS bodies. However, this still has not stopped parents from referring children to partner agencies due to backlogs in usual treatments such as ear syringing and grommets which have resulted in more children being given hearing aids or additional support.

The Group noted that the biggest challenge is managing demand in education and health. Increases in caseloads were creating a delay for families to get appropriate professional advice to support children to get the assessments they need. In addition, Schools are struggling with the increase in demand and need the training to manage this. There was a consensus that the Council and education providers needed to ensure the system can manage the current capacity and that demand does not outweigh capacity, especially with some temporary contact staff.

The Council, schools and children centres across the Borough have utilised learning opportunities and remote software such as Microsoft Teams to engage with professionals and families. In addition, tools such as social media have been fundamental in engaging with families to develop their confidence which has enabled positive communication.

The Group recognised partners have shown the ability to adapt and work within the constraints and restrictions of a national pandemic. Whilst, the impact of Covid-19 will be enduring on children and they need action now. Furthermore, the impact on services in the long term had created a

greater need for mental health and well-being support, special school providers and the wider public sector.

Recommendation 8

That, the Council works with our multi-agency partners to support, engage and monitor the stability within the early years setting;

That, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive regular assurance on the Covid-19 Recovery Plan of the Council, Children's Trust and relevant partner agencies.

Summary of Recommendations

| | Recommendation | Responsible |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | <p>That, the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Welcomes the Borough's designation as an Education Investment Area by the Government and work co-operatively with the Department for Education to improve the education standards of children and young people; b. Be proactive in working with schools in the area to consider the creation or adoption of multi-academy trusts; c. Be proactive in considering suitable locations in the Borough for specialist sixth-form free schools which are funded by central government; <p>Join the Department for Education's 1-2-1 attendance mentoring pilot to monitor issues in schools across the Borough.</p> | <p>Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education/Director of Children and Education</p> |
| 2 | <p>That, the Cabinet Member for Children and Education attend the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board at least three times per municipal year to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Present an overview of their work in relation to their Cabinet portfolio; b. Produce and present a report on the Council's progress to deliver Ambition 1 of the Council's Vision 2030 in particular the delivery of raising aspirations and resilience, young people to have skills for the future and raising the quality of schools. <p>That, the Council pledge to improve and increase the Borough's educational assessment data in line with the national average by 2027, in line with the aims and objectives of Vision 2030.</p> | <p>Cabinet Member for Children's Services/ Education/Director of Children and Education/Secretary of State</p> |

That, the Government engage with education practitioners to understand the long-term problems caused by the national pandemic and prepare appropriate resources to help children and young people recover academically, socially and psychologically.

3 The Council encourages and supports schools in the Borough to provide sports programmes and extracurricular activities to help children catch up in all areas of lost learning, experiences and to improve mental and physical health;

That, the Government should provide specific monetary assistance to children eligible for free school meals to take part in extracurricular activities;

That, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive a future report on the implications of the Government's white paper on 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child';

That, the Council review its partnership working with education providers and the Sandwell Children's Trust to ensure that actions, outcomes and best practice work are shared to ensure we are working cohesively together.

Cabinet Member for Children's Services/
Education/Director
of Children and
Education/Secretary
of State

4 That, the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust:

- a. Ensure that all SEND children in Sandwell have access to the right services, provisions and support;
- b. Continue to monitor the progress of SEND and EHCP children in regard to educational attainment;
- c. Examine ways to effectively and appropriately communicate with parents and carers of families with SEND or EHCP children to ensure they are not alone and have the right support;

Cabinet Member for Children's Services/
Education/Director
of Children and
Education/Sandwell
Children's Trust

d. Assess and capture lessons learned data following the Covid-19 pandemic.

5 That the Council investigates ways to connect with young people and offer extra support, mentoring and encouragement such as:

- a. Establish a peer mentoring programme;
- b. Encourage social youth work, sports, drama, and outdoor activities;
- c. Encourage and support volunteering;
- d. Engage with local businesses to improve the number of available apprenticeships;
- e. Support a holistic youth services experience which accompanies physical and digital offer;
- f. Support and Champion a new Eco Bus with young people involvement.

Cabinet Member for Children's Services/
Education/Director of Children and Education

6 That, the Government be requested to provide adequate, realistic funding to address young peoples' recovery to support academic improvement, socialisation, conversation, mental health and wellbeing;

That, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board undertake a review and monitors the recovery strategy of mental health services within the Borough.

Secretary of State/Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board

7 The Council in partnership with Sandwell Children's Trust continue to monitor the challenges facing the industry including the recruitment and retention of social workers;

The Council and Sandwell Children's Trust continue to support the Borough's children in care and care leavers in their post-pandemic recovery.

Cabinet Member for Children's Services/
Education/Director of Children and Education/Sandwell Children's Trust

8 That, the Council works with our multi-agency partners to support, engage and

Cabinet Member for Children's Services/
Education/Director

monitor the stability within the early years setting;

of Children and
Education/Sandwell
Children's Trust

That, the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive regular assurance on the Covid-19 Recovery Plan of the Council, Children's Trust and relevant partner agencies.

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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Scrutiny Board

14 November 2022

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Subject: | Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations |
| Director: | Law and Governance Surjit Tour Surjir_tour@sandwell.gov.uk |
| Contact Officer: | Connor Robinson Democratic Services Officer Connor1_Robinson@sandwell.gov.uk Democratic Services Unit |

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That the Board notes the responses from the Executive/Directors on recommendations referred since the Board's last meeting, as set out in the Appendix.
- 1.2 That the Board notes the progress on implementation of those recommendations approved by the Executive/Directors, as set out in the Appendix.
- 1.3 That the Board identifies any recommendations where progress is unsatisfactory and determines what action it wishes to take.
- 1.4 That the Board determines which recommendations no longer require monitoring.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 To facilitate the effective monitoring of progress on responses to and press with implementation of recommendations made by the Board and identify where further action is required.
- 2.2 Effective monitoring of recommendations facilitates the evaluation of the impact of the scrutiny function overall.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  | Best start in life for children and young people | <p>The scrutiny function supports all of the objectives of the Corporate Plan by seeking to improve services for the people of Sandwell. It does this by influencing the policies and decisions made by the Council and other organisations involved in delivering public services.</p> <p>Effective monitoring of recommendations made supports this and allows scrutiny to evaluate its impact.</p> |
|  | People live well and age well | |
|  | Strong resilient communities | |
|  | Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods | |
|  | A strong and inclusive economy | |
|  | A connected and accessible Sandwell | |

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The attached Appendix details the responses to and progress on the implementation of recommendations made by the scrutiny function.



5 Implications

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Resources: | The resource implications will be detailed in the responses to recommendations as detailed in the appendix. |
| Legal and Governance: | <p>The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Part 1A Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2000.</p> <p>The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on the Executive to respond to Scrutiny recommendations within two months of receiving them.</p> |
| Risk: | <p>Any risk implications have been considered with the relevant Officer/Director/Cabinet Member/Risk Owner at the time the recommendations were referred to them by the Board.</p> <p>Any specific risks for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p> |
| Equality: | <p>Any equality implications have been considered with the relevant Officer/Director/Cabinet Member/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team at the time the recommendations were referred to them by the Board.</p> <p>Any specific equality implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p> |
| Health and Wellbeing: | <p>Any health and wellbeing implications have been considered with the relevant Officer/Director/Cabinet Member/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team at the time the recommendations were referred to them by the Board.</p> <p>Any specific health and wellbeing implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p> |



6 Appendices

Appendix – Monitoring Table



| Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board 22/23 | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Scrutiny Board Date | Agenda Item Title | Action/Recommendation | Responsible Director /Body | Activity Log as at 12 Sept 22 |
| 10 Oct 22 | Sandwell Children's Trust – Site Visit | | | |
| | Site visit to the Sandwell Children's Trust | For the Scrutiny Board to visit the Sandwell Children's Trust | Dem Services / SCT | Dates and times being confirmed. |
| Update: 14 Nov 22 | Scrutiny Review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport Models | | | |
| | | 1 That the Director – Law and Governance arrange for the following recommendations to be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration | Cabinet | |
| | | (1a) That the Cabinet reviews the administration of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport to ensure consistency of approach and that resourcing is adequate in light of increasing demand on the service. | Cabinet | 14/02/22 - As the new procurement process is worked the service will continue to be reviewed to ensure consistency, transparency and robustness of service delivery and that there is a sustainable structure in place to support future demands. 14/11/22 - Capacity and capability of the team to remain under review as robust contract monitoring is introduced. |
| | | (1b) That the Cabinet ensures that the Parent Group for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is communicated and consulted with on any changes to the Transport service and, where possible, the views of affected children and young people are also sought. | Cabinet | 14/02/2022 - Regular meetings with Parent Carers Voices United (SEND Parent Carer Forum) are in place and it has been agreed that a member of the Travel Assistance Service office will attend the forum. 14/11/22 - Parent/Carer Newsletter sent to all families every half term Team to investigate a secure parent portal to make it easier for parents/carers to update their details. |
| | | (c) That the Cabinet ensures that Education Health Care Plan assessments are carried out without delay to ensure early identification of | Cabinet | 14/02/2022 - Not all children who have an EHCP are eligible for transport as detailed in the Home to School and Adult Learner Policy. In terms of EHC assessments once the LA has received a report from |

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| | | recommended provision, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport requirements. | | <p>the Community Assessment Meeting (CAM) that a statutory assessment may be needed it will take that report to the next Assessment and Moderation Panel (AMP). At the AMP a decision will be made as to whether to accept the recommendation of the CAM to proceed with a statutory assessment. The process is the same if the LA has received a request directly from a parent or young person. Parents/Carers will be informed of the LA's decision within 6 weeks of receipt of the CAM report or the parent/young person request. If the decision at AMP is to proceed with a statutory assessment then the LA will begin the process of gathering information and advice which will inform its decision as to whether to issue an Education, Health and Care Plan. The assessment process will take about 10 weeks. Local Authorities then have a statutory duty to finalise and issue the EHCP within 20 weeks of the start of the process.</p> <p>14/11/22 – As noted previously</p> |
| | | (d) That the Cabinet re-evaluates child to adult ratios for minibuses to ensure that they are appropriate and reflect assessed risks and needs on a case by case basis. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - This will form be reviewed as part of the new procurement exercise to ensure that the needs of the child are meet</p> <p>14/11/22 - The ratio of 1 passenger assistant to each vehicle is in place and works well. Individual (1:1) passengers assistants are provided to support indivual children, where required, e.g. medical needs</p> |
| | | (e) That the Cabinet continues, and seeks to increase, the Independent Travel Training Programme. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - Both SEN and the Travel Assistance Service will continue to promote the Travel Training Programme to parents/cares and schools to encourage take up and help provide life skills</p> <p>14/11/22 - Ongoing</p> |
| | | (f) That the Cabinet refreshes awareness campaigns relating to Personal Budgets and the Independent Travel Training Programme to ensure all families are aware of the options available. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - SEN will continue to promote both Personal Budgets and the Independent Travel Training Programme as part of the initial EHCP assessments and at the annual review.</p> <p>14/11/22 – As noted previously</p> |

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| | | (g) That the Cabinet reviews Early Years provision in each town, which may help reduce transport costs. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - The Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA) is an intensive year long Leadership and Management programme set up by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) funded through the DfE to provide strategic vision in Systems Change Management using the theory of change model. The team was made up of a Public Health commissioner, Health Commissioner, Early Years lead for Public health, Health Visiting Lead, Children Centre Commissioner, Quality Early Years Manager, Inclusion Support Early Years Manager and Midwifery Lead. The team mapped the services and provision across the pre-conception to end of reception years, undertook 150 parent interviews with Sandwell families to understand what it is like being a family with young children living in Sandwell and completed the data analysis Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 0-5 Years. The key findings/actions taken from this piece of work were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speech, language and communication was a key feature of the needs of young children and a barrier to learning and good outcomes in adulthood. 2. There was a gap for children after the age of 12 months up to 2.5 years from universal services such as Health Visitors. 3. A Speech, Language and Communication Pathway was developed using existing pathways. 4. Additional funding was secured from Health for a consultant model for SALT - dedicated Speech and Language Therapist. 5. Wellcomm screening is available from 18months through Children Centres and day-care settings. 6. Re-visit developmental check on or before 18mths by a Health Visitor Team showing emerging delay in development. <p>In addition, there is involvement with the Black Country Outcomes project which is focussing on SLCN for all children. All of the above work will support future mapping of need across the borough and inform place planning.</p> <p>14/11/22 – as noted above, with a focus on specialist place planning and increasing capacity across the borough.</p> |
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| | | (h) That the Cabinet reviews time lengths of journeys to ensure that children are not needing to travel for more than 50 minutes in normal circumstances. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - All contracts will continue to be regularly monitored to ensure that no journey time exceeds 50 mins. All tenders will be evaluated to ensure that journey times are kept to a minimum prior to awarding new contracts.</p> <p>14/11/22 - All journeys times for children and young people are restricted to 50 mins or less unless the journeys are out of borough and it's not possible.</p> <p>Travel Assistance Service are also exploring the use of an app to provide real time updates to parents/carers e.g. a text is sent if the vehicle is running late due to unexpected traffic.</p> |
| | | (i) That the Cabinet considers how place provision strategically located throughout the borough can be used to minimise journey times. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - Place provision is reviewed and where ever possible provision is strategically located in the borough. Projections for mainstream schools are produced by our Data Intelligence team to support the sufficiency analysis for new places. We predict that the number of children and young people with EHC plans within Sandwell schools will increase by an average of 5.3% each year over the next 5 years and the general population number of pupils will increase by 1.4%. This prediction estimates that there could be an additional 500 – 630 statutory school aged pupils with an EHC Plans within 5 years. This as well as other data is considered when planning provision.</p> <p>14/11/22 – as noted previously</p> |
| | | <p>(j) That the Cabinet considers the following in relation to the contracting of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport for February 2022:-</p> <p>(i) providers should ensure drivers and Passenger Assistants are trained, and accredited where appropriate, in First Aid, non-verbal communication, use of safety harnesses and manual handling. In addition</p> | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - All new contracts (New framework) from September with require all drivers and all passengers assistants to have a first aid accreditation.</p> <p>Where a child requires specialist support during the journey we will continue to enable their carer and/or nurse to travel with them on their own (single occupancy vehicle)</p> <p>The new framework will build in greater financial and service resilience for the council by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the total number of Lots awarded |










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| | | <p>there should be Advanced Passenger Assistants who are specifically trained to provide emergency medication on transport, including but not limited to administering pre-loaded EpiPens or pre-loaded buccal midazolam devices;</p> <p>(ii) a market position statement be prepared, encouraging competition from a wide range of suppliers;</p> <p>(iii) small and medium enterprises should be afforded opportunities to tender for the contracts;</p> <p>(iv) mainly whole school provision should be the preferred approach;</p> <p>(v) some harmonisation of provision should be considered to balance effective management of contracts whilst retaining a diversified group of providers;</p> <p>(vi) the model for provision should avoid the increased risk associated with awarding contracts to a small number of providers.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limiting the total amount of work a single operator can be awarded • reserving the right not to accept the lowest tenderer for a respective Lot to ensure the most economic advantageous award of contract is made • adopting an appropriate evaluation matrix to manage the equitable award of contracts to individual operators • selecting a wide range of operators to minimise the risk of service disruption through the failure of a single operator • securing satisfactory evidence of the ongoing financial resilience of the operators admitted to the Framework • ensuring adequate contingency plans are in place to ensure continuity of service • this will help to provide opportunities for existing and new SME operators <p>14/11/22 - A first aid accreditation is now part of the required training that all drivers and PA's have to undertake prior to working in Sandwell</p> <p>Key Features of Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 contracts over 3 lots • Broader structure of lots to support/ encourage SME's • Operators were originally limited to the award of 1 contract per lot • Robust evaluation thresholds for compliance, finance & quality reviewed and improved. • Further opportunities for new contracts during life of framework • Enhanced pricing structure for tender submissions • Service Specification for Operators: reviewed & updated • Improved compliance: robust and regular contract monitoring to be done that looks at operationally & contractually matters |
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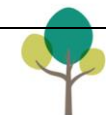
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| | | (k) That the Cabinet undertakes a trial scheme for providing Passenger Assistants in-house, or in partnership with schools, as part of the contracting of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport and that a full analysis is carried out on the trial scheme to determine its effectiveness. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - A pilot scheme to be developed to consider; • role and responsibilities of the passenger assistant • uptake of the role • the cost to the Council • Impact on children and their families • Impact for operators • how other Council who directly employ passenger assistants operate</p> <p>14/11/22 - This will be considered as part of the new procurement exercise which will start in Spring 2023 for new contracts from September 2024.</p> |
| | | <p>(l) That the Cabinet investigates the feasibility of taking Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport provision in-house, this should include risks, costs, benefits, potential timescales and suitable performance indicators, and it should include the following options:</p> <p>(i) full Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport service in-house;</p> <p>(ii) combined provision with existing Adult Social Care Transport;</p> <p>(iii) only Passenger Assistants service provided in-house.</p> | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - This will be considered as part of a wider review of transport services in the Council and will consider;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Capacity • Quality of provision • Flexibility of service to meet demand • Continued service improvement • Alternative delivery models • Ability to maintain a sustainable service • Mitigation of risk <p>14/11/22 - This will be explored as part of the new procurement exercise</p> |
| | | <p>(m) That the Cabinet ensures that, however the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport service is provided in future, Passenger Assistants:-</p> <p>(i) must be trained, and accredited where appropriate, in First Aid, communication with non-verbal children; and</p> <p>(ii) during their induction and onboarding a clear and strong emphasis should be placed on relationship building between the Passenger Assistant, the family, the school and the</p> | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - Covered in previous responses. The Travel Assistance Service will continue to promote and encourage the building of relationships between the child, their family, driver and passenger assistant to foster trust and ensure the journey is always a good experience .</p> <p>14/11/22 - The Travel Assistance Service are exploring the option to introduce a secure parent portal that will allow details to be updated so any required changes can be action quickly.</p> |






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| | | transport provider; (iii) also include Advanced Passenger Assistants who are specifically trained to provide emergency medication on transport, including but not limited to administering pre-loaded EpiPens or pre-loaded buccal midazolam devices; | | |
| | | (n) That the Cabinet investigates with partners how children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can receive earlier diagnoses which can help improve outcomes, including around transport needs, for that group. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - Sandwell has a multi-agency assessment pathway for Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Multi Agency Assessment (MAA) pathway investigates whether a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder would be appropriate for a child or young person. The MAA is completed by three different agencies which will include a Consultant Paediatrician or Consultant Psychiatrist, a Speech and Language Therapist and a Specialist Advisory Teacher, it can also include an Occupational Therapist.</p> <p>Sandwell' autism diagnostic pathway is a partnership between Children's Therapies, Inclusion Support's Complex Communication and Autism Team and Early Years Team, The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Child Health – Paediatrics. Assessments are carried out with regard to the diagnostic criteria set out in the ICD 10/11. Best Practice guidelines are set out in the NICE Guidance- Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis (CG128).</p> <p>The assessment period is around 30 weeks; Sandwell does not have a 'waiting list', children and young people are under assessment from the point that the referral is processed following the completion of the required NHS checks. In the academic year 2020-21, over 240 diagnostic assessments were completed. In the period July 2018- July 2021 there has been a 64% overall increase in Sandwell of the number of autistic children and young people. Our mainstream primary schools have seen a 112% increase.</p> <p>The MAA Pathway is held under review by the ASD Steering Group who monitor number of referrals and completion times. The Steering Group works to improve access to the pathway with information for parents and professionals. Information on the Local Offer is currently</p> |

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| | | | | <p>being revised and amended by the Steering Group. It is important to note that multi- agency partners do not have additional resources to provide this pathway.</p> <p>The MAA pathway is separate to the identification of transport needs. Transport needs will be considered in line with the Sandwell Home to School and Adult Learner Transport Policy.</p> <p>14/11/22- as noted previously</p> |
| | | (o) That the Cabinet ensures that research relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is considered whenever it is available to identify potential areas of improvement in Sandwell’s service provision. | Cabinet | <p>14/02/2022 - The SEND strategy 2021-2024 details the Sandwell vision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities The priority area’ for development are: 1. Quality Assurance of Statutory responsibilities: 2. Workforce Development 3. Improving Provision 4. Improving Progress and Attainment The SEND Strategic Board is responsible for the governance and commissioning of services to support children and young people with SEND across the Sandwell Local Area and will be key to the delivery of this strategy. As a multi-agency group the latest evidence and research is constantly reviewed to inform and ensure improvements are continual.</p> <p>14/11/22 – as noted above</p> |
| | | (2) That the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board is kept informed about the process for commissioning Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport in Sandwell. | Cabinet | 14/02/2022 - the Board would continue to receive updates as required. |
| | | (3) That Post-18 Provision for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities be included in the work programme for the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board. | Scrutiny Board | 14/02/2022 - Update presented to the Scrutiny Board |

Work Programme 2022/23 Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

| Meeting Date | Item | Links with Strategic Aims | Notes |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| 12 September 2022 | Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review |  | Emma Taylor (CEO of SCT) |
| | Elective Home Education Report – Cabinet Response |   | Sue Moore (Group Head for Education Support Services) |
| | Annual Regional Adoption Report |   | Lynn Noble (Adoption at Heart) |
| | Children's Services COVID Recovery Funds |   | Sally Giles (Strategic Partnerships and Commissioning Manager) Claire Tate (Senior Transformation Lead for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health) |
| 14 November 2022 | Virtual School and STEPS Centre |   | Michael Jarrett (Director for Children's Services) Balwant Bains Head of Virtual Schools. (STEPS) |



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| | The impact of the lockdown on Children and Families – findings report following substantial work and investigation in 2021/22. |   | |
| | SEND Transport – updates to the Board. |  | |
| 9 January 2023 | Early Help |  | Kate Griffiths (Strategic Lead for Early Help) Jon Grant (Chair of Early Help Partnership) |
| 20 March 2023 | Sandwell Children’s Trust 6 month review |  | Emma Taylor (CEO of SCT) |

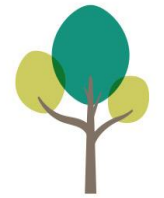
Items to be scheduled

- Outcome of trial of 16+ provision at the Westminster School and The Meadows.
- Children’s Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health.
- Government White Paper - Opportunity for all - strong schools with great teachers for your child – Focus on attendance
- Government Green Paper - SEND & Alternative Provision - Summary of the SEND review: right support, right place, right time
- Education Investment Area and Priority Investment Area developments
- Youth Service Offer and Youth Facilities
- Childhood Obesity
- Workforce – Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers



The following items set out key decisions related to Children’s Services and Education to be taken by the Executive in public session:-

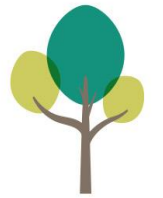
| | Title/Subject | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
|---|---|---|-------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | <p>Sandwell Residential Education Centres Fees & Charges 2023-2024</p> <p>Contact Officer: Richard Oakes</p> <p>Director of Children’s Services and Education, Michael Jarrett</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children & Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>16 November 2022</p> | | <p>Report</p> |



| | Title/Subject | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
|---|--|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| 2 | <p>Family Hubs and Start for Life programme funding</p> <p>Contact Officer: Peter Forth</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett, Director Children and Education/Lisa McNally, Director Public Health/Simone Hines, Director Finance</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>16 November 2022</p> | | <p>Report by:</p> <p>Director of Children and Education</p> |



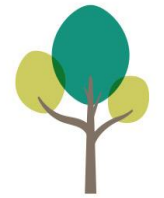
| Title/Subject | | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
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| 3 | <p>Extension of contract for a non-executive director of Sandwell Children’s Trust Board</p> <p>Contact Officer: Mandip Chahal</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>16 November 2022</p> | <p>N/A</p> | <p>Report by:</p> <p>Director of Children and Education</p> |
| 4 | <p>Schools’ Model Pay Policies 2019/20</p> <p>Contact Officer: David Briggs</p> <p>Director of Children & Education: Michael Jarrett</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children & Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>16 November 2022</p> | | |



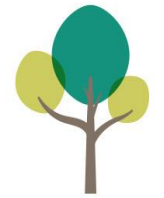
| | Title/Subject | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
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| 5 | <p>Title Grant funding for advice services 2023/24 – 2025/26</p> <p>Contact Officer: Heather Chinner</p> <p>Directors: Director of Housing - Gillian Douglas, Director of Public Health - Lisa McNally - Director of Children’s Services and Education - Michael Jarrett</p> | <p>Cabinet – Adults Social Care and Health (Cllr Hartwell)/ Children & Education (Cllr Hackett)/ Communities (Cllr Millard)/ Housing (Cllr Padda)</p> | 7 December 2022 | | Cabinet report |



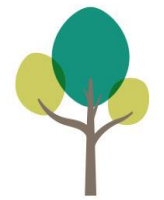
| | Title/Subject | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
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| 6 | <p>Application to Secretary of State for Education for change of use/appropriation of Denbigh Drive</p> <p>Contact Officer: Rachel Hill</p> <p>Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children & Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>7 December 2022</p> | | <p>Report</p> |



| | Title/Subject | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
|---|---|---|------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 7 | <p>Childcare Sufficiency Report 2022/2023</p> <p>Contact Officer: Sara Baber/Sally Dowie</p> <p>Director of Children’s Services and Education, Michael Jarrett</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children & Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>7 December 2022</p> | | <p>Report</p> |



| | Title/Subject | Decision Maker | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
|---|---|---|------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 8 | <p>Uplands Manor Primary School; Re-design and expansion of Special Educational Needs provision consultation responses as per the Making significant changes ('Prescribed alternations') to maintained schools</p> <p>Contact Officer: Rachel Hill</p> <p>Director of Children's Services and Education, Michael Jarrett</p> | <p>Cabinet - Children and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p> | <p>7 December 2022</p> | | |



Annual Programme Reminder (these items are not added automatically)

| Title/Subject | Cabinet Portfolio Area | Decision Date | Pre-decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date) | List of documents to be considered |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Determination of Admission Priorities for Sandwell’s Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools | | January/February | | |
| Schools Funding | | December/ January | | |
| Schools Capital Programme | | April to June | | |
| Review of Fees and Charges Sandwell Residential Education Services Centre Charges | | May – July | | |
| Childcare Sufficiency Report | | July - September | | |
| Model Schools Pay Policy | | October/ November | | |

