

Agenda

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Monday 11 September 2023 at 6.00pm
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 - 16
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2023 as a correct record.

- 4 Urgent Additional Items of Business**
To determine whether there are any additional items of business to be considered as a matter of urgency.

- 5 Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2022/2023** 17 - 44
To receive and comment upon the Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2022/23 and provide summary feedback to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.



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|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 6 | Sandwell Children's Trust Performance Update | 45 - 108 |
| | To consider and comment on Sandwell Children's Trust Draft Annual Review 2022/23 and receive the Sandwell Children's Trust performance update 2022/23 . | |
| 7 | Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments | 109 - 128 |
| | To consider and comment upon the Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments. | |
| 8 | Scrutiny Review - The Cost of Living and its Impact on Attainment and Attendance | 129 - 136 |
| | To consider the establishment of a Scrutiny Review Working Group to investigate the impact of the Cost of Living on Attendance and Attainment in Education in Sandwell. | |
| 9 | Scrutiny Action Tracker | 137 - 146 |
| | Standing item to consider and note progress on implementation of actions and recommendations. | |
| 10 | Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan | 147 - 160 |
| | Standing item to consider the Children's Services and Education Work Programme and future items on the Forward Plan. | |

Shokat Lal**Chief Executive**

Sandwell Council House

Freeth Street

Oldbury

West Midlands

Distribution

Councillor Hinchliff (Chair)

Councillors Chambers, Allcock, Ashraf, Choudhry, Fitzgerald, W Gill, Mayo, Pall, Uddin and Weston

Barrie Scott - Church of England diocese representative;

Carmel Hinton - Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative;

Yvonne Ologbo - Parent Governor representative.

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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 Interest

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 3 July 2023 at 6.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

- Present:** Councillor Hinchliff (Chair)
Councillors Allcock, Fitzgerald, Mayo, Pall and Uddin.
Barrie Scott Co-opted Member - Church of England dioceses
of Birmingham and Lichfield Representative
- Officers:** Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Education);
Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer).

19/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashraf, Chambers, Choudhry, W Gill, Weston and Carmel Hinton Co-opted Member - Roman Catholic archdiocese of Birmingham Representative.

20/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

21/23 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 are approved as a correct record.



22/23 Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

23/23 Corporate Parenting Week

From the 12 to the 16 June 2023 the Council had facilitated a corporate parenting week which had sought to raise awareness around corporate parenting and the responsibilities that were shared across the Council and its partners.

The event, which would take place annually in future, brought together partners from across the Council, Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT), the Black Country NHS Foundation and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The purpose of the weeklong event had been to:

- raise the profile of corporate parenting across partnerships;
- ensure a clear understanding of what it meant to be a corporate parent;
- develop the confidence of individuals to become good corporate parents.

The week had opened with a one-hour virtual live event which had brought together senior leaders from across children's services. The virtual event had been well received by staff from across the Council, with over 600 employees from the Council and SCT colleague's in attendance. The session had been led by a young person who had experienced life in care, who shared the story of their journey.

Throughout the week a range of sessions were delivered, which included:

- a webinar from SCT to help colleagues understand the journey of the children in care and care leavers;
- a trauma-informed webinar on supporting children and young people who **had** experienced trauma;



- three sessions across the week delivered by the LGA which included: Face to face corporate parenting training to the Council's leadership team and assistant directors, a virtual training session for newly elected members and a workshop for Corporate Parent Board which focussed on developing a new corporate parenting strategy.
- a one-hour webinar by CAMHS and the Council on Understanding the Emotional wellbeing and mental health of Sandwell children in care and care leavers.
- a stand outside the reception area near the children's outpatients at Sandwell Hospital.
- a face-to-face networking workshop from the Employment and Skills Team demonstrating what and how support could be offered to ensure that young people accessed employment and apprenticeships.
- question and answer session delivered by key members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Throughout the week, feedback had been positive and there had been clear learning across the Council, SCT and partners.

Key actions had been identified which would be a focus over the next 12 months:

- redraft of the Corporate Parent strategy;
- the creation of a new vision;
- to understand that success looked like in terms of the new 5 pledges and 25 promises;
- create an Assistant Director's group to which identified gaps in services for children in care and care leavers;
- work as a multiagency partnership to ensure Sandwell children in care and care leavers became a protective characteristic;
- ensure further corporate parenting training was provided to business partners;
- ensure all Elected Members and colleagues received corporate parenting training in the next 12 months.



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

- the number of looked after children that returned to their parents varied, depending on the circumstances a large proportion of children did return to their families, however, not all were able to return;
- children leaving care had a personal advisor who supported the transition from childhood into adulthood which included support around their future destinations;
- there were numerous success stories of young people leaving care and going onto higher education and a career, however, there were also some not so successful stories which often stemmed from their disadvantaged position;
- tracking was in place to monitor the destinations of young people leaving care, some care leavers wished to move on while others continued to access support;
- there were reciprocal arrangements in place across local authorities to maintain support for care leavers, modern technology also allowed support to take place in a virtual setting;
- the Cabinet was keen to pursue a policy change to ensure the support for care leavers;
- there were GDPR considerations when considering engagement with ward members, any change in approach would be considered by the Forum for Independent Young Adults;
- there was an ambition to produce an offer to demonstrate all the available pathways available to care leavers;
- the Council wanted to ensure opportunities were available within the Council as well as with Council partners;
- the young people on the Corporate Parenting Board fed back regularly on the support offered to care leavers, the Council was committed to working collaboratively with young people on co-production and co-design of support offered;
- the Cabinet report template had been amended to include an implication on corporate parenting requiring each item to consider its wider corporate parent implications;
- corporate parenting training had included members and training would continue to be provided.



24/23 **Scrutiny Action Tracker**

The Board noted progress on actions and recommendations from previous meetings.

25/23 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan as it related to Children, Young People and Education.

Meeting ended at 6.35pm

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Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 September 2023

Subject:	Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2022/2023
Director:	Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett
Contact Officer:	Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education Michael_Jarrett@sandwell.gov.uk Mandip S. Chahal, Senior Commissioning Manager for Statutory Services Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receives and comments on the Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2022/23;
- 1.2 That the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board Considers the performance of the fourth year of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and provides summary feedback to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.


2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 At its meeting on 7th January 2019 it was agreed that the performance of the new arrangement for Adoption@Heart, the Regional Adoption Agency would be reported to and scrutinised by the Children's Services and Education Corporate Parenting Board.



- 2.2 Adoption@Heart has been operational since 1 April 2019 and a performance report was presented to the Scrutiny Board in November 2020 covering the first year of operation, further reports have been provided annually.
- 2.3 The fourth full year of performance is now set out in Adoption@Heart's Annual Report 2022/23.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Ensuring that children have the Best Start in Life is a key driver for Adoption@Heart; ensuring that children are safeguarded, protected and, when unable to live with their parents, are effectively cared for.</p> <p>High quality adoption services improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people and ensure that all children are offered an equality of opportunity in the way that they are matched with an adoptive family. Adoption offers children a new start in life.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services. The government agreed that all local authorities (LAs) would be expected to deliver their adoption services through a RAA by 2020 and funding was provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to cover the costs of setting up these new arrangements.
- 4.2 On 12th December 2018, Sandwell Council's Cabinet gave approval to transfer adoption services to the new Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption@Heart. These arrangements were considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7th January 2019 when it was also agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would undertake the role to scrutinise these arrangements and report its findings to the Corporate Parenting Board, which is chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Education.



- 4.3 The RAA for the Black Country local authorities is called Adoption@Heart. The arrangement is a 'hosted' model, whereby the adoption service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council on behalf of the four Black County local authorities and commissioned on their behalf via Dudley Council. Contractual arrangements are in place for all partners. The adoption service has an operational interface with each local authority children's service; in Sandwell, this is Sandwell Children's Trust.
- 4.4 Adoption@Heart has now been operating for just over 4 years. The number of children adopted in the 12-month period 2022/23 has fallen compared with previous year's performance.
- 4.5 In the first year of operation, forty one percent of children placed were from Sandwell and consequently numbers placed for the other three partners were considerably lower. This was because more Sandwell children were waiting on Placement Orders at the point the service became operational. In subsequent years this levelled out with 27% of children placed being from Sandwell in 2020/21 and 28% in 2021/22. This year's performance has been largely maintained with twenty-seven percent of children placed being from Sandwell
- 4.7 Panels have approved 40 Adopters and matched 91 children in the year 2022/23. There has be a fall of 11.6% in the number of children matched compared to 2021/22. There has been a reduction in the number of adopters approved nationally.
- 4.8 There has been a reduction in the number of enquiries from potential adopters in 2022/23, falling to 541 enquires compared to 609 in the previous year.
- 4.9 Ofsted undertook inspection of adoption services in Sandwell in December 2022, the outcome of this was a judgement of good.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services. The government agreed that all local authorities (LAs) would be expected to deliver their adoption services through a RAA by 2020.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>At the inception of the Regional Adoption Agency, the financial contributions were based on the budgets already in existence in the four individual local authorities.</p> <p>The contribution levels for each partner is based on an agreed formula and varies annually based on level of service provision. Sandwell’s budget contribution for 2022/23 was £1.367m. This was an increase of £48.5k on 2021/22, however there was an underspend in 2021/22 of approx. £48k that off-set this increase.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>A contract is in place between the four Black Country local authorities to commission Adoption@Heart, and the organisation is hosted by Wolverhampton Council. A Strategic Commissioning Board meets on a quarterly basis to monitor the contract. The commissioning process is managed via Dudley Council. The Strategic Commissioning Board is chaired by Dudley Council.</p> <p>An Operational Board meets monthly to ensure high quality oversight of the operational business. A further meeting is also in place to ensure the successful interface between Adoption@Heart business and the social care practice in each local authority/Trust.</p> <p>Annual scrutiny and assurance is provided in Sandwell via the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board, which then makes its comments available to the Corporate Parenting Board. In Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton, the scrutiny and assurance process takes place within the Corporate Parenting Board meeting.</p>



Risk:	The corporate risk management strategy has been complied with and has concluded that there are no significant risks that require reporting and that suitable measures are in place to mitigate the risks identified to acceptable levels. The risks associated with the RAA are included in the directorate risk register.
Equality:	An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, Adoption@Heart undertakes its own equality impact assessments. Ensuring that diversity and equality has a prominent focus is a key feature of the RAAs work.
Health and Wellbeing:	The impact of COVID-19 on the performance of Adoption@Heart is set out in the Annual Report. It will be important to continue to monitor the impact via the Strategic Commissioning Board.
Social Value	Adoption@Heart supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. Adoption@Heart supports community resilience through the recruitment of local residents as adopters

7. Appendices

Adoption@Heart Annual Report 2022/23



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Adoption Service Report

1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

Report for Sandwell Children's Trust

Date of report 8 June 2023

Produced by Lisa Preston
Head of Service

Service Adoption@Heart

Appendix 1a

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report:

This report fulfils the obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002, to report to the "executive side" of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in this report.

The report covers the full year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, Appendix 1a will cover the overall work within Adoption@Heart and the progress with adopter recruitment and Appendix 1b will be service specific for each of the four partner agencies.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2023.

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell Children's Trust, City of Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Council and Walsall Council. The service is hosted by City of Wolverhampton Council and became operational on 1 April 2019. The service is now four years old.

2. Aims and Objectives:

The overarching aim of Adoption@Heart is to provide secure and loving homes to children in need of permanence via adoption and to support those children and their families through their lifelong adoption journey. Adoption@Heart offers child-led and adopter friendly services by an experienced and motivated professional team.

Adoption@Heart supports the ethos that children and young people are best able to develop close and enduring relationships within a family setting. Adoption@Heart aims to ensure that all children whom it places within adoptive families will experience stability, security, and quality of care throughout their childhood and into their adulthood.

The objectives of Adoption@Heart are to:

- Meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, associated standards, regulations, and guidance.
- Ensure the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process, as outlined in the Welfare Checklist (Adoption & Children Act 2002).
- Support the process of timely decision making for children in relation to permanence options, including the use of Early Permanence Placements.
- Recruit, assess and approve a range of adoptive families in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of our LA and Children's Trust partners children for whom adoption is the plan, including children who wait longer, sibling groups and those children who require an early permanence placement.
- Promote best practice in adoption through the provision of advice and support to our LA and Children's Trust partners with the care planning process.
- Ensure the assessment and preparation of adoptive families is comprehensive and robust, in order that adopters are aware of and prepared to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.
- Provide a child centred, needs led matching, transition, and placement process for children.
- Provide a comprehensive adoption support service for adopted children and young people and their parents, adopted adults and birth family members.
- Ensure all staff involved in the work of Adoption@Heart have the appropriate level of skill, knowledge, and experience to deliver an effective service.
- Regularly review and evaluate services provided to ensure services delivered are of the highest possible standard and continue to meet the needs of our LA and Children's Trust partners and the children and families in receipt of our services.

3. National Context:

Whilst representing a small part of the total children's social work sector, adoption continues to have a high profile politically. The programme of regionalisation which commenced in 2016

is now almost complete, with 29 Regional Adoption Agencies covering virtually all Local Authorities in England. There continues to be some areas, such as Birmingham, where they have formed as a Voluntary Adoption Agency, due to the nature and size of their individual organisations and Children's Trust status.

The government launched their [Adoption Strategy: Achieving Excellence Everywhere](#) in July 2021, setting out its vision to further improve the adoption system across England, with the provision of sector-led support to create national models of best-practice.

The National RAA Leaders Group is working to deliver against key areas of the strategy in line with the 3 key priority areas identified in their plan for 2021-2023:

1. Adoption Recruitment
2. The Child's Journey
3. Adoption Support

The National RAA leaders group meets monthly and there are working groups in place to address these three priority areas. Adoption@Heart is not currently represented on the working groups due to a change in Head of Service role in November 2022. The group receives updates directly from the Department for Education, the Children's Minister, and Ofsted.

In February of this year, Ofsted announced its intention to roll out an inspection framework for Regional Adoption Agencies. It is likely this will mirror the VAA inspection framework. However, given the variation in RAA set-up, to clearly define the parameters for an inspection, Ofsted will be selecting 6 pilot inspection sites in the summer of this year, with a plan to roll out the learning from these pilot inspections in Winter 2023. The new inspection framework and evaluation criteria is likely to be published early 2024.

4. Regional Context:

Adoption@Heart continues to be an active member of the Midlands Together Collaboration (MTC). The shared aim of the MTC partnership is to work together to enhance placement choice at the earliest possible opportunity for children and to ensure effective arrangements and protocols are in place for providing longer term adoption support. There are 18 Local Authority members and two Voluntary Adoption Agency members. There are five Regional Adoption Agencies represented.

The key aims are to:

- Reduce the placement waiting times for children.
- Increase the number of children placed regionally.
- Enhance adopter involvement in placement identification.
- Improve the co-ordination and access to adoption support services and to take advantage of opportunities to develop best practice across the region, to improve opportunities and services for children to be adopted and adoptive families.

Whilst all RAA's are working to ensure sufficiency for approval of adopters to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan, Adoption@Heart still uses a relatively high number of inter-agency placements, securing regional links is preferable to placing children at a distance.

The placement figures for the MTC region for 2022-23 are as follows:

Adoption Service Report FINAL
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023
Report for Sandwell Children's Trust

- There were 145 interagency placements made for 206 children.
- 12 placements were secured with RAA's in the region for 13 children (8.3%).
- 41 placements were made with our VAA partners for 60 children, representing 28.3% of all placements made.

The focus this year has been the launch of the MTC Early Permanence Good Practice Guide. This follows the launch of the National Early Permanence Standards. This is in recognition of the need to ensure we consider early permanence for all children with a likely plan of adoption. Since the launch of the Good Practice Guide in February and March 2023, referrals for Fostering to Adopt (FFA) placements have increased. The challenge for Adoption@Heart and other RAA's is recruiting enough adopters to meet the increase in demand.

5. Recruitment of Adopters:

5.1 New Enquiries

For the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, the Adoption@Heart Recruitment Team received 541 new enquiries.

This is in comparison to 609 enquiries received last year.

5.2 Information Events

21 virtual information events took place with 169 households attending and six phone consultations (mix of single and joint applicants). Therefore, 32% of people who made an enquiry went onto receive information.

6. Marketing Overview:

Marketing figures for this period are:

- 541 enquiries.
- Six phone consultations and 169 households attended information events.
- Between 1st April 2022 and 31 March 2023, we had a total of 18,611 website visits – made up of 13,491 unique visits.
- 482 Twitter followers.
- 2,180 Facebook likes.
- 340 Instagram Followers.

6.1 Marketing brief

In late spring, a national campaign was launched by 'You Can Adopt' which focused on the children that wait longer (i.e., older children, siblings, children with additional needs and children from ethnic minorities). Adoption@Heart supported the campaign with local PR (which resulted in two radio interviews), social media posts (both organic and paid for adverts) and Google Ads campaign.

In September and October, Adoption@Heart launched its own recruitment campaign, which ran alongside National Adoption Week. The campaign aimed to increase awareness of Adoption@Heart and encourage anyone thinking about adoption to contact their Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption@Heart. Artwork and messaging focused on the brand and the

strength of the three Local Authority and Children's Trust brand. Imagery focused on a single parent and toddler, both of Black heritage. The advert recorded for the radio campaign featured the voice of a Black female actor, with the message focused on the Adoption@Heart brand, myth busting and information about the children that wait longer.

The campaign included targeted Google Ads, PR to regional media, digital 'page takeover' on the Express & Star website, billboard advertising, a radio campaign with Free Radio, the launch of a 'mega rear' bus back advert which travels daily around the Black Country for 12 months, plus a schedule of co-ordinated social media posts (including paid for social media adverts) across Adoption@Heart and partner social media channels.

Adoption@Heart also shared the national 'You Can Adopt' campaign, which focused on the memories and keepsakes of adopted young people and adults throughout their journey. This campaign was supported via social media posts, emails to residents and the Adoption@Heart website.

In December, Adoption@Heart shared a story of two adopted brothers that wanted to donate their Christmas presents to children that go without during the festive period. The gifts were donated to a local Family Hub. Adoption@Heart helped coordinate the donation and shared the story with local press and via social media channels.

In January, Adoption@Heart launched a campaign focusing on people motivated by the new year and their new goals. Building on from the campaign that took place in October, adverts focused on the Adoption@Heart brand for anyone considering adoption, a reminder that Adoption@Heart is the Regional Adoption Agency for the Black Country. A radio ad focused on emphasising the brand and dispelling myths by using the voice of a single 'adopter' who talks about the different people that can adopt and which children are currently waiting the longest. Imagery of a single adopter from a Black ethnic minority background was used across all artworks and the voice of a female from a Black ethnic minority group was used for the radio advert. The Facebook advert used multiple images including a single female, single male, range of ethnic minority backgrounds, a same sex couple and a person with a disability.

The campaign included a Facebook/Instagram advert, radio advert (digital and Black Country transmitter), Google adverts, PR (which resulted in two local radio interviews), a sponsored article and social media post with Birmingham Live, plus promotion around the first face to face information event held since before the pandemic.

LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering week took place in March 2023, which saw the launch of the '1, 2, 3 or more' campaign, a recruitment campaign to encourage those from the LGBTQ+ community who are considering adoption or would like more information to come forward and to also consider whether they could adopt siblings. Adoption@Heart had support from LGBTQ+ adopters to share their stories across multiple platforms including video, social media, blog posts and at virtual information events. A month-long digital radio campaign also took place with an advert targeting LGBTQ+ adopters to come forward. Towards the end of the campaign a general adoption sponsored post was shared via Birmingham Live.

Adoption@Heart has continued to offer virtual information events for prospective adopters using Microsoft Teams but has now added face to face events back into the schedule. Virtual events have continued to work well and were attended by an average of nine people per event across the year. Events are hosted by Social Workers, the Marketing Executive, and an adopter, where possible. The format of video, a presentation, plus a Q&A session, continues to provide an interactive and engaging session.

The face-to-face events are held in different community venues within the Black Country, ensuring that locations rotate around the region. The event format is similar, but with the opportunity to speak to the team at the end of the event over refreshments. This also allows attendees to complete an expression of interest (EOI) form on the spot which increases the conversion from attendance to EOI from levels achieved at a virtual event. It is planned to continue to offer a mixture of virtual and face to face events to meet differing preferences of enquirers.

Regular meetings continue to take place with the Communications Leads across the three Local Authorities and the Trust. The meetings are used to discuss both national and regional marketing campaigns and activities, the marketing and communications support given to Adoption@Heart by the other comms leads (utilising the knowledge of their areas and resources) and what future support is needed and how the partnership can work going forward. Ongoing plans include joint working between fostering and adoption at community events across the Black Country.

This year will see the launch of a further national 'You Can Adopt' campaign, aimed at increasing awareness of support available to adopters. The new campaign is due to launch in late June 2023. Adoption@Heart has been improving the website with the aim to switch over to a new look website in the next few months. The new website features improved navigation, user experience and additional content including videos and articles. The improved website will work hand in hand with refreshed Google Ad campaigns. Having relaunched Instagram, Adoption@Heart now aims to increase content creation and improve its social media channels to increase reach and impact.

7. Adopter recruitment statistics:

Adoption@Heart approved 40 adopter households in 2022/23.

- 15 (37.5%) were approved within the six months statutory timescale.
- 25 (62.5%) were not approved with the six-month statutory timescale.
- This year we approved 17 less adopter households, compared to last year's figure of 57.
- There has been some decline in timeliness for completion of assessments. The average number of days across the 40 approvals in stage two is 141. The fewest number of days was 79 and the longest 465.
- 43 households completed stage one throughout 2022/23. The average number of days in stage one was 160. The fewest number of days was 26 and the longest 559 days.

Nationally, there has been an overall decline in the number of adopters being approved and a decline in the number of adopters starting the adoption process. Whilst there are no nationally defined reasons for the decline in adopter numbers, the RAA leaders' group has begun to gather intelligence on the impact of the current cost of living crisis. It is clear that prospective adopters are making different decisions regarding family size and delay in pursuing adoption. There is a clear North/South divide with adopter enquiry numbers holding steady in some Southern areas whereas the Midlands and the North of the country are being adversely affected with overall decline in enquiries and approvals.

In addition to this, In November 2022, Adoption UK published survey results of over 300 adopter households in different stages of the adoption process on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. They found:

- 7% delayed beginning their adoption approvals process.
- 5% paused the process after it had begun.
- 41% said they were considering adopting fewer children than previously

The survey also found adopters were concerned about the expense of setting up a home for a child, buying essential equipment, being able to afford to take off their full adoption leave entitlement and having enough finance to enable them as a family to enjoy family experiences, such as days out and activities. These pressures were more acute for self-employed applicants, single applicants, and low-income households.

Adoption@Heart is focused on ensuring recruitment activity is robust and visible and is clear in its messaging that finance is not a barrier to adoption. However, for those who were in assessment during 2021-22, it is clear finance was an issue for many families with some deciding to withdraw from the process and others having to take a break to address their debt.

In addition to finance issues, during the year, we have seen a high number of complex assessments with some adopters having to take a considerable amount of time to come to terms with their personal histories including, loss and grief, poor mental health, and adverse childhood experiences. This has also adversely impacted on the completion of adoption assessments within six months.

On a positive note, during Q4 Adoption@Heart were beginning to see an increase in adopter enquiries.

At the end of March 2023 there were 40 families in stage two:

- Including three cases on hold.
- 10 (25%) have been in stage two for over a year.
5 (12.5%) have been in stage two for between 8 and 12 months
- 4 (10%) between 4 and 8 months
- 21 (52.5%) for under 4 months.

Whilst this does show there are still some complex families in assessment, the total number in stage two at the end of March 2023, is higher than the figure for the same time last year which was 27.

At the end of March 2023 there were 58 families in stage one:

- Including five families on hold.
- 19 (32.8%) have been in stage One for two months or less.
- 39 (67.2%) families have been in stage one for over two months.

The total number of families in stage one at the end of March 2023 is higher than last year's figure of 39.

At the end of March 2023, there were 21 families approved and waiting compared to 43 families approved and waiting at the end of March 2022. Of these:

- Five of these are early permanence placements waiting to be formally matched.
- Six are families of South Asian origin, who have been waiting for a considerable amount of time for a child who matches their cultural and religious heritage.

- Four have specific matching criteria and are considering children.
- The remainder are in the early stages of matching or are newly approved and now considering children.

The average days waiting for a placement was 322, (10 months). One family had been waiting 1401 (46 months). (a child has been linked in April 2023) The shortest amount of time was less than a month for a family that had been approved in March 2023. At this point in time, adopter approvals are looking much more positive, since the beginning of April 2023 there have been 13 approvals:

- Two foster carer approvals.
- 11 mainstream adopter approvals comprising of four South Asian couples, two single White British Females, one Black Caribbean female, one mixed heritage couple and the remaining three White British couples.

The high number of adopters in stage one and stage two is positive and should overall increase the number of adopter approvals for 2023-24. However, we do anticipate to still see the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the final number of approved and available families.

To provide strategic oversight on the progress of adopter assessments, the Head of Service for Adoption@Heart is undertaking monthly tracking. This enables any delays to be closely monitored and issues such as delays in the completion of statutory checks to be escalated.

8. Complaints:

There were four formal complaints about the service during the twelve-month period, one complaint was about Sandwell Children's Trust and incorporated a complaint about Adoption@Heart about not feeling supported during the transition period with communication. A further complaint was about their approval/assessment journey and Keep in Touch, formerly called letterbox contact. Additionally, there was a complaint about a worker's breach of confidentiality and finally a complaint about the communication style of an Adoption@Heart worker. Learning from complaints is a key feature of the service, management and team meetings are used to explore learning and the business plan and team plans are used to implement learning from complaints.

9. Staffing:

The service employs 31 qualified Social Workers on a permanent basis, along with one agency Social Worker, who is providing additional capacity due to the number of cases in the Adoption Support Team. There is one Social Worker currently going through pre-employment checks, who is likely to start in June. There are also a number of unqualified posts such as family support workers and business support colleagues.

There is a Service Manager and three Team Managers, with one covering each of the thematic service areas. The Business Support Team have a Business Support Manager, Senior

Business Support Officer and five Business Support Officers. The Panel Team have two Panel Advisors along with a Panel Co-ordinator and three Panel Administrators.

The recruitment vacancy rates continue to remain low since the service went live.

10. Panels:

During the year 2022-2023 adoption panels continued to be virtual. Consideration has been given to panels using a hybrid approach by consulting with members and seeking feedback from adopters. Feedback continues to show that applicants feel more relaxed joining panels virtually via Microsoft Teams from their home. Social Workers report that working in this way allows them to work effectively and efficiently, whilst managing their workloads, it is also time and cost efficient.

In addition to the work undertaken in Adoption@Heart, the University of Worcester in partnership with Adoption Central England (ACE) RAA, conducted a piece of research which concluded that there are as many advantages to online panels as there are disadvantages. The disadvantages can be mitigated to some extent. There is a balance to be struck between the formality and quality assurance purpose of the panel meeting and the comfort of those participating.

The research made the following recommendations:

- To consider those circumstances where an in-person panel would support those attending.
- Social Workers being in the same room as their adopters when attending panel.
- Technical support to panel chairs, members and applicants when using Teams.
- Regular in-person events for panel members.

These recommendations are currently being considered by the Adoption Panel Team.

Panel activity approvals and matches per month 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
	Approvals	Approvals	Approvals	Matches	Matches	Matches
April	5	5	4	7	10	7
May	4	4	7	16	10	13
June	5	8	3	11	13	6
July	7	7	0	8	8	8
August	8	3	5	12	5	3
September	7	7	0	19	6	4
October	5	3	5	20	11	5
November	7	5	5	7	12	9
December	4	3	5	6	3	6
January	6	3	1	6	5	14
February	3	10	1	8	6	7
March	6	7	2	11	14	13
Total	67	65	38	131	103	95

10.1 Panel membership

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Report for Sandwell Children's Trust

The Panel continues to function with the support of the Panel Team including the Panel Advisors, Panel Co-ordinator, and Panel Administrators. There are currently 35 Panel Members on the central list. It is made up of Independent Panel Members and Social Work Panel Member representatives. There are four Independent Panel Chairs, six Medical Advisors for the three Local Authorities and the Children's Trust.

The central list offers a good representation of members who have either been adopted or have adopted and this is seen as very positive in terms of the different perspectives they bring. There has been a change in the membership and activity to recruit new members with the aim of increasing the diversity and representation at panel in terms of gender, race, disability and lived experiences. However, it is acknowledged that more needs to be done to recruit males, same sex couples and single adopters. Work in this area is therefore ongoing.

Figures provided for an Ofsted Inspection in December 2022 show the diversity of panel from the start of the RAA 1st April 2019 to December 2022.

(*Data was not available for 2020/2021 but will be collected and monitored annually from 2023)

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Panel Members	37	*	*	47
Gender	7 Male members			6 Male members
	1 Medical Advisor 6 Independent members			1 Chair 1 Medical Advisor 2 Independent members 2 Social Workers members
Ethnicity	8 Asian members			11 Asian members
	5 Medical Advisors 1 Independent member 2 Social worker members			5 Medical Advisors 1 Independent member 5 Social Worker members
	1 Black Caribbean member			6 Black African or Caribbean members
	1 Social Worker member			5 Social Workers members 1 Independent Social Worker
	2 Mixed Ethnicity members			3 Mixed Ethnicity members
	1 Medical Advisor 1 Social Worker member			1 Medical Advisor 2 Social Workers members

10.2 Panel training

In the period 2022-2023 Panel Members have had the opportunity to attend the following training events:

Adoption Service Report FINAL
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023
Report for Sandwell Children's Trust

Adoption@Heart Panel Development Day 29/03/2023, with the agenda items including Adoption@Heart Performance, Legal Updates, Diversity in Approvals and Matches presented at panel, Good Examples of Matching, Recruitment and Assessment, Mental Health, and the adoption process.

Thematic training has also been offered to Panel Members to develop their effectiveness on panel following themes and topic areas identified in their annual appraisals. These are as follows: Thematic Training on Questioning at Panel – Questioning Techniques 18/11/2022, Attachment in Adults & Attachment in Children 09/12/2022. In addition to this all four Panel Chairs attended Cultural Humility Training on various dates.

10.3 Panel business

Panel met on 45 occasions during 2022-2023, there are 50 panels a year for adoption matters to be heard. There is also flexibility within the panel system allowing for extra and special panels to be arranged to enable additional cases and emergency matters to be heard, as and when directed by the courts. This means that children do not wait, and matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

The Agency Decision Makers (ADM) from City of Wolverhampton Council made all the decisions regarding the suitability for approval of all prospective adopters from April to December 2022. From January 2023 this responsibility changed, and the Adoption@Heart Head of Service now undertakes these decisions as ADM.

Should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA) decisions remain in the three Local Authorities and the Trust, except in the case of Consensual Adoptions, previously known as relinquishments, which remain with Adoption@Heart. Agency Decision Makers are very flexible regarding early decisions in relation to both approvals and matches, to enable transitions that work best for the child/ren.

10.4 Approvals

Adoption@Heart is welcoming of adopters from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, those in same sex relationships, single applicants, those with disabilities and where English is not the first language. In some circumstances an interpreter has been used or made available to support the applicants.

40 adopters were approved in this reporting period. There was one deferral, which was subsequently approved. There were two Consensual Adoption cases presented for an adoption recommendation.

10.5 Feedback from Adopters and Social Workers about their experience at panel:

Feedback from Applicants for approvals and Prospective Adopters for matches is sought after every panel.

Feedback has been largely positive and where this has not been the case, it has been addressed through several ways, for example learning reviews, changes in practice, change in policies or processes at varying levels.

Quotes from adopters include:

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- *“Panel Members were all welcoming and friendly – calmed our nerves.”*
“We were treated well at panel and were kept informed of everything that was happening and would like to thank everyone involved.”
- *“I was a lot more relaxed than I thought I would have been, and I think that was because of how warm and friendly the panel were.”*
- *“We found panel to be a positive experience. We were made to feel welcome and had time to express our feelings.”*
“Very well organised, friendly, and made to feel at ease when questions were asked.
- *Notifications and calls before panel, e-mails when panel had commenced and links to join panel were all done professionally and efficiently.”*
- *“I was informed before the meeting ended how the decision would be made and the time frame. I understand everything and was happy with what was said to me.”*
- *“Very good conversation with all members in the panel,”*

Quotes from Social Workers include:

- *“The reason was clear for the recommendation. Panel listed the couples strengths; they recognised it had not been an easy journey for them and heard the emotion of the applicants that they have a strong affiliation and commitment to this child. The evidence was before us as the young person attended with the prospective adopters. Their attendance was due to childcare (grandparents had covid). Nevertheless, the couple’s ability to engage in the panel process whilst continuing to be attentive to the child was evident.”*
- *“The panel showed careful consideration of the needs of the child and provided a very positive recommendation which was pleasing to hear.”*
- *“The chair clearly explained the recommendations to the adopters/professionals.”*
- *“I just wanted to thank panel for the positive praise which was acknowledged by all panel members in this case.”*
- *“Recommendations were clear and fair.”*
- *“I wish to thank the panel advisor for ahead of panel she was supportive in ensuring the quality of the PAR, noting there were spelling and grammar errors and ensuring these were amended. It had been QA’d, but certain sections needed re-working after. I know the wider discussions within the LA and waiting on outcomes from meetings regarding the siblings, at some level impacted the quality of the PAR.”*
- *“Panel asked relevant questions and showed a great deal of empathy to my adopters. I found today’s experience useful myself with clear recommendations and advice and also support to go forward with this case.”*
- *“Panel members were welcoming and asked clear and concise questions. It was nice to be invited back into panel to receive the recommendation”*

11. Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM):

There has been one referral to the IRM in the period. The Social Worker and the manager attended the IRM panel on 20th September 2022. The recommendation was received by the agency on 29th September 2022; and the full set of minutes was sent to Adoption@Heart on 4th October 2022. The IRM upheld the decision of Adoption@Heart.

12. Disruptions:

There was one placement disruption during the period for a sibling group of two girls. The girls were placed in June 2022 and returned to a foster parent placement in September 2022. The disruption meeting identified that the girls had lived in five households before their move to adoption. Their level of and exposure to trauma may not have been fully explored during the decision-making stages of care planning, the foster carer was also not clear about her experience of providing care, as such the adopters were unprepared for the behaviours one of the girls was exhibiting. The adoptive parents were used to offering care to children who were receptive and trusting, this very quickly escalated into a 'blocked care' situation where the adopters were unable to move beyond the presenting behaviour. The female adopter became fearful and anxious, and the adopters made the decision to end the placement.

The learning identified was as follows:

- CAMHS involvement had ended too quickly and should have supported the girls in their transition plan recognising their level of trauma.
- The focus became the relationship between the sisters and not how to support the adopters to understand the basis for the behaviour.
- There was a lack of oversight from the IRO who had followed the girls' journey and would have had an invaluable insight.
- The adopters were not prepared for the extent of the children's needs, they were unable to see beyond the behaviour to understand the girls were testing out the relationship.
- The Matching Panel made recommendations that greater thought needed to be given to the support plan, this advice was not reviewed and therefore not embedded. Consideration should be given to sharing advice from panel, not only with the children's Social Workers and their managers but also the IRO.

In addition to this disruption, there was also a case where introductions for a child ended prior to placement. The child had four pre-meets and the adopter appeared unable to respond to the needs of the child, the house was unprepared, and the foster carer was privy to personal information about the adopter, which impacted on their development of a relationship. A learning review was undertaken on this case and the learning identified was as follows:

- Workers underestimated the readiness of the adopter to respond to the child's holistic needs.
- There were some signs in the assessment that the adopter was not prepared for the arrival of a child or had enough transferable skills.
- The pre-meets need to be conducted by one consistent person, so the feedback loop is consistent.
- PARs are not to be shared with foster parents, this information belongs to the adopter and the agency, the same way that a Form F is personal to a foster parent.

Learning from both has been fed back into the service and where needed, changes have been implemented.

13. Inspections:

One Local Authority (Dudley) and the Children's Trust (Sandwell) in the Adoption@Heart partnership were inspected in the year, Dudley within the ILACS framework and Sandwell initially under the ILACS framework and later as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) inspection.

Dudley received an overall Requires Improvement judgement, whilst Sandwell received an overall inspection outcome of Requires Improvement for the ILACS inspection and Good for VAA adoption inspection. Positive feedback was received in all inspections. However, the Sandwell VAA inspection presented several challenges from a VAA perspective, as most activity was based on Adoption@Heart activity but had to be looked at through a Sandwell Children's Trust lens. There were recommendations in both Ofsted reports for Adoption@Heart to follow through on, these are contained in the business plan.

14. Accountability:

Management board

The service has continued to have in place two key layers of governance with a Management Board attended by Assistant Directors and a Strategic Commissioning Board attended by Directors of Children's Services.

The Strategic Commissioning Board has continued to meet quarterly, supported by the commissioning lead from Dudley. The chairing of this board has remained with Dudley during the year 2022-23.

An Operations Group was established in the previous year, with a view to increasing engagement, oversight, and operational involvement of Heads of Service and other Managers from each partner service. This group has continued to meet six-weekly, chaired by the Head of Service for Adoption@Heart. The Management Board meets quarterly.

The Management Board is chaired by the Deputy Director for Children's Social Care in Wolverhampton, as host Local Authority for Adoption@Heart.

With effect from Autumn 2023, it has been agreed that the governance arrangements will change with the establishment of a new board which will be titled the Strategic Partnership Board (SPB). This will replace both Management Board and Strategic Commissioning Board and representation will be from Assistant Directors, with a Director of Children's Services chairing. This decision to streamline the governance arrangements has been made considering the continued positive progress of the service in becoming an effective and high performing Regional Adoption Agency for the region. The legal agreement and related documents supporting the current governance arrangements are being reviewed to reflect this change.

15. Service Development

Whilst there has been significant focus on Ofsted activity, the management team have also focused on the re-write of key policies and procedures and the formulation of an overarching business plan which identifies key service development priorities.

For the coming year, 2023-24, the business plan identifies the following as areas for ongoing development:

- Embed early permanence from both a child and adopter perspective
- Focus recruitment activity on recruiting adopters for children who wait the longest
- Improve on timeliness of adoption assessments and matching
- Improve on adopter and child voice
- Reinstating some activities that were suspended during Covid such as coffee mornings, adopter picnics and social gatherings for adoptive families which will extend our adoption support offer
- There is a need to embed a quality assurance framework within the service, which includes the need for regular themed audit activity across all aspects of the service and the collation of service user experience across all parts of the adoption journey

Appendix 1b

Child level Information for City of Wolverhampton Council children:**16. Number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and length of time waiting:**

On 31st of March 2023:

There were 31 children subject to placement orders, but not yet placed for adoption. 7 of these are linked but not yet formally matched and 7 are awaiting their placement order to be revoked to pursue a different care plan. The remaining 17 have an active family finding plan.

The timescales for the 31 children waiting since the granting of their Placement Orders is as follows:

Less than 2 months:	1
Between 2 and 4 months:	5
Between 4 and 6 months:	7
Between 6 and 12 months:	4
Children waiting over 1 years:	13

The 31 children comprise of 6 sibling groups of two children and 2 sibling groups of three, the remainder are single children. As indicated above, 7 of these children require a change of care plan.

17. Children Made Subject to Placement Orders:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
5	4	12	3	24

This is the total number of children where the court has agreed with the Local Authority care plan of adoption and have granted a placement order. This enables the Local Authority to progress the adoption plan for the child.

15. Children Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions as of 31 March 2023 (without Placement Order):

There are twelve children who have a SHOBPA decision in place but not a placement order, this is because the care proceedings for these children have not yet concluded, or they are a consensual adoption case.

18. Number of Children who had a SHOPBA during the period:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total

5	9	15	7	36
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This is the total number of children across the year who had a decision made that they should be placed for adoption (SHOPBA)

19. The Numbers of Children with PO who had a Change of Plan (away from adoption) in the Period:

11

This will be those children where the decision has been made that adoption is no longer viable and will have resulted in a change in care plan.

20. Number of Children Placed for Adoption during the period:

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
6	6	4	9	25

For those children placed, 18 were two years or younger, 5 were aged five and under and 2 were aged six plus.

There were 12 boys and 13 girls placed. 13 children were White British, 2 White European, 01 Asian Pakistani, 1 Black Caribbean and the remainder were mixed ethnicity White British/Asian, White British African or Caribbean.

Children Placed in Previous Years

Financial Year:	19/20	20/21	20/22
Children Placed	39	35	31

21. Number of Children Adopted:

The number of children legally adopted by their adoptive parents in the 12-month period to 31 March 2023 was 34.

Number of children adopted in the three previous years is below:

Financial Year:	19/20	20/21	21/22
Children Adopted	31	35	34

22. Adoption timeliness:

The national 3-year average scorecard indicators for timeliness of achieving adoption have not been published since 2020. These have been replaced by the ASGLB data that is published quarterly. End of year 2022-23 is not yet available. For comparison purposes, I will refer to 2021-22 timeliness and 2022-23 Q3 timeliness.

For the end of **2021-22**, ASGLB indicators were:

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- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **199 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **460 days**

For the end of **Q3 2022-23**, ASGLB indicators were:

- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **199 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **478 days**

Sandwell's current timeliness for **2022-23** indicators are as follows:

- A2 time from placement order to matching decision **195 days**
- A10 time from entry to care to placement for adoption **465 days**

A2 indicator for Sandwell is in line with national benchmarking data and current in-year data for children adopted is showing significant improvement on Sandwell's 3-year rolling average of 231 days.

A10 is also in line with the national benchmarking data and again current in-year data is showing a significant improvement on Sandwell's rolling average of 519 days.

However, there are some early indications that A10 may see a dip when those placed for adoption currently are finally adopted. It will be important to understand the rationale behind this cohort to understand if they are children who wait the longest for example sibling groups.

It is also worth noting that the numbers of children leaving care nationally via adoption has reduced continuously since 2017. Sandwell's numbers have remained consistent, this means that where adoption is considered as part of a child's care plan, robust and focused activity is undertaken to progress the adoption plan where it is clear this is the most appropriate plan, this is also supported by the current improvements in A10 and A2 scorecard indicators.

23. Early Permanency:

There were six Sandwell children placed in early permanence placements via Foster for Adopt, four with internal adopters and six with voluntary adoption agency families.

24. Children's Family Finding Activity:

The tables below contain the total numbers of children placed by the service during the year 2022/23.

Children placed 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

LA/Trust	Inhouse	Interagency	Total Placed
Dudley	15	1	16
Sandwell	18	7	25
Walsall	20	21	41
Wolverhampton	7	2	9
Total	60	31	91

Inter-agency usage for full year is 34%, thus 66% of children were placed in house.

Whilst this is positive, the lower number of adopter approvals has meant there were less adopters available for placements in Q4 and more inter-agency placements were made in Q4 than any other quarter. To try and reduce the use of inter-agency placements, we are exploring potential matches for children waiting with families in assessment. However, the current trajectory is for there to be an increase in the use of inter-agency placements for 2023-24 to ensure that we can continue to place children in a timely way with approved adopters.

The agreement to inter-agency placement searches is monitored and reviewed monthly by the management team, the meetings are chaired by the Head of Service. Should there be a need to expedite a search sooner than this, the Adoption@Heart Head of Service can agree. The increase in demand for FFA placements because of the launch of the MTC Early Permanence Best Practice Guide is meaning that we are not able to keep up with current demand and therefore seeking inter-agency FFA placements alongside other placements. The likely increased cost of this is also being monitored and reported to the Operations Group and Management Board.

Children Placed Foster for Adopt

LA/Trust	FFA Inhouse	FFA Interagency	Total
Dudley	4	0	4
Sandwell	4	2	6
Walsall	9	2	11
Wolverhampton	3	0	3
Total	20	4	24

Analysis – Children Placed

The number of children matched and placed with adoptive families in the full year is 91. This is less than the number placed in the previous year (103).

34% of children placed by 31 March 2023 were placed inter-agency and this represents a slight improvement on the end of the previous year performance (38%).

The spread of children placed/matched across the four partners is significantly different this year, with Walsall placing the most children and Wolverhampton significantly less, this is the opposite to last year when Wolverhampton placed the most and Walsall the least. Dudley and Sandwell both saw a drop in numbers.

It is positive that 24 children have been placed via Foster for Adoption (32 in previous year) and that 80% of these were placed with in house adopters. Early Permanence practice is becoming become more embedded, despite this year's drop in numbers.

Like the tracking of adoption assessments, the Head of Service also has strategic oversight of case tracking for family finding. This activity commenced only recently and sits alongside the tracking of inter-agency spend. Family finding audits are now also embedded so that key themes, from both a strengths-based perspective and an improvement perspective can be identified and fed back into the service and partner agencies.

25. Adoption Support:

The team continues to provide all aspects of pre and post order adoption support on behalf of each of the three Local Authorities and Children's Trust and supports families pre and post order. The team commissions therapeutic services via applications to the Adoption Support Fund, Keep in Touch arrangements, access to records and birth parent support.

It is recognised that early life adversity impacts children developmentally, emotionally, cognitively, and socially and requires therapeutic support for children to thrive. Adoption@Heart operates a graduated approach, offering universal access to an adoption training programme and support groups delivered by staff; enhanced support includes an assessment of need and parenting support, individually or in groups, and targeted support includes commissioning of specialist therapeutic intervention. We utilise the service of an Adoption Support Therapist employed by Adoption@Heart, as well as commissioning private and independent therapeutic services.

The starting point for accessing the Adoption Support Service is an Assessment of Need. The team undertook the following number of these in the twelve-month period. This is an overall increase in the number of assessments of need, this is becoming a growing demand and continues to evidence the lifelong nature and complexity of adoption.

Dudley	79
Sandwell	45
Walsall	63
Wolverhampton	60
Total	247

The Adoption Support Fund was established in 2015 by the Government to help adoptive families access support and settle into their new lives following adoption. The Government committed ongoing funding for the 2022-23 financial year in advance of the spending review settlement. There has been a marginal increase in the number of ASF applications which again evidences the need for on-going support within the adoption arena.

ASF Applications completed in the year

Sandwell	35
Walsall	54
Dudley	70
Wolverhampton	75
Total	234

Access to Records

The provision of birth records counselling and access to information is of vital importance in enabling adopted adults to understand the circumstances of their adoption and enhance their sense of identity. The team supported the numbers of requests below within each area.

Dudley	19
Sandwell	12
Walsall	16
Wolverhampton	17

Total	64
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Birth Parent Support

The team also provides support to birth parents affected by adoption and the following numbers were supported by the service in the twelve-month period.

Dudley	2
Sandwell	9
Walsall	10
Wolverhampton	3
Total	24

Keep in Touch

Adoption@Heart is responsible for Keep in Touch arrangements on behalf of City of Wolverhampton Council. There are three full-time Family Support Workers who are responsible for administering the service. They offer support to adoptive parents and birth relatives. There have been some considerable staff absences this year which has impacted on some aspects of service delivery. Due to staff absence within the team over the course of the past year, a breakdown of Keep in Touch exchanges by Local Authority/Children's Trust is not available. This will be rectified for the next annual report.

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Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 September 2023

Subject:	Sandwell Children’s Trust Annual Review 2022/23 and Performance Update
Director:	Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett
Contact Officer:	Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education Michael_Jarrett@sandwell.gov.uk Mandip S. Chahal, Senior Commissioning Manager for Statutory Services Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations


- 1.1 That the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board considers and comments on Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) Annual Review 2022/23 and Performance Update.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Sandwell Children’s Trust is required to report to the Scrutiny Board twice each year as part of the obligations set out in the contract between the Council and the Trust.
- 2.2 The purpose of the item is to provide an update for consideration and discussion regarding Sandwell Children’s Trust.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Ensuring that children have the Best Start in Life is a key driver for Sandwell Children’s Trust; ensuring that children are safeguarded, protected and, when unable to live with their parents, are effectively cared for.</p> <p>SCT works with families, foster carers, schools, statutory and voluntary providers to support the achievements of vulnerable children and those in the care of the council</p> <p>SCT works to ensure that children in the care of the Council receive the support and opportunities that any parent would give their child</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

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



Partnership Board and then by the Cabinet. Progress against the performance indicators for the period 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 is set out in the Annual Review 2022/23, together with information about financial, workforce, and other performance areas.

- 4.4 Since April 2018 the Trust has been the subject of seven monitoring visits from Ofsted as well as a focussed visit, three inspection visits of the fostering service, a full inspection under the Ofsted's framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children (ILACS) in May 2022 and most recently an inspection of adoption services in December 2022.
- 4.5 The judgement following the inspection undertaken in May 2022 was one of 'requires improvement to be good'. With the judgement of 'good' received by the fostering service in August 2021 and a judgement of 'good' for the adoption service in Dec 2022 there is a clear trajectory of service improvement.
- 4.6 The Trust have undertaken a refresh of the Improvement Plan, utilising the feedback provided by Ofsted following ILACS inspection with an aim of becoming a 'Good' or better organisation.
- 4.7 The delivery of the improvement plan will be overseen by the Improvement Board, which will be chaired by DfE appointed independent chair Lou Williams, and progress monitored as part of the Council's contractual monitoring processes

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2016, Cabinet was advised of the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996) to set up a new arrangement in the form of a children's trust to deliver children's social care services. As a result, Sandwell Children's Trust started operating on 1st April 2018. The Service Delivery Agreement includes a contractual requirement to attend Children and Education scrutiny twice per year. Any alternative to the current arrangement must



be agreed by both the Council and the Trust and go through a formal contact variation process.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Sandwell Children’s Trust will receive £74.475m to deliver the Council’s statutory responsibilities for children’s social care, and also to provide targeted early help services in 2023/24.</p> <p>The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and SCT is performance managed via a monthly Operational Partnership Board, a quarterly Strategic Partnership Board, and SCT is required to attend up to 2 Children’s Scrutiny Board meetings and 1 Budget Scrutiny meeting each year. There is a partnership Improvement Board independently chaired by a DfE appointed consultant. Additionally, the Trust is required to submit its Annual Review to the Council.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>The council’s strategic risk register previously identified a red risk relevant to this report, regarding improvements required in children’s social care services.</p> <p>As a result of the recent ILACS judgement, this was reviewed and the risk assessment has decreased from 16 (red) to 8 (amber)</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children’s services will have a positive effect on the lives of</p>



	vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics
Health and Wellbeing:	SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.
Social Value	SCT supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. SCT supports care leavers to access education, employment and training. Having strong governance and oversight supports SCT to achieve service improvement and better support children and families in Sandwell.
Climate Change	There are no climate change implications attached to this report
Corporate Parenting	Ensuring that SCT continues on its improvement journey will support the Council in delivering its corporate parenting responsibilities.

7. Appendices

SCT Annual Review 2022/23



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Annual Review

DRAFT DOCUMENT

2022 - 2023



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Sandwell Children’s Trust was created in 2018 with the clear purpose to improve the lives of children and young people. This is an ambition that continues to be shared by the Sandwell partnership, in particular our strategic partners Sandwell council with whom the Trust has a contract to deliver social care services to children, young people, and families.

The last five years have been both challenging and rewarding, staff and leaders have worked hard to deliver widescale improvements in all areas of the Trust against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and national pressures affecting the social work sector.

Our regulators have recognised the progress that we have made; our 2022 ILACS Inspection judged the Trust overall to be requires improvement to be good, OFSTED also rated both our Fostering Service and Adoption Service as good and HMI Probation rated our Youth Justice Service as good. This represents significant progress after years of inadequacy and has created a solid foundation on which we can continue to strengthen and improve the service we provide to the most vulnerable people in our community.

We have embarked on a comprehensive and aspirational transformation programme that will underpin the next phase of our improvement, and with our staff have co-developed a clear ethos that sets out how we are going to realise this ambition. As OFSTED have told us, we know ourselves well; we will be relentless in pursuing the very best outcomes for our children and families.



In addition to our regulators, The Department for Education (DfE) have also acknowledged our progress and have confirmed that Sandwell's Children's Services will now enter a period of transition from intervention, whilst maintaining the statutory direction at this time. We welcome this news as an endorsement of our progress and a testimony to the resilience and commitment of the Sandwell family.

This annual review document sets out the steps we have taken to deliver these improvements as well as the Trust's performance against a series of key performance indicators. It is necessarily a detailed document which should be considered alongside our performance data.

We would like to thank staff, leaders and partners from across Sandwell for their contribution to the progress that has been made since Sandwell Children's Trust was created in 2018 and look forward to working together to further improve our services.



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



Emma Taylor - Chief Executive
Sandwell Children's Trust

Creation of the Trust

The Trust was created following the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996), in 2016, to set up a new arrangement in the form of a Children's Trust to deliver children's social care services. The statutory direction was issued in response to a long period of inadequate provision of children's social care services delivered by the council. The Statutory Direction set out the requirement to establish a new and distinct legal entity to provide children's social care services in Sandwell on behalf of the council. The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services and is managed by a board of non-executive and executive directors. The council commissions the Trust to deliver statutory children's social care and targeted services, as specified in the Service Delivery Contract.

The Trust commenced operations on the 1 April 2018 with day to day operational management overseen by the Executive Management Team, who are accountable to the Trust Board.

The Trust Board

Chaired by the Right Honourable Jacqui Smith, the Trust Board is both supportive and challenging. The Board is complemented by 3 committees: Finance and Infrastructure, Workforce and Audit and Risk, each focussing on key matters that impact on the day to day running of the Trust. There is a strong sense of the ambition for children amongst all members; and there is good oversight of Trust activity, with regular, detailed reports that cover all aspects of the Trust, e.g. workforce, practice and performance, finance. The Chair is well sighted on strategic and relevant operational matters and key decisions are made swiftly after thorough scrutiny. The Chair of the Board was originally appointed by the Department for Education and regularly provides written reports, to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Children, on the Trust's performance and progress adding a further element of scrutiny and challenge.

Governance

A comprehensive programme of governance arrangements is in place. The Trust and council officers meet at least monthly at the Operational Partnership Board (OPB), to consider performance and operational matters.

The OPB is chaired by the Trust Chief Executive. On a quarterly basis, the Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust and the Trust Chief Executive meets with the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services at a Strategic Partnership Board (SPB). The SPB is chaired by SMBC Chief Executive.

Living our purpose and ethos

To complement the Trust's purpose of improving the lives of children and young people, staff from across the Trust have collaborated to articulate and embed our ethos which sets out the ways in which we achieve this, with specific focus on our children and families and ourselves and partners

Our ethos

Children and families

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
- We keep families safe, keeping them together where possible
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand
- We celebrate our children and enable them to smile, laugh, play, and succeed

Ourselves and our partners

- We support and look after each other
- We make meaningful connections and collaborate effectively with the wider Sandwell family
- We share a common understanding of our responsibilities
- We encourage each other to learn, develop, and reflect
- We embrace diversity and celebrate each others differences
- We promote the positives - we are advocates for the Trust



Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

EDI has a high profile across the Trust, we have seen progress but there is still a lot more to do. We continue to listen, learn and change. We all play a part in championing a diverse workforce, recognising and addressing any attitudes or behaviours that do not reflect our ethos. We want to be responsive to national and regional events that could have an emotional impact on our diverse workforce and the families we work with. We need to understand how these have affected different communities and develop actions to help deal with them.

Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) was created in 2018 with a clear purpose; to improve the lives of children and young people in Sandwell. Founded on core principles of excellence, equality and opportunity for all, Sandwell Children's Trust is resolute in creating an environment that recognises and celebrates differences, designs services to meet the diverse needs of our children, young people and families attracts and retains the best staff. What we gain from our diverse communities and workforce is immeasurable.

We are striving to be an organisation that values differences and inclusiveness, where everyone can be the very best they can and in turn create a workforce that is knowledgeable about the communities we support so we can connect directly with our young people and families, and be responsive to their needs. Led by our Chief Executive and with the full support of our Trust Board, promoting equality, valuing diversity and maximising inclusivity is about recognising that we all have our part to play.

The children and families of Sandwell along with our staff and partners are important contributors to our continuous development, learning and the overall success of what we do. Therefore, we will ensure that we provide equality of opportunity for all so that meaningful ways of collaboration, participation and contribution can flourish, and we strive to strengthen our cultural competences and embed it as an employer, an organisation and in practice.

Overview of Sandwell and our children

Sandwell is an urban area lying in the centre of the West Midlands conurbation, made up of six small urban towns. It ranks as the 15th most deprived authority in the country for income deprivation that affects children, with this deprivation spread across the borough.



Sandwell has an estimated population of 341,900, which has risen year on year since the 2011 census. 84,867 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Sandwell. This is 24.8% of the total population in the area. There has been an 11% increase in the number of children and young people living in Sandwell since 2011, which has required the creation of 5,300 new primary school places and 3,915 secondary school places.

Sandwell is a diverse borough with 30.1% of the total population from black and minoritized ethnic groups. This percentage increases for children and young people from minoritized ethnic groups, who account for 49% of Children aged 0-17, compared with 26.2% in England. The largest minoritized ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are of Indian (8,246) and Pakistani origin (5,917).

Many of Sandwell's children and young people experience poor outcomes. Approximately 25% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families. Around 7 in 1,000 children die before their first birthday, levels of teenage pregnancy are higher than the national level and 28.2% of 11-year-olds are classified as obese.

The number of children entitled to free school meals has increased by 30.2% since March 2020 with 20,209 children currently in receipt of a free school meal, which equates to 33.2% of the school population. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary schools is 32.4% (the national average is 20.9%); in secondary schools it is 29.2% (the national average is 17.2%). Over 3,100 children are subject to an Education, Health and Care Plan. This figure has risen significantly since 2019 and continues to rise.

As of 31 March 2023, there were 802 children in care, with 333 children subject of a child protection plan and 624 Children in Need. The rate per 10,000 of children in care in March 2023 has reduced by 7.2 over the last 12 months, and currently stands at 94.5. This is an improving trend, and now below statistical neighbour average (97.1 per 10,000). We currently have a transformation plan and financial plan to reduce the number of children in care further. The rate of children on a children protection plan has also reduced over the last 12 months.

Introduction

The Annual Review is a formal requirement of the Trust's contract with the council. The aim of the review is to look back over the previous 12 months and understand how far we have achieved our goals. The review is the first strategic document of the year, informing our business plan and our improvement plan.

The Service Delivery Contract allows for the Trust to be 'relieved of its obligations to provide its services as a result of a "Relief Event'. A Relief Event is an event such as a fire, storm, accidental loss or damage to the Trust premises, power failure, or the failure by the council to fulfil the council dependencies.

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

- Section (a)** The Improvement Plan
- Section (b)** Performance of Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year
- Section (c)** The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year
- Section (d)** The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections
- Section (e)** Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year;
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Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

The Improvement Plan

Sandwell Children's Trust is an independent organisation owned by Sandwell council. Day to day management is overseen by its Executive Management Team, which is accountable to the Trust Board.

In May 2022, Sandwell Children's Trust was subject of an regulatory inspection by Ofsted under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS). After a decade of children's services being inadequate, a judgement of Requires Improvement was achieved in all areas which was a significant turning point for the Trust and its partners. In December 2022 the Trust's Adoption Services were also inspected, where an overall judgement of Good was achieved.

As part of our improvement journey we have a robust improvement plan which outlines progress and evidence against the seven recommendations from the ILACs inspection in May 2022. These recommendations can be seen on page 31.

The current context is one of a national shortage of social workers, where almost all areas have been affected. There has been a disproportionate impact on the Trust, given its difficult history, workforce stability remains one of the Trust's biggest challenges. Despite this, efforts to improve continue at pace. There is a clear sense of direction and strong ambition for the Trust's future, which is underpinned by our six priorities. In early 2022 our locality model was established, whereby three Heads of Service oversee three social work localities, alongside borough wide services for children in care/care leavers, disabled children and fostering. The model is embedding well.

The Trust Board is both supportive and challenging. There is a strong ambition and high expectations from all members; and there is good oversight, with the Board receiving regular detailed reports regarding all aspects of the Trust's work, e.g. workforce, practice and performance, finance. The Chair is well sighted on strategic and relevant operational matters and key decisions are made swiftly after thorough scrutiny.

There is a positive partnership approach between the Trust and the council and there is evidence that children are prioritised in Sandwell; and whilst there is appropriate challenge through our governance arrangements, there are constructive relationships between officers and politicians across the Trust and council.

There is a clear sense of direction and oversight across the wider partnership, as well as clarity about our priorities which are overseen by the Children and Families Strategic Partnership. These include early help, mental health, and children in care.

Our Strategic Leadership Team has been established for two years now and is developing well. It is clear on its remit which is to deliver on our priorities, addressing any issues collectively so we continually improve. Likewise, our wider Operational Leadership Team comes together regularly, both to reflect on practice but also to spend time learning together as leaders and helping to shape improvements - all part of our inclusive and collective culture.

Our ethos underpins our whole approach and there are clear expectations about how everyone should behave and live our values. This links closely with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Overseen by a Strategic Governance Group, there is a strong commitment to excel in this area. Not only do we want to deliver on the strategy's action plan but make the strategy a 'state of being' for everyone in the Sandwell Family.

Transformation Programme

The Trust has mapped out an ambitious programme of projects which will ensure that it continues on its upward trajectory and improvement. The Transformation Programme has developed over its first full year in line with our ethos and is structured around our 6 priorities.

Time has been invested in the development of the programme ensuring that each priority has clear objectives captured in individual ambition statements, clarified by 'what this means' which articulate how the ambitions will be achieved. Each priority area is underpinned by prioritised projects with the appropriate level of resources, project planning, lead officers and all overseen by the Strategic Leadership Team to ensure co-ordination, alignment and collective management of risks.

Additionally, the Transformation Programme is fully aligned with the Trust's Savings plan. Every element of the savings plan appears in the Transformation Programme which means that the prioritised activity will continue to transform the organisation, deliver better outcomes for our children, young people and their families and deliver tangible savings or avoid costs.

We strive for excellence in all areas.



Priority areas and their ambition statements



Priority 1 - People

“A place where our people are proud to be part of a skilled Sandwell family by being respected, supported, nurtured and empowered to thrive”



Priority 2 - Practice

“To improve the lives of children and young people through caring, compassionate support and proportionate high quality interventions based on each child’s needs”



Priority 3 - Partnerships

“To work alongside partners across Sandwell to improve the lives of children and young people through collaboration, shared understanding of roles and mutual respect”



Priority 4 - Prevention

“To work alongside partners to ensure that our children, young people and families receive the right support, in the right place at the right time”



Priority 5 – Meeting Need and Measuring Progress

“To recognize and understand the needs of the children and young people we support by ensuring services are designed to best meet those needs, enabling children and young people to fulfil their potential”



Priority 6 - Striving for Excellence

“To create the environment that transforms the Trust into an intelligence led, innovative, aspirational and confident organization”

The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year

Over the course of the year, we have reported our key contract performance on a monthly basis and are pleased to say, we have maintained good performance in many areas.

Performance in a few areas dipped in the first half of the year due to staff shortages and recruitment issues of Social Workers, many of the Contract KPIs improved in the second half of the year.

As of 31 March 2023, the SCT has met 11 of our KPI targets, a further 3 are within the contract tolerance. There is one indicator within the failure zone for month of March 2023. Measure in failure zone is as follows:

- PI13 – Social Worker Permanent Vacancy Rate – this measure has increased slightly over the last month from 40.7% to 42.6%, this measure is still above target tolerance (14th consecutive month above target and tolerance). This performance is directly effected by a national shortage of experienced social workers.

Throughout the financial year a number of measures have seen a decline in the earlier part of the year, however significant improvements have been made and include:

- Percentage timeliness of Contact to MASH within 24 hours (PI1)
- Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences within 15 working days of the strategy discussion (PI3)
- Timeliness of Single Assessments within 45 working days (PI4)
- Children unallocated longer than 5 working days (PI5)
- Child Protection and Children in Need Visits within the last 4 weeks (PI6 and PI10)

Measures which have declined throughout the latter part of the year include:

- Children in Care Reviews within Statutory Timescales (PI12)
- Overall Caseloads across Children Services (PI13)

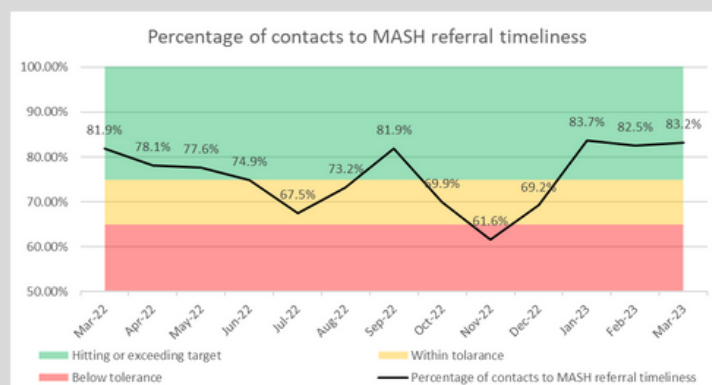
Between June and September 2022 there were significant staffing issues, which were reflective of the national and regional picture in respect of recruitment and retention of social workers. This impacted performance with a number of Children unallocated which impacted on a number of measures including PI3, PI4, PI5, PI6, PI10, PI11 and PI12 which eased in October 2022 with performance increasing significantly over the last 6 months of the financial year.

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

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

Target: > 75% **Tolerance:> 65%** **Failure: < 65%**

This measure is important as it shows how efficiently our front door is operating and how quickly we are responding to referrals where threshold is not immediately clear. Throughout financial year 2022-23, performance fluctuated between 61.6% in November 2022 up to 83.7% in January 2023 (performance was above target for 6 reporting periods, within tolerance for 5 reporting periods and within failure for one reporting period).

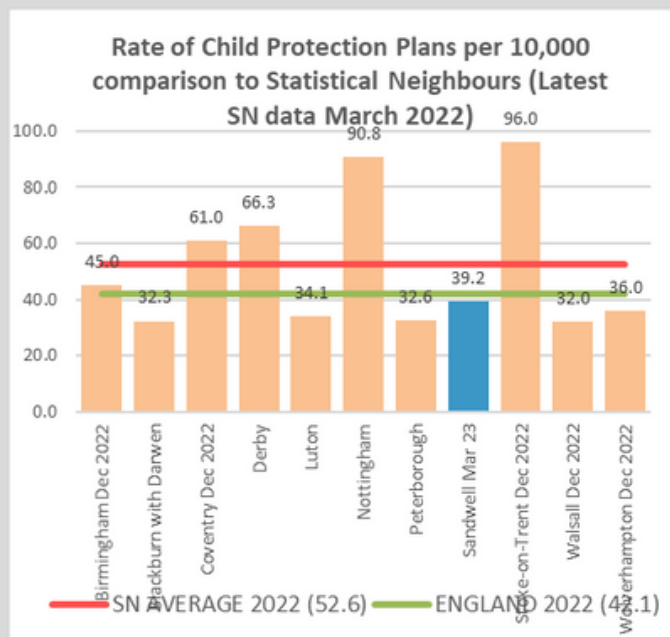


PI2 - The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population

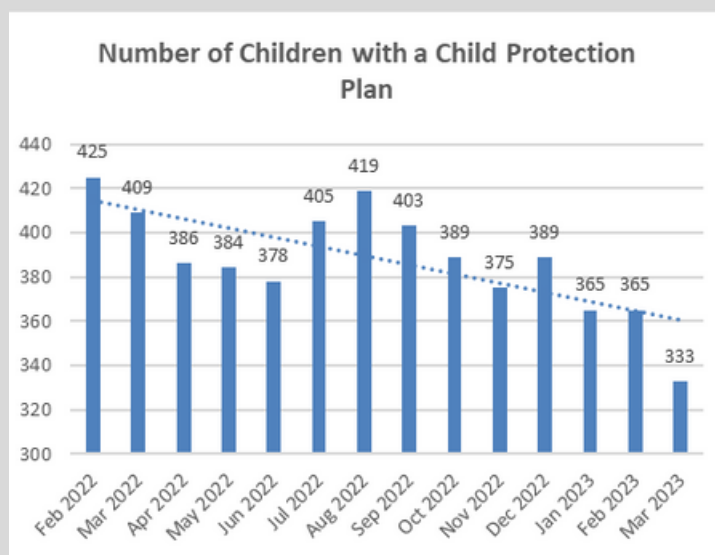
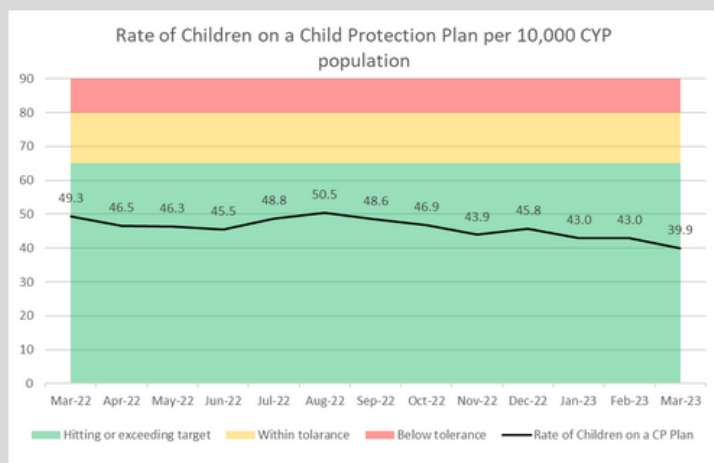
Target:<65 Children per 10,000 **Tolerance:< 80 Children** **Failure: > 80 Children**

This measure gives us a sense of our demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds for children where there are child protection concerns.

Our statistical neighbour average is 52.6 and the England average is 42.1 (measured at March 2022).



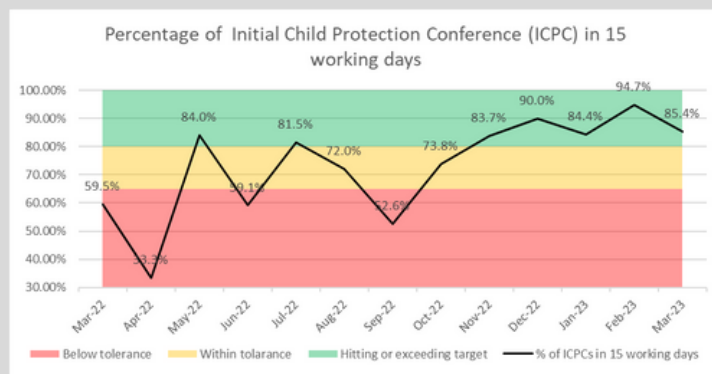
Throughout the year we have worked hard to ensure that the threshold for child protection was consistent, and this measure continues to decrease below our statistical neighbour average and now below England Average, and positively at the lowest rate since the Trust went live in April 2018 at 333 (39.2 per 10,000) Children on a Child Protection Plan (performance in this measure has achieved target in last 12 reporting periods).



PI3 – The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC’s) held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary

Target: > 80% Tolerance: > 65% Failure: < 65%

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



Performance in this indicator has been sustained above target since November 2022 and is consistently above our comparators for 2022;

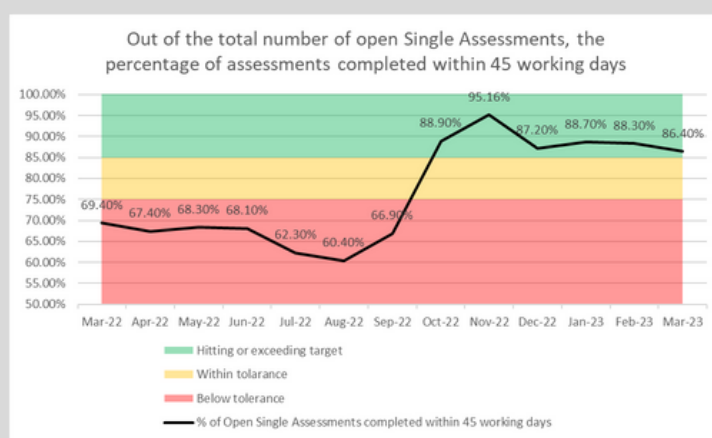
- Statistical Neighbours – 83.4%
- England Average – 79.2%
- West Midlands Average Q4 2021/22 – 77.6%

(This measure has been above contract target for 7 months of this financial year, within tolerance for two months and failure for three months)

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

Target: > 85% **Tolerance:> 75%** **Failure: < 75%**

This measure shows how timely our Single Assessments are for children (in line with the statutory maximum expectation of 45 working days). Most Single Assessments are completed by Social Workers within Locality Service areas and Duty and Assessments Teams (between September 2022 and March 2023), but a significant amount are completed across other service areas as part of updating/review assessments for children.

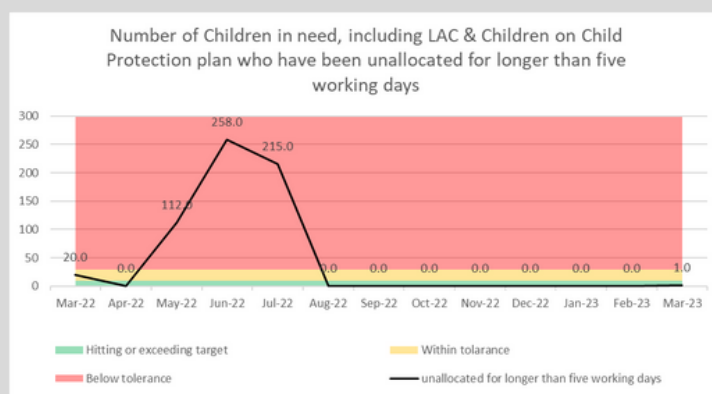


We saw a dip in performance early in the financial year, which coincided with workforce fragility and issues within unallocated children, performance improved significantly between October 2022 and March 2023 and above our comparators (West Midlands – 82%, statistical neighbour – 84.8% and England Average – 84.5%). Furthermore performance over the financial year was above target for 6 months of the financial year, but significantly improved above target for last 6 months (October 22 to March 23).

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

Target: <10 **Tolerance:< 30** **Failure: >30**

This measure helps to demonstrate how well we have oversight on every child's situation, and how well we are handling throughput at the Front Door and other transfer points. Poor performance in this area would mean children do not have a social worker for lengthy periods of time, which could be a dangerous situation.



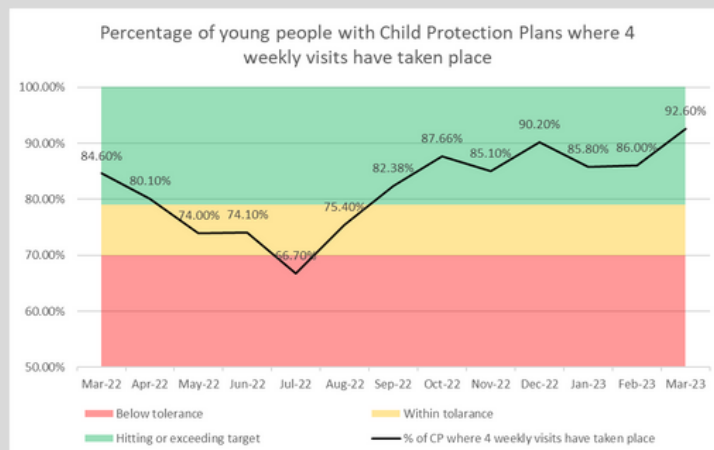
There are circumstances where having children unallocated for a short period of time is reasonable, but this should be kept to a minimum.

As can be seen our performance in this area has consistently been better than our target this year since 31 August 2022. Between 31 May and 31 July 2022 we had a high number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days, this was due to workforce stability issues. A clear plan was implemented to manage allocations and transfer of work which continued throughout the financial year. The difficulty in recruiting social workers to our vacant positions had affected our performance in this area during this period (performance above target for 9 out of 12 month reporting cycle).

PI6 - The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 4 weeks

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

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child Protection. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child Protection Plan at least every 4 weeks.



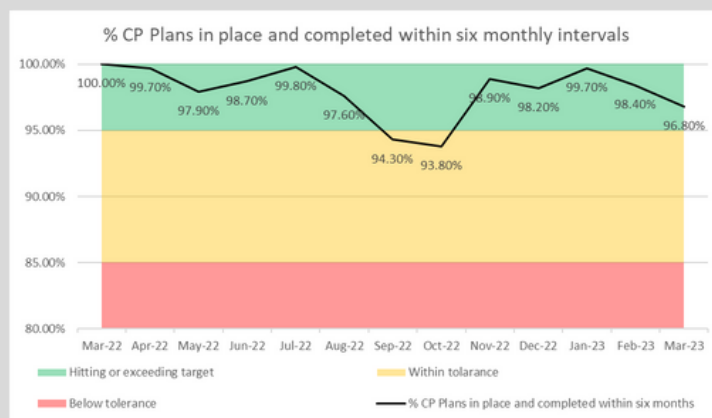
Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through practice reviews and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention and safeguarding.

The drop in performance mid-year is accounted for by increasing staffing fragility within the locality service, which has now stabilized (performance in this area above target for 9 months, tolerance for two months and below target and tolerance for one month).

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

Target: >95% **Tolerance:>85%** **Failure: <85%**

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



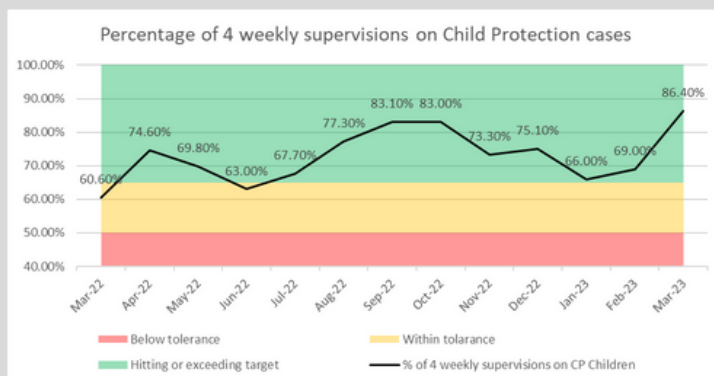
This measure is linked to how often Social Workers are holding / recording their Children's Core Group Meetings and Conference Chairs their Review Child Protection Conferences.

Performance has been relatively consistent – between 93.8% and 99.7% throughout the year this has remained above our target for 10 out of the 12 reporting months in 2022-23 with two months within tolerance.

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

Target: >65% **Tolerance:>50%** **Failure: <50%**

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

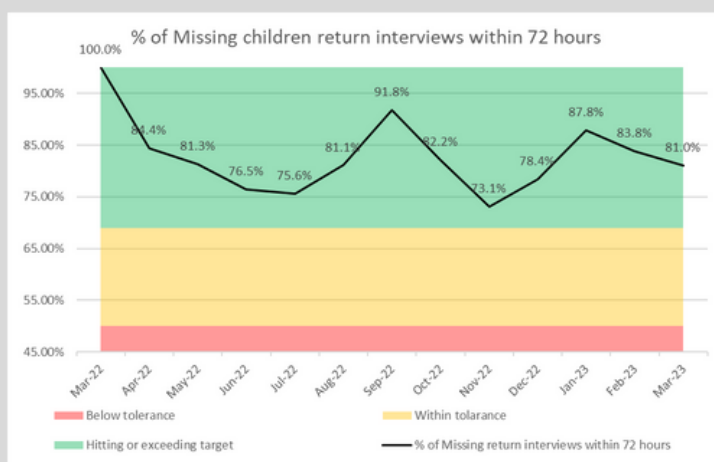


Our performance over the financial year has fluctuated between 63% in June 2022 and 86.4% in March 2023 and above target for 11 out of the 12 reporting months.

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

Target: >70% **Tolerance:>50%** **Failure: <50%**

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



Our performance in this area has been good, although the relatively small sample sizes per month mean there can be variance month to month (performance has ranged between 73.1% and 91.8% and above target for all 12 reporting months).

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

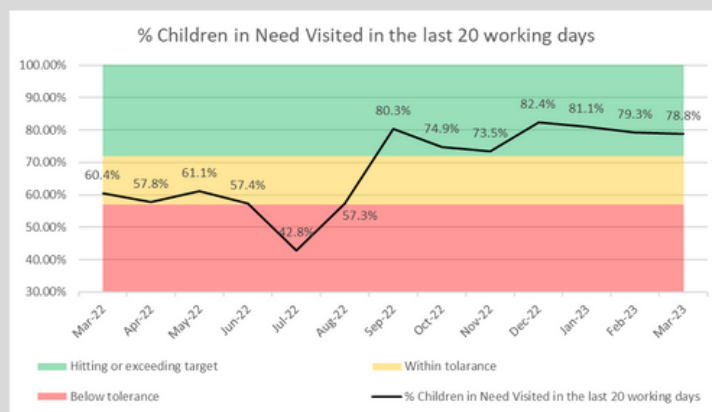
Target: >73% **Tolerance:>58%** **Failure: <58%**

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child in Need.

The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child in Need Plan at least every 4 weeks.

Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through practice reviews and management oversight.

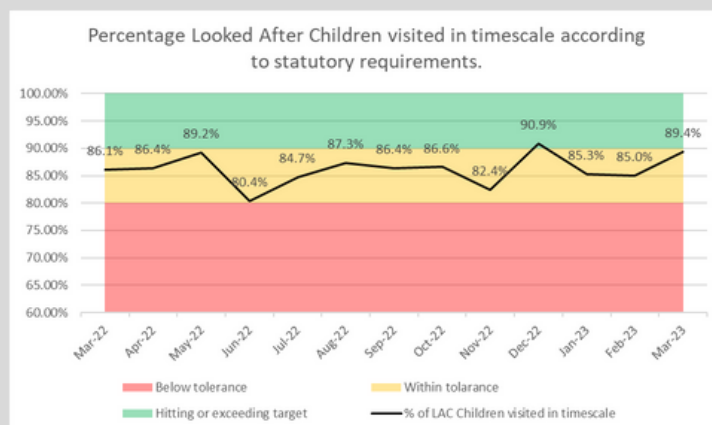
Performance in relation to Children in Need visits has improved significantly during September 2022 to March 2023 ranging between 73.6% and 82.4% this has been maintained above target over the 7 reporting periods, although between April 2022-August 2022 performance ranged between 42.8% and 61.1% where performance was below target for four out of the 5 months and in tolerance for one of those months.



PI11 – The percentage of Children in Care visited in accordance with statutory requirements

Target: >90% **Tolerance:>80%** **Failure: <80%**

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with Children in Care. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is defined through statute. Good performance helps to show we have established relationships with our Children in Care, know their needs and meet their needs, driving permanence and robust planning.

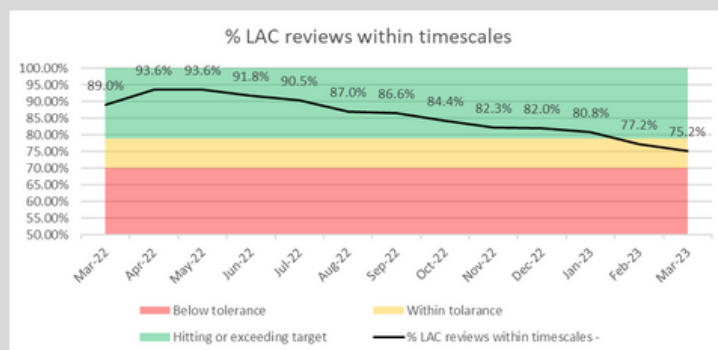


Many Children in Care are placed in stable situations, and are secure with their carers. Therefore, statutory visits range between 4-12 weeks based on Child needs and stability. Performance has ranged in this measure from 80.4% in June 2022 and 90.9% in December 2022, out of the 12 reporting months CIC visits has been within contract tolerance for 11 months. Performance in localities (where main staffing issues have been) has ranged between 75-85% during the year with CIC service between 85-95%.

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

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

This measure shows the timeliness of Looked After Children reviews, and contributes to our understanding of how well we monitor the progress of Looked After Children's plans, and ensure that we are doing what we say we will.



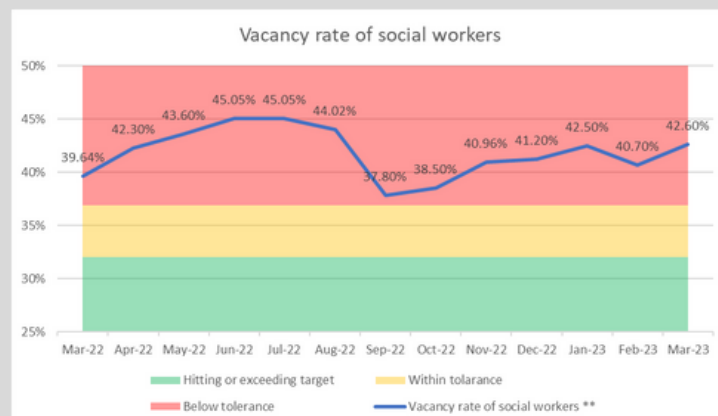
Good performance in this area will show that we independently review children's plans on a regular basis, at least every 6 months. This is a cumulative measure across the financial year starting in April each year.

Our performance in this area has been consistently above tolerance and above target for 10 out of 12 reporting months although performance is 9.8% below same period in previous year, this is primarily due to the period of workforce instability where CIC reviews needed to be re-convened between June and August 2022 impacted as this measure is cumulative throughout the financial year.

PI13 - The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers

Target: >32% **Tolerance:>37%** **Failure: <37%**

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



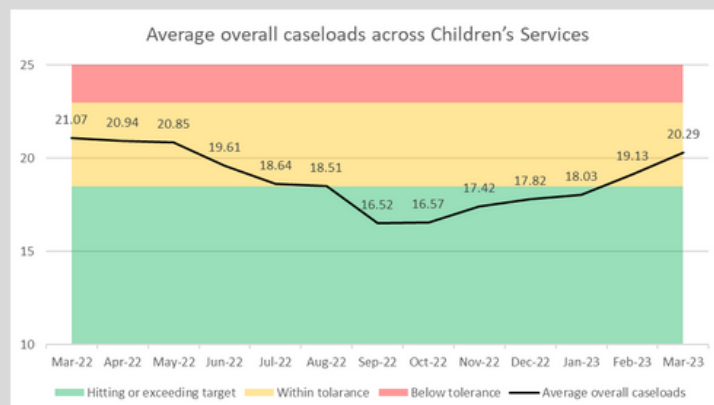
During the financial year there has been a national crisis in relation to recruitment of permanent Social Workers including a 2 tier agency workforce agenda consisting of high cost agency workers within project teams driving a national problem. This measure impacted directly on poorer performance on a number of other contract KPIs during the summer months.

Throughout the financial year our permanent vacancy rate has fluctuated between 37.8% and 45.05% which has been below target for the whole financial year. We continue to drive recruitment and retention within the Trust with a number of different initiatives to attract a more permanent workforce.

PI14 - Average case loads across the service

Target: >18.5 **Tolerance:>23** **Failure: <23**

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



Over the previous 12 months you can see that caseloads started with an average of 20.94 in April 2022 this decreased to 16.52 in September 2022 (this coincided with the introduction of project teams within the service) and steadily increased up to 20.29 at end March 2023, when a number of project teams were removed.

Although fluctuations have been between 16.52 and 20.29 within the financial year, performance has remained better than target and tolerance. It is worth noting that whilst 20.29 children is the average workload per Social Worker, a more detailed review of senior social workers (not ASYEs) are carrying higher than average child workloads.

ASYE caseloads range between 12 and 18 based on the where they are within their assisted year of employment and their level of experience. Please see table below.

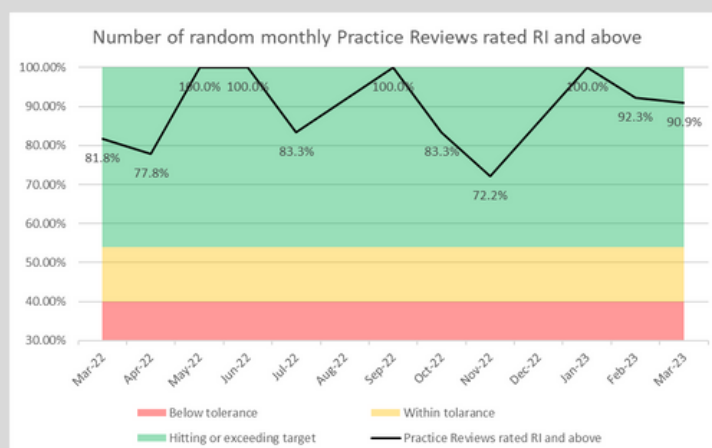
Length of Time ASYE	Childrens Workload Numbers
Up to 3 months	12
3-6 months	14
6-9 months	16
9-12 months	18

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

Target: >55% **Tolerance:>40%** **Failure: <40%**

This is a very important indicator as it shows the progress of practice improvement across Practice Reviews.

Good performance is an indication that our assessments, plans and interventions with children and families are improving.



The quality of our work has been consistent according to our random monthly practice reviews, despite the challenges we have faced, which should be seen as a positive. During the financial year performance has remained above target for whole year April 2022 – March 2023 ranging from 72.2% to 100%.

Please note that no practice reviews took place in August 2022 and December 2022 focusing on practice learning events these were:

- Adoption learning event in August 2022
- Learning from complaints in December 2022

Section (c)

The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year

Over the last few years the Quality Assurance (QA) framework has continually developed to strengthen our practice through learning identified from the variety of QA activities. Our approach recognises the need to have a range of QA activities aimed to measure and evaluate the quality of services delivered to children and families. The framework enables us to capture feedback from children, families and our staff which shapes and validates our practice and service delivery. Our practice and thematic reviews, dip sampling, external reviews and Practice Observations enable the Trust to evaluate practice and identify areas that require further strengthening whilst identifying areas of good practice.

Through a robust closing the loop process and feedback mechanisms, the findings from all the QA activities are shared with all relevant practitioners, managers and executive management team to ensure actions are taken at both individual child but also at a more strategic level, if required.

This targeted approach not only assists managers to support individual practitioners to address any gaps in practice, but also provides evidence and informs and shapes further systems changes at a more strategic level.

Alongside understanding our performance better, our approach of sharing findings from our Quality Assurance activities enables the staff to continually cultivate a work culture where improving practice is business as usual. We have established a culture where managers and social workers are held to account through performance boards, performance surgeries, senior management meetings including Children's Management Team and the Practice Improvement Board. This approach has been successful for most teams and we have seen marked improvements. However, there is still much to do to ensure practice is consistently improved with all service area/teams. We have streamlined our performance reporting to ensure Team Managers and Senior Management have the right performance information to drive improvements and so they are not overwhelmed with the volume of information they receive. Examples of this include daily locality dashboards which include key performance for each locality drilled down to a team level in one singular report.

Section (d)

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

The table below outlines the outcome of Ofsted's Visits and Inspections in 2022/23:

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
ILACS Full Inspection	9-20th May 2022	Requires Improvement to be Good https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80549
VAA Adoption Inspection	5-9th December 2022	Good https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/7/1264707

ILACS Full Inspection 9th to 20th May 2022 Inspection Highlights

Ofsted inspectors visited us between 5th to 9th May 2022 for Sandwell Children Trust full ILACS inspection. Feedback from inspectors was as expected, we have areas of strength and areas for continued improvement (all of which we already knew). The current biggest issue to sustained improvement is recruitment and retention of our workforce, which is a national issue.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires Improvement to be Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires Improvement to be Good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires Improvement to be Good
Overall Judgement	Requires Improvement to be Good

Ofsted reported that, "Services for vulnerable children and families in Sandwell have improved since the last inspection in November 2017, when they were judged to be inadequate. Since April 2018, children's services have been delivered by Sandwell Children's Trust on behalf of the local authority. New strategic leadership, which includes the chief executive of the Trust, has increased the pace and trajectory of improvement over the last year. Stronger strategic leadership has led to improvements in much of the service, through changes such as the move to a locality model, implementation of an early help strategy, a social work career pathway and high-quality specialist services."

Many of children's needs are well met by social workers who collaborate effectively with partners in other services."

ILACS Inspection - Recommendations

- OR1 - The application of thresholds by partners when referring to children's social care, to ensure that children and families receive the right service.
- OR2 - Consistent threshold decision-making, particularly when escalating statutory involvement at the 'front door' when the criteria are met for child protection enquiries.
- OR3 - Management oversight and support, including the process of escalation and challenge by independent chairs to ensure timely progression of children's plans.
- OR4 - The effective application of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and decision-making, to achieve timely permanence for children who come into care.
- OR5 - Life-story work for all children in care, to support their understanding of the reasons for them being in care.
- OR6 - The range of suitable placements for older children and those with complex needs.
- OR7 - Timely transition planning to prepare children in care, including those with disabilities, for adulthood.

Adoption Inspection (VAA) – 5th to 9th December 2022

Inspection Highlights

HMI Ofsted inspectors visited us on 5th to 9th December 2022 to undertake a VAA inspection for our Adoption service the findings were as follows:

Judgement	Grade
Overall experiences and progress of service users taken into account	Good
How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires Improvement to be Good
Overall Judgement	Good

- The Trust progresses early permanence for children when adoption is identified as a part of a child's care plan. The Trust works closely with the regional adoption agency to progress early permanence as a result the number of Children placed in foster to adopt placements has increased
- Children build positive relationships with adopters
- Children are introduced to adopters in a planned and sensitive way
- Children's social workers work collaboratively with the Regional Adoption Agency to ensure that children and adopters, once matched and placed, are supported well. As a result, there have been no disruptions for children who have been placed by the Trust
- The Trust has developed a governance structure that enables leaders to maintain some good oversight of the delivery of the adoption service provided by the Regional Adoption Agency
- The culture of the Trust is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children. This is demonstrated in their desire to achieve permanence for children and stability in placements.

VAA Inspection - Recommendations

- Ensuring we encourage and gather feedback and consider the wishes, feelings, and views of children to help them improve the service
- Ensuring that life story books are personalised to each and every child consistently
- Ensuring that the later-life letter is individual and personalised to each child and that the prospective adopters receive the letter within 10 working days of the adoption ceremony
- Ensuring children are introduced to prospective adopters in a timely way that is child focused and without delay
- Ensuring that training and assessment of prospective adopters are non-judgemental
- Ensuring that we seek feedback from adopters about the experience of the adoption process from beginning to end and that we implement any learning from this.

The Trust's Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year

Financial Context

The finances provided to the Trust consists of funding from SMBC (the Contract Sum) and contributions from third parties. The basic contract sum was £70,473,917 and the 'third party' income was £7,720,579 which consisted of:

- ICB health contribution
- Education funding for placements
- DfE improvement grant
- Supporting Families claims
- Home Office funding

In addition to this we drew upon a high cost placement reserve from SMBC of £500,000. SMBC also funded the salary settlement, market supplement and social work project team costs over and above the contract sum amounting to £1,758,771. This makes a total income of £80,453,267.

We also had an opening deficit of £7,017,645. The surplus for 2022/23 is subject to audit but provisionally stands at £39,000 making the cumulative deficit £6,978,645 at year end.

Medium Term Financial Plan

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

The key aspects of the Medium Term Financial Plan are:

- Introducing more efficient ways of working
- Ensuring that we manage the demand for our work as efficiently as possible
- Ensuring we get best value for services
- Ensuring we take advantage of invest-to-save initiatives
- Delivery of savings aligned to our Transformation programme.

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

For the year 2023/24 we aim to achieve a draft in-year surplus position of £740,000. This would be achieved through the delivery of cost savings totalling £2,200,000 compared with the previous year.

Year-end position

Income totalling £80,453,267 was received for 2022/23, and expenditure was £80,414,267, meaning the Trust has achieved a £39,000 provisional surplus, which was £1,908,130 below the aims outlined within the Medium Term Financial Plan. This was due to continued cost pressures on placements for Children in Care and reliance on high cost agency staffing and project teams.

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

The below table highlights the provisional full-year outturn for - 2022/23.

Provisional full-year outturn	2021
Income	£80,453,267
Expenditure	(£80,414,267)
Operating surplus	£39,000
Surplus before taxation	£39,000
Tax on surplus	Nil
Surplus for the Financial year	£39,000

This year, some of the key points are:

- We received £500k of DFE Improvement Grant funding to fund some of our improvement initiatives.
- We drew upon the high cost placement reserve of £500k paid by SMBC.
- We received further funding of £1.76m from SMBC to fund the salary settlement, market supplement and exceptional social work project team costs.
- Contributions to placement costs from health and education partners have increased as a result of complexity of need and cost of living pressures.
- Key cost pressures remain within staffing (requirement for high cost agency staff to fill front-line roles) and placement cost increases (particularly external residential provision).

Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year

3.1 Workforce and Child Workloads

3.1.1 Workforce

It is important to acknowledge that Sandwell Children's Trust employs nearly 600 staff, of which around a third are social workers. If not for the range of specialist and support staff within the Trust, social workers would not have the foundation and infrastructure to work effectively with children and their families. Nevertheless, our focus continues to be to ensure we have a stable 'case holding' workforce, as it is the consistency and skill of this workforce that will bring about the improved outcomes we expect for our children and families.

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

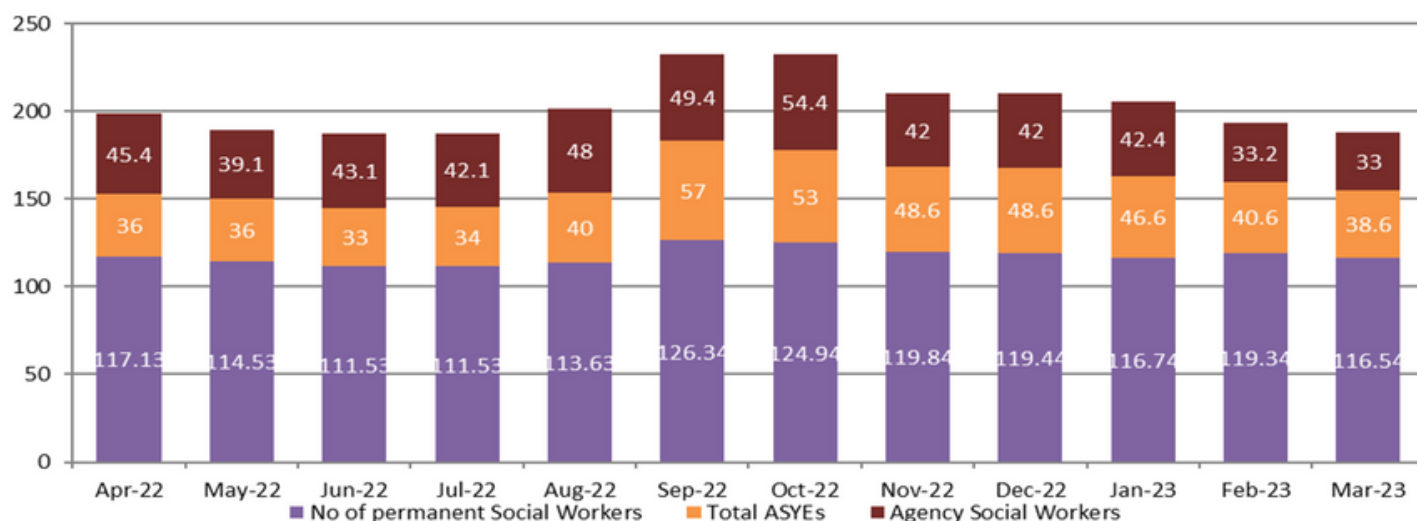
1. For social workers working with Children in Need and those with a Child Protection Plan (within Localities), an average of 18 children.
2. For social workers working with long term Children in Care (within the Children in Care Service), an average of 15 children.
3. For Social Workers in their Assessed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

Case-holding Social Workers

We have an agreed establishment of 203 Full Time Equivalent social workers, based upon our current demand, and considerations within the Medium Term Financial Plan. This is made up of permanent social workers, agency social workers and those within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE's).

	Apr 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Jan 2022	Feb 2022	Mar 2022
Total Workforce - Level Needed	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
Total Social Workers	162.53	153.63	154.63	153.63	161.63	175.74	179.34	161.84	161.44	159.14	152.54	149.54
No of permanent Social Workers	117.13	114.53	111.53	111.53	113.63	126.34	124.94	119.384	119.44	116.74	119.34	116.54
Permanent Excluding ASYE	81.13	78.53	78.53	77.53	73.63	69.34	71.94	71.24	70.84	70.14	78.74	77.94
% Permanent (Excl. ASYE)	49.9%	51.1%	50.8%	50.5%	45.6%	39.5%	40.1%	44.0%	43.9%	44.1%	51.6%	52.1%
Total ASYEs	36	36	33	34	40	57	53	48.6	48.6	46.6	40.6	38.6
% Total ASYEs	22.1%	23.4%	21.3%	22.1%	24.7%	32.4%	29.6%	30.0%	30.1%	29.3%	26.6%	25.8%
Agency Social Workers	45.4	39.1	43.1	42.1	48	49.4	54.4	42	42	42.4	33.2	33
% Agency SWs	29.7%	25.5%	27.9%	27.4%	29.7%	28.1%	30.3%	26.0%	26.0%	26.6%	21.8%	22.1%

Staffing Levels (Permanent SWs, ASYE and Agency)



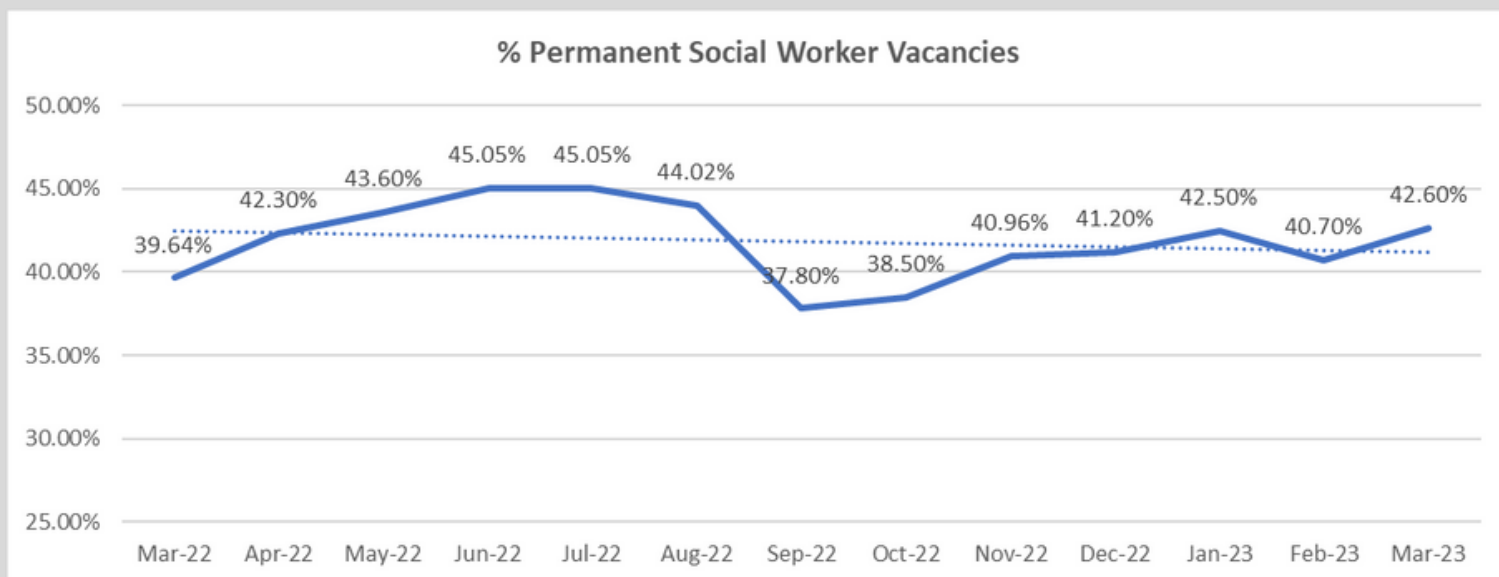
Our Social Work establishment has remained at 203 for the whole of the financial year, between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 there has been a net decrease of 13 Social Workers in the financial year from 162.53 to 149.54 the breakdown is as follows over the period;

- Permanent Social Workers has decreased slightly from 117.13 to 116.54 (net decrease of 0.59)
 - Permanent Social Workers – decrease from 81.13 to 77.94 (net decrease of 3.19)
 - Permanent ASYEs – increase from 36 to 38.6 (net increase of 2.6 workers)
- Agency workers has decreased from 45.4 to 33 (net decrease of 12.4 workers)

During the financial year we have introduced 5 agency project teams to support our Social Worker issues. These came into post in August 2022 with a final phased end of Project teams by June 2023, ensuring minimal impact on services we deliver to our children and families, including reallocation of children swiftly and robustly (three of these teams as of the 31 March 2023 had been disbanded). Further to this a cohort of ASYEs (37) joined the Trust between September 2022 and October 2022 which helped support deficit in vacancies within the service.

“PI13 Vacancy Rates of Permanent Social Workers” as stated above SCT has (at 31 March 2023) 116.54 permanent workers, compared to an establishment of 203. This number has decreased slightly since April 2022 (117.53) with our permanent vacancy rate sitting now at 42.6% (86.46 permanent vacancies).

- 38.6 ASYEs
- 23.7 Social Workers
- 54.24 Senior Social Workers



Our real time vacancy rate including agency social workers as of 31 March 2023 is at 26% with 149.54 workers in post over the establishment of 203 (52.46 real time vacancies), this has decreased from 162.53 (19.9%) in April 2022 (vacancy rates have increased over the last 12 months).

Current Background- National and Regional Context

- The Trust continues to struggle to both recruit and retain permanent and agency staff due to national workforce crisis.
- The independent review of Children's Social Care (May 2022) have recognised the staffing pressures faced and recommended that investment is made in the social care workforce to address high vacancy and turnover rates
- ADCS and NCAS conferences raised national pressures on resources within social care and confirmed that this is being felt nationwide by all local authorities and Trusts
- Regional MoU been reviewed and signed by all, workforce a regional priority
- 10 out of 14 West Midland Local Authorities now offer a financial incentive for permanent practitioners between £2,000 - £10,000
- The HR Team and Members of the EMT regularly meet with peers from other Trusts, Local Authorities and the DFE to discuss recruitment and retention concerns.

Our Strategic Approach

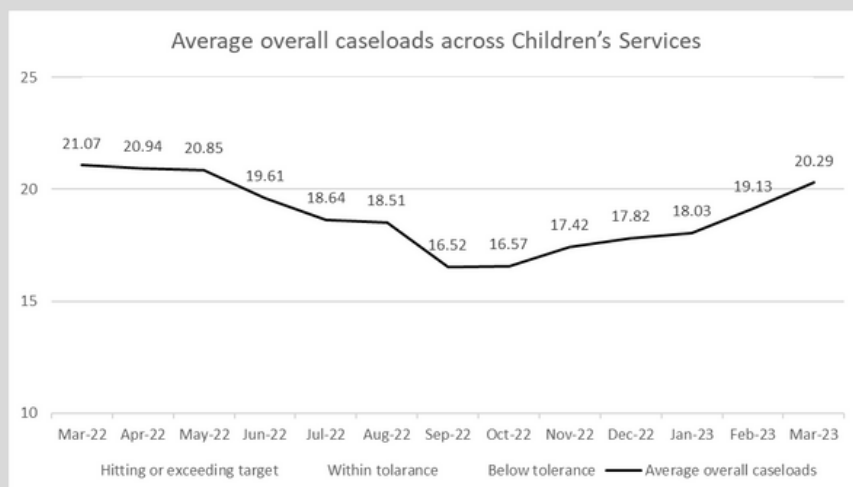
- Transformation Programme – Priority 1 is People
- Recruitment, retention and career development
- Creating a safe working environment and embedding culture of staff wellbeing
- Refocus and improve activity in relation to ED&I
- In April 2022 the Workforce Strategy 2022-2025 was released. The Workforce Committee, Chaired by Jacqui Smith- plus Trust Board members, EMT and Officers meet quarterly to oversee progress of Workforce Strategy
- The Workforce Strategy, provides a strategic approach to recruitment, retention, development, leadership, the provision of a safe working environment and the creation of a learning organisation- plus detailed operational activity
- In April 2022, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2022-2025 was released. The Workforce Committee also provides progress oversight and challenge to the Trust ED&I activity.

Current areas of focus:

- The creation of a Sandwell family ‘deal’. This includes an offering and expectations of a recruitment and retention package which includes developing our grow-your-own programme, career pathways and aspiring programmes
- The creation of a leadership hub that is driven by all managers and leaders across the Trust, supporting the Trust ethos and culture
- The introduction of service level induction plans, building on the recently released corporate induction plan
- Working with the operations directorate to devise and introduce exit strategy for the current project teams

Social Workers recruitment is a national issue with many LAs experiencing social work staffing pressures. In addition, the recruitment of agency social workers continues to be highly problematic (especially within the Child protection and Court Teams) with the project teams’ model being preferred by the agencies, driving costs significantly and creating a 2 tier within agency workers groups.

3.1.2 Workloads



**SCT SW workload average
31 March 2023**

20.29/per SW

**Statistical Neighbour
Average**

16.1/per SW

England average

16.3/per SW

The concern remains the high workloads held by some localities' Social workers. This issue in conjunction with the difficulties to recruit experienced SW contributes to the Trust's vulnerability.

3.2 Our Children

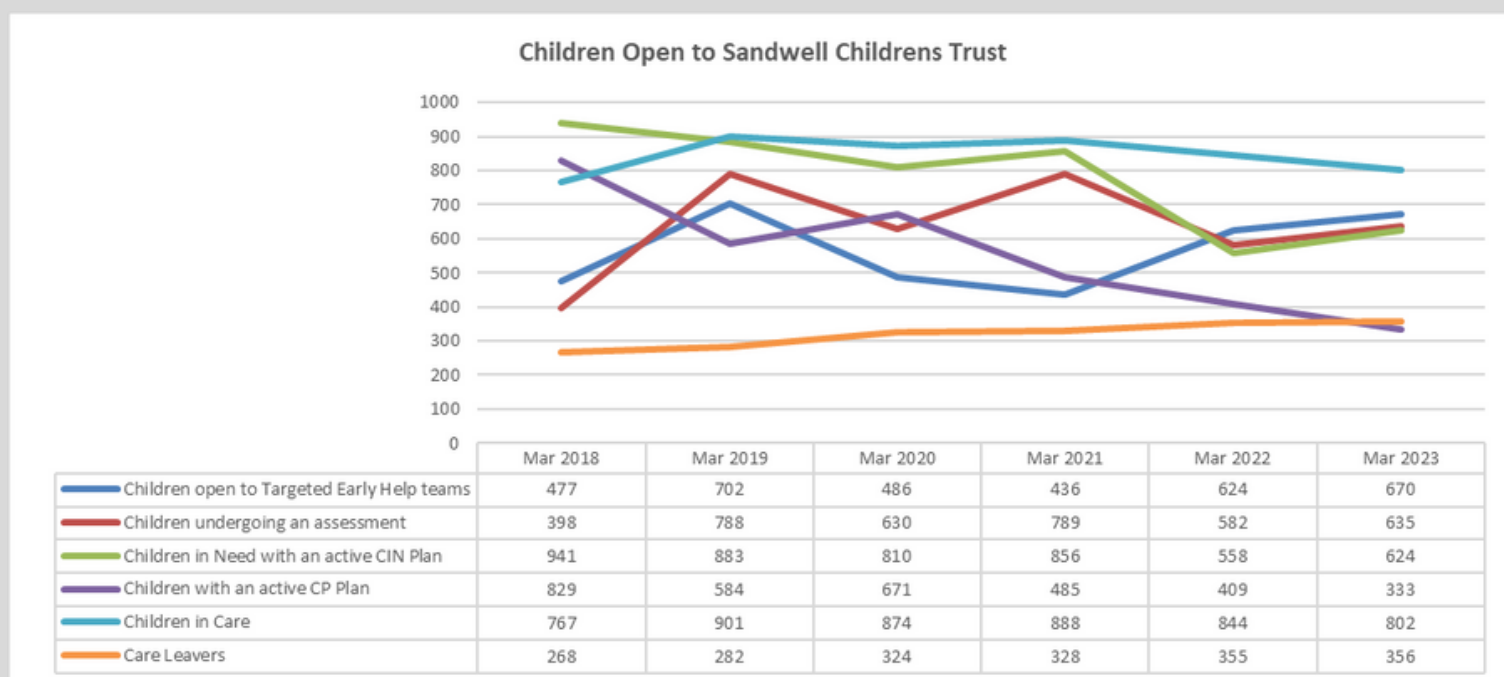
Since March 2018, we have seen a reduction of 260 Children open to Sandwell Children's Trust. In relation to early intervention and targeted early help there has been an increase of 193 Children open to the Strengthening Families Service* with Social Care statutory services seeing a reduction of 453 Children over the same period.

There are now slightly fewer Children in Care than our comparators (approximately 20 fewer children), the Trust have reduced the number of children and young people open to Children's Social Care from a total of 3,203 (including Care Leavers) to 2,750, which is a reduction of 453. This is due to our continued focus on progressing children's plans where there has been historic drift; and ensuring that more children are appropriately in the social care system when they need to be.

Breakdown of children and care leavers 2018 - 2022

Service	Mar 2018	Mar 2019	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2022	Mar 2023	Difference Mar 2018 to Mar 2022
Children open to Targeted Early Help teams	477	702	486	436	624	670	193
Children undergoing an assessment	398	788	630	789	582	635	237
Children in Need with an active CIN Plan	941	883	810	856	558	624	-317
Children with an active CP Plan	829	584	671	485	409	333	-496
Children in Care	767	901	874	888	844	802	35
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355	356	88
Total	3680	4140	3795	3782	3372	3420	-260

* Strengthening Families is a non statutory service providing support and advice to families in order to prevent the need for statutory intervention.



As of 31 March 2023, we had 635 children with a Child in Need Plan, 333 children with a Child Protection Plan and 802 Children in Care. We have fewer children on Child Protection Plans and in Care than our statistical neighbour comparators.

Comparison with Statistical Neighbours

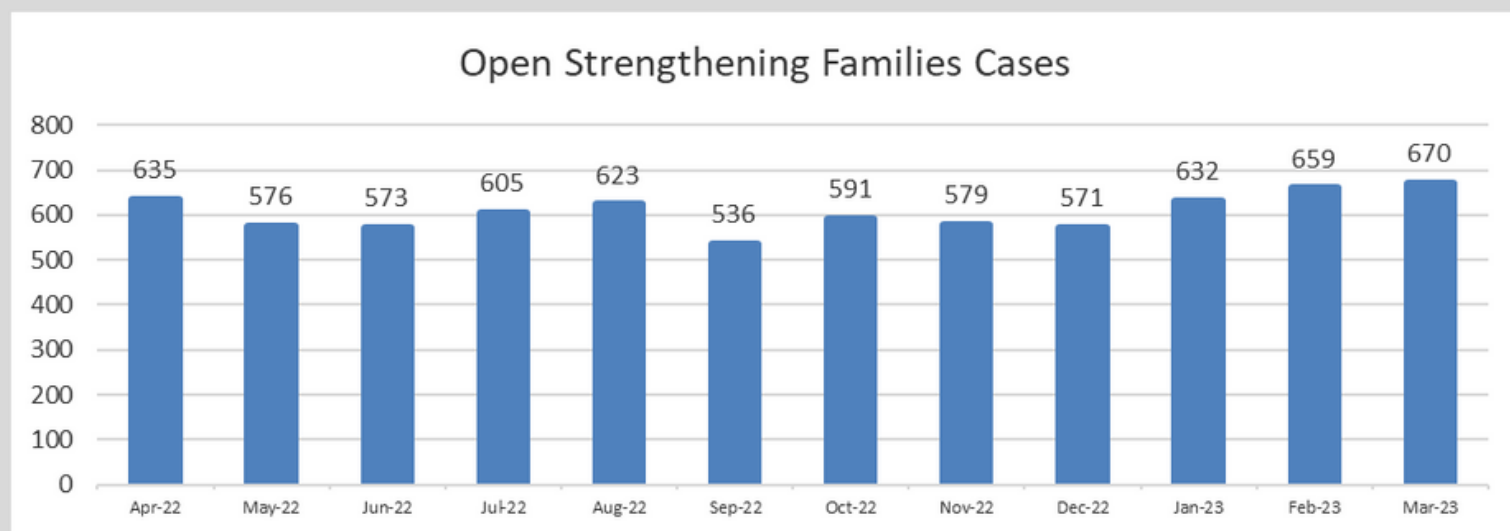
	Sandwell (31 March 2023)	Statistical Neighbour Average 2021- 2022	England Average 2021 - 2022
Children with a Child Protection Plan	39.2 per 10,000	52.6 per 10,000	42.1 per 10,000
Children in Care	94.5 per 10,000	97.6 per 10,000	70 per 10,000

Referrals, S47s and ICPCs

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
Referrals	6,301	6,377	5,402	4,454	4,194
Referral Rates Per 10,000	759.20	768.36	650.88	536.66	494.1

The increased referral rate to the Trust in 2018/19 (759 per 10,000 children) continued throughout the first two years increasing further to 768 at the end March 2020. The last three years has seen a downward trajectory to 494.1 per 10,000 as at the end March 2023 this is now below our Statistical Neighbour and England averages of 570 and 538 per 10,000 and is in line with West Midlands Average of 503 per 10,000. The reduction is due to workers and partners better applying threshold criteria for statutory services and managing risk.

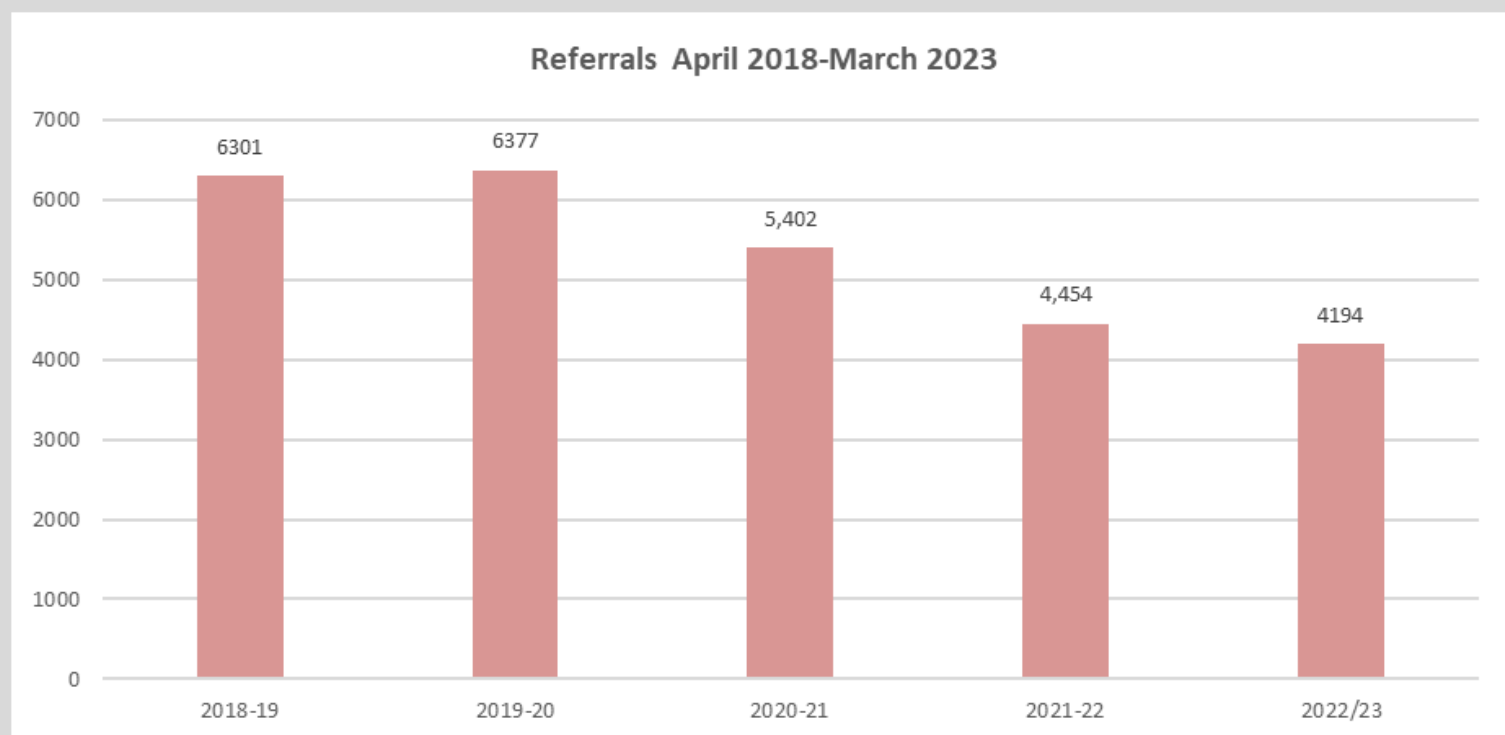
We are seeing more children stepping down to targeted family support in our Strengthening Families Service over the last 2 years in comparison to previous years, in addition we have more Children supported by Strengthening Families as both a shared service 89 last year to 106 this year and more Children Open to the service. There is still more work to do in relation to thresholds for referrals. Single Assessment outcomes of No Further Action (NFA) has reduced from 48% between April 2020-March 2022 to 40% this year.



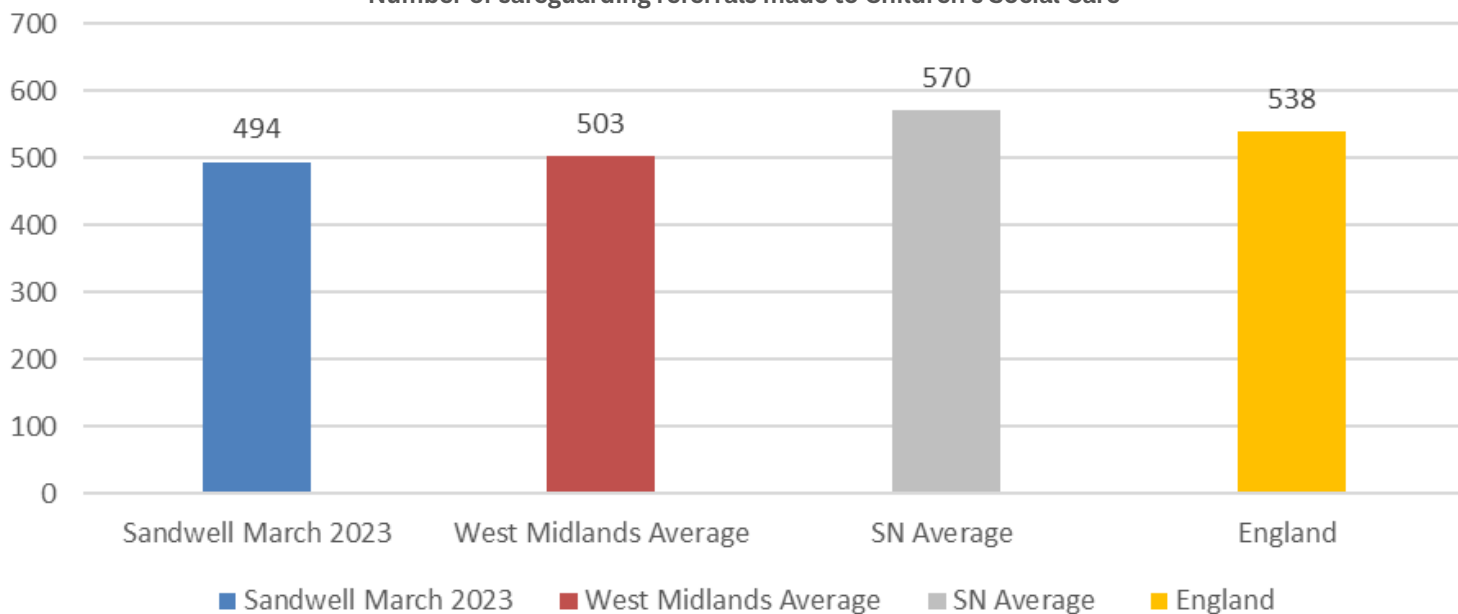
Around 23% (decreasing slightly from 25 in previous two years) of our assessments over the last 12 months are being stepped down to Strengthening Families or Universal Agencies and 37% are escalated onto a Child in Need, Child Protection or Child in Care Plan (30% previous two years).

23% of children have been re-referred within the previous 12 months, this has increased slightly since March 2021, slightly above our comparators. A deep dive highlighted re referral rates increased when duty project teams were introduced, where some assessments were more parent focused and were consequently closed too quickly. Remedial work and reinforcement of our practice standards have seen an improvement and the approach to duty has also been changed, this has begun to reduce in April 2023.

The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has reduced from a rate of 279 in March 2019 and stabilized compared to last year at a rate of 185 per 10,000 in March 2023 (183 last year), this continues to be lower than our Statistical Neighbours and in line with England and West Midlands averages. This shows that the Trust continues to consistently purposeful when we are faced with deciding whether to proceed with S47 enquiries. Decision making and application of thresholds are more robust in this area to ensure that risk is assessed and Children and Families have the right outcome needed.



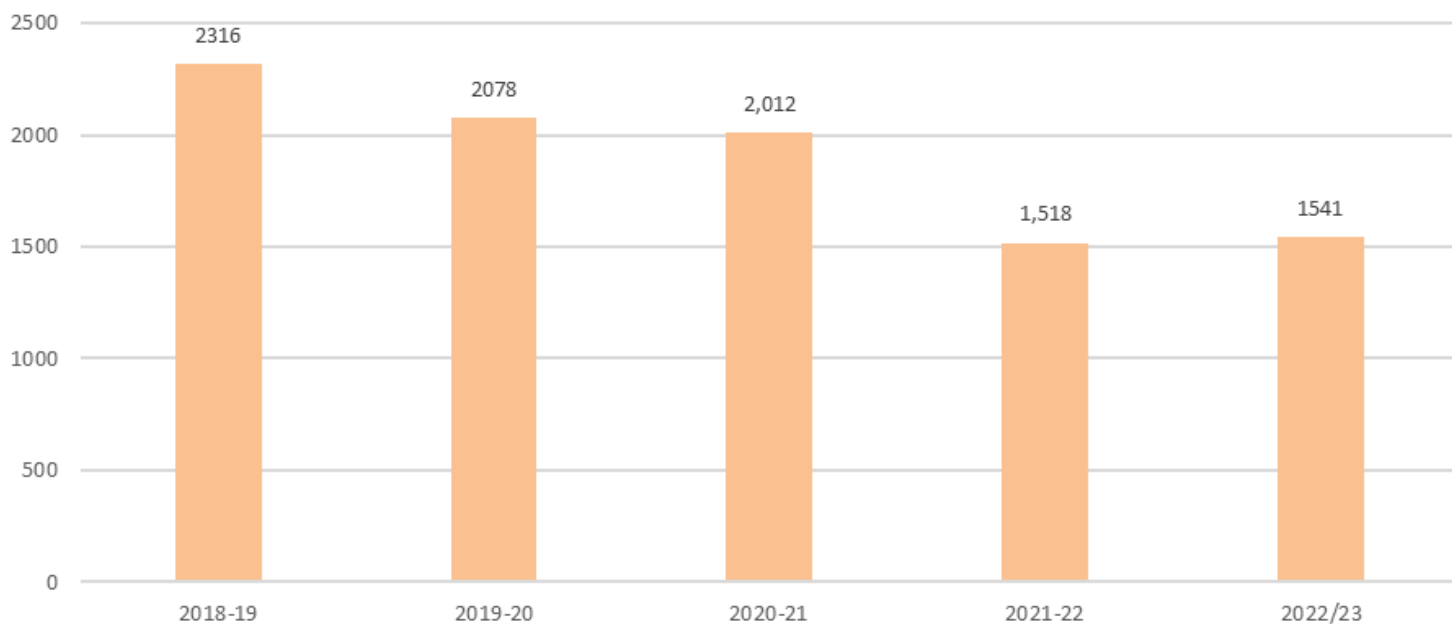
Referral Rates
Number of safeguarding referrals made to Children's Social Care

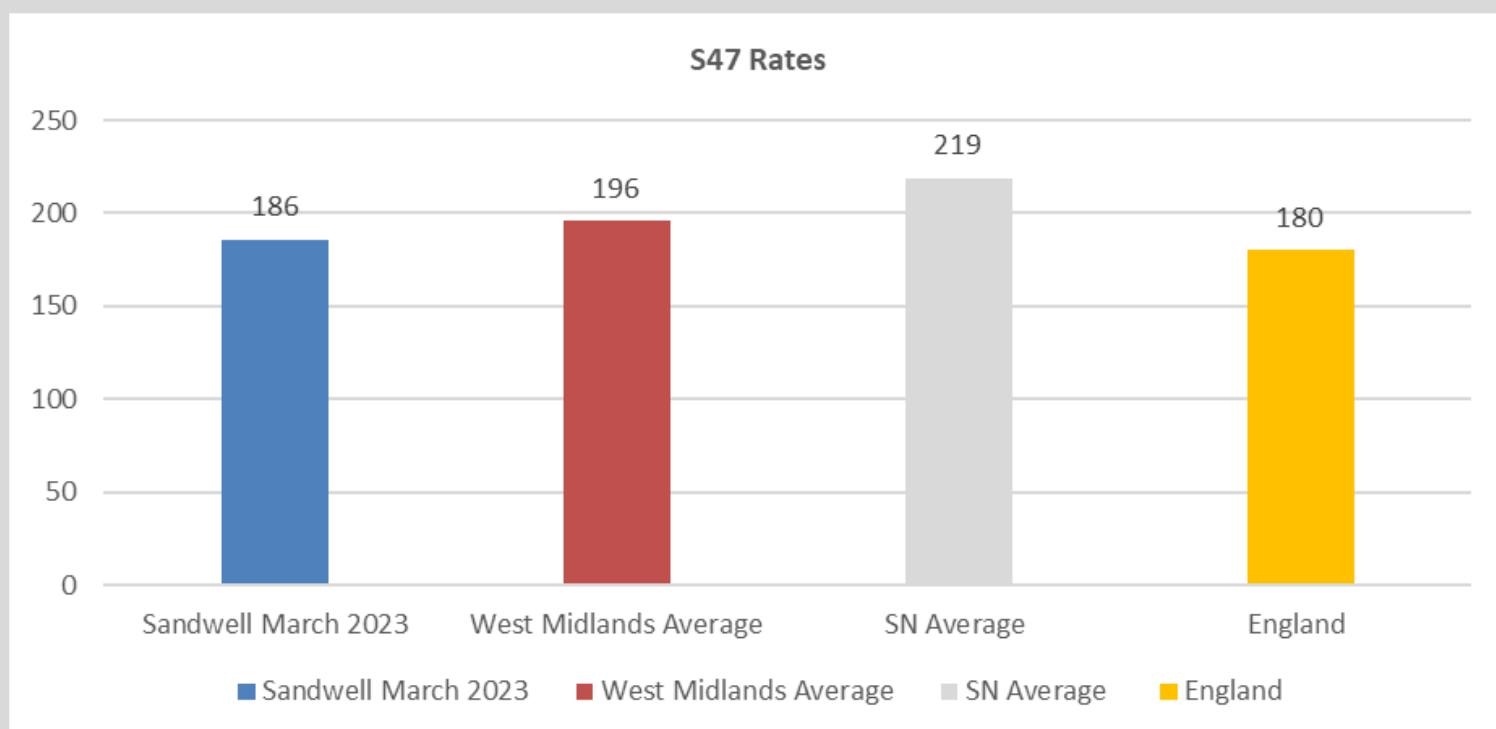


Summary of S47s 2018 - 2023

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
S47s	2,316	2,078	2,012	1,518	1,541
S47 Rates Per 10,000	279.05	250.38	242.42	182.90	185.67

S47s April 2018 to March 2023

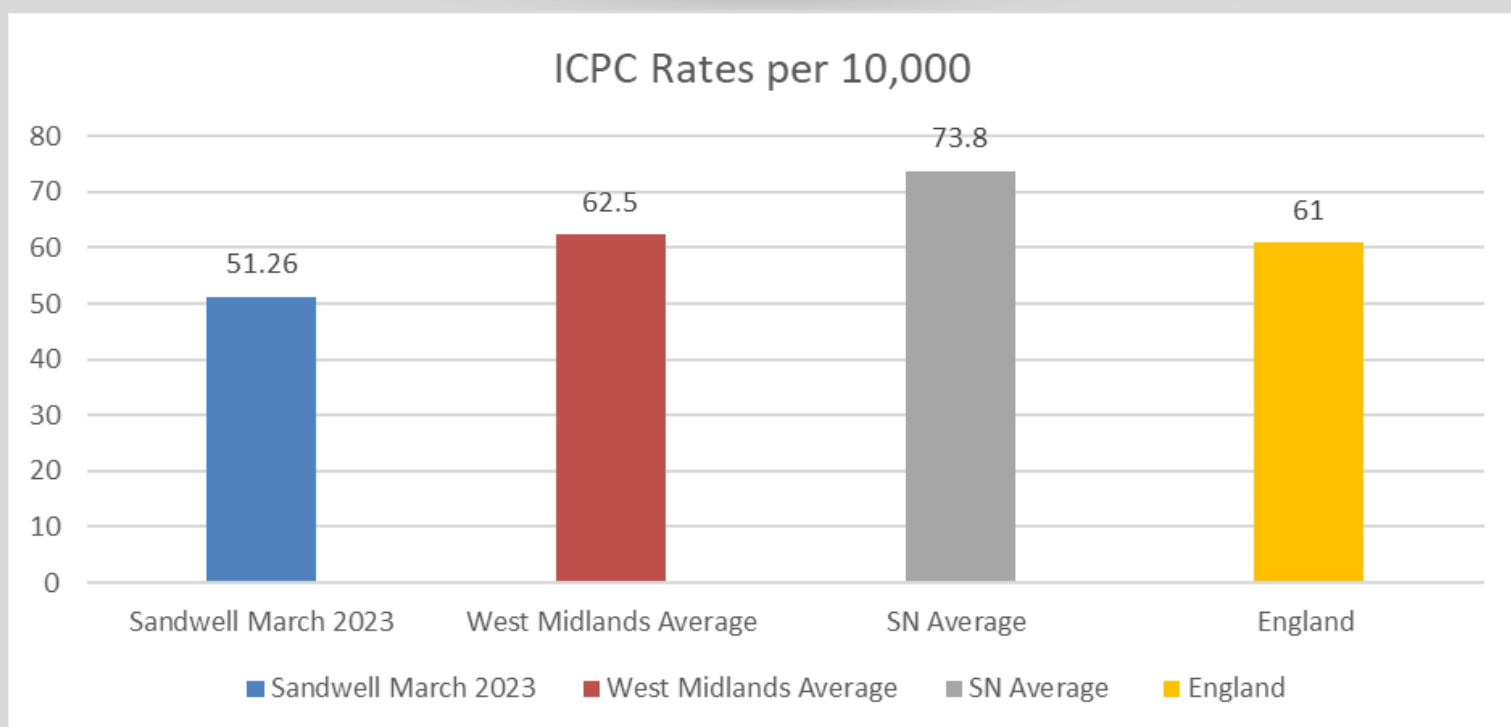
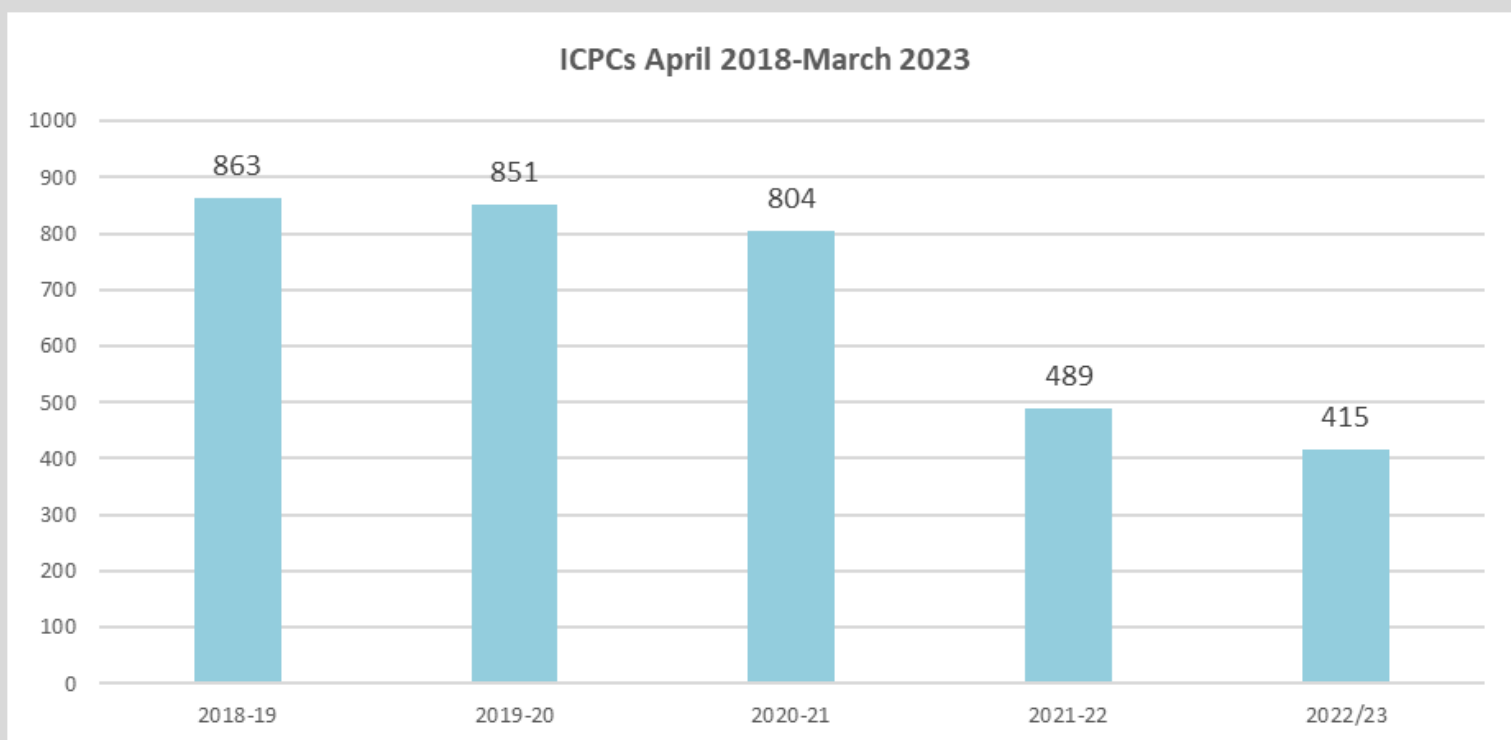




The rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has also reduced from 103.98 in March 2019 to a rate of 51.26 per 10,000 in March 2023 (this has reduced further since March 2022 at 58.92 per 10,000). Current ICPC rate is now below Statistical Neighbour, England and West Midlands Average. In addition, the latest conversion rate from ICPC to CP Plan is healthier and has improved to 83% over the last financial year in comparison to 68% in 2020 (and in line with 86% last year). The threshold discussions between Conference Chairs and Social Workers are ensuring that the right Children are going into conference, this has helped support the further reduction of Children on a Child Protection Plan in this financial year.

Summary of ICPC and ICPC rates per 10,000

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
ICPCs	863	851	804	489	415
ICPC Rates Per 10,000	103.98	102.54	96.87	58.92	51.26

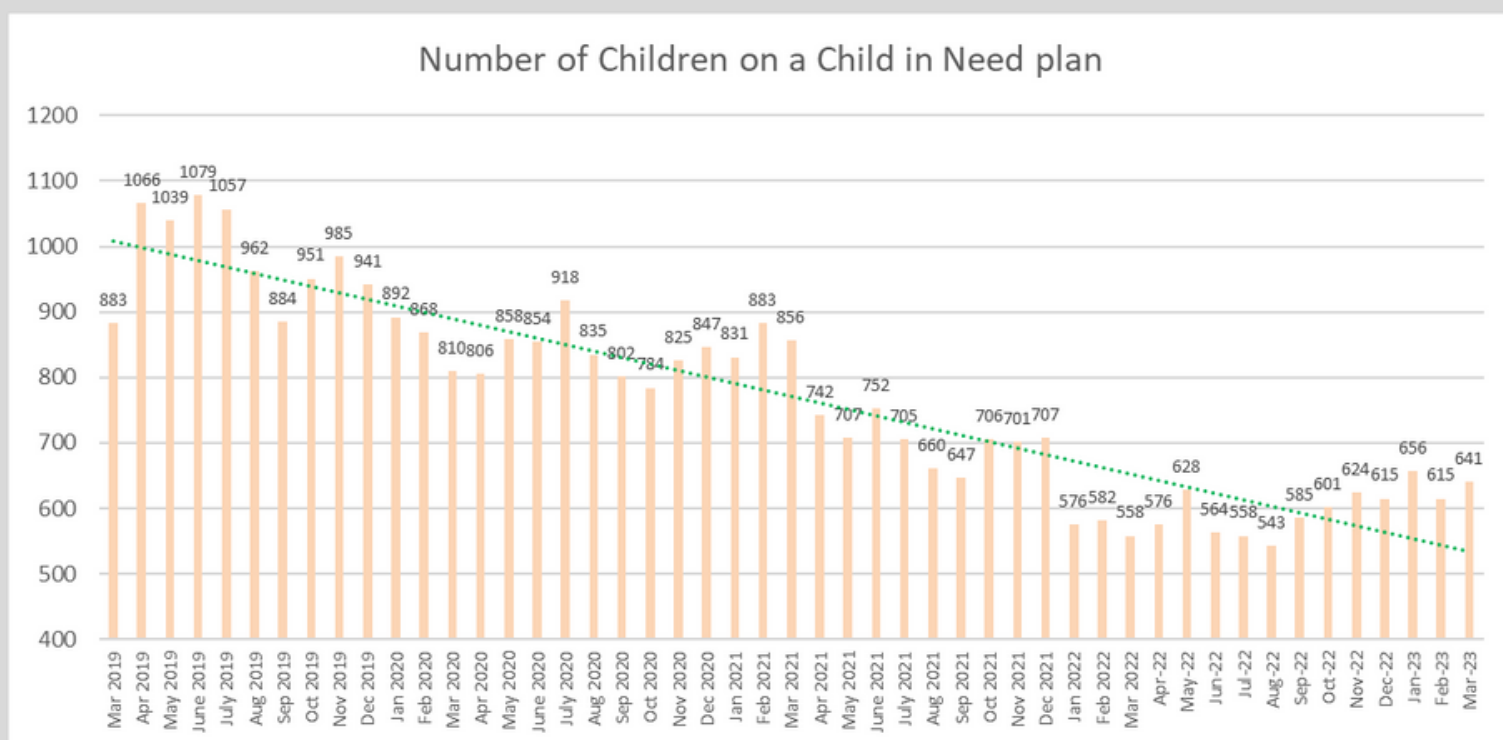


Overall, alongside the continued dip sampling of assessments, S47's and ICPC's the above measures provide clear evidence that we are acting more confidently and consistently when applying thresholds for our services and working in a more timely and consistent manner.

Children in Need

We began the contract on 1 April 2018 with 941 children in need and quickly recognised that this was an area to better understand and reduce drift and delay in progressing children's plans. Following a short review of these children, it was clear that some of the children did not require a statutory service. As a consequence there was a clear focus on progressing case closures. Since December 2018 the service robustly monitors and reviews Children on Child in Need Plans at 9 months to ensure a safe step down to targeted early help or universal services regular updating of assessments takes place and support to reduce drift and delay with better decision making for our Child in Need cohort.

The graph below demonstrates a significant reduction of Children on Child in Need plans from a high point in June 2019 of 1,079 Children to 558 Children as end March 2022, although a slight increase to 641 in March 2023 (reduction of 438 Children since June 2019. This is an area kept under constant review (to note we currently have less Children on a Child in Need Plan over 9+ months than in March 2022 120 (20.9%) to 106 (16.5%))

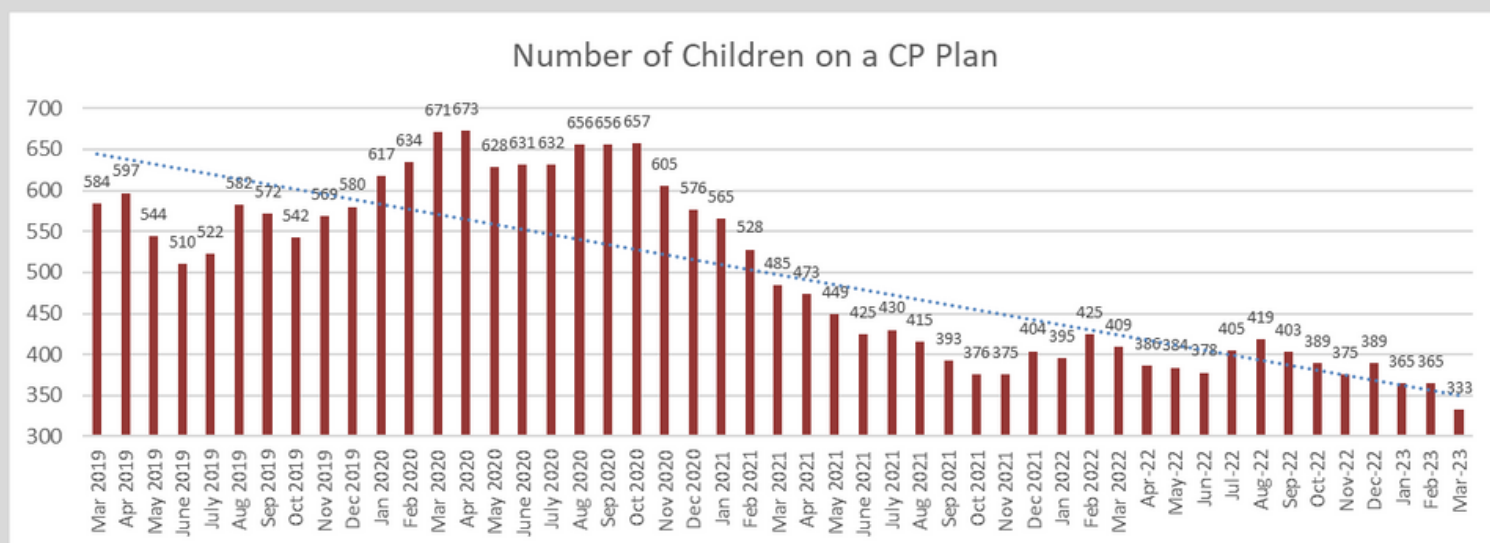


Children with a Child Protection Plan

In April 2018, the Trust had 798 children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan, and across the course of the four years the number had reduced to 409, furthermore this year this has reduced further to 333, which is now significantly below SN Average of 52.6 per 10,000 and lower than England and West Midlands Averages .

It was identified that there was drift and delay in progressing children’s plans in 2018. To address this, we held a panel to ensure these children’s plans were being progressed which contributes to the continued decrease of Children on Child Protection Plans.

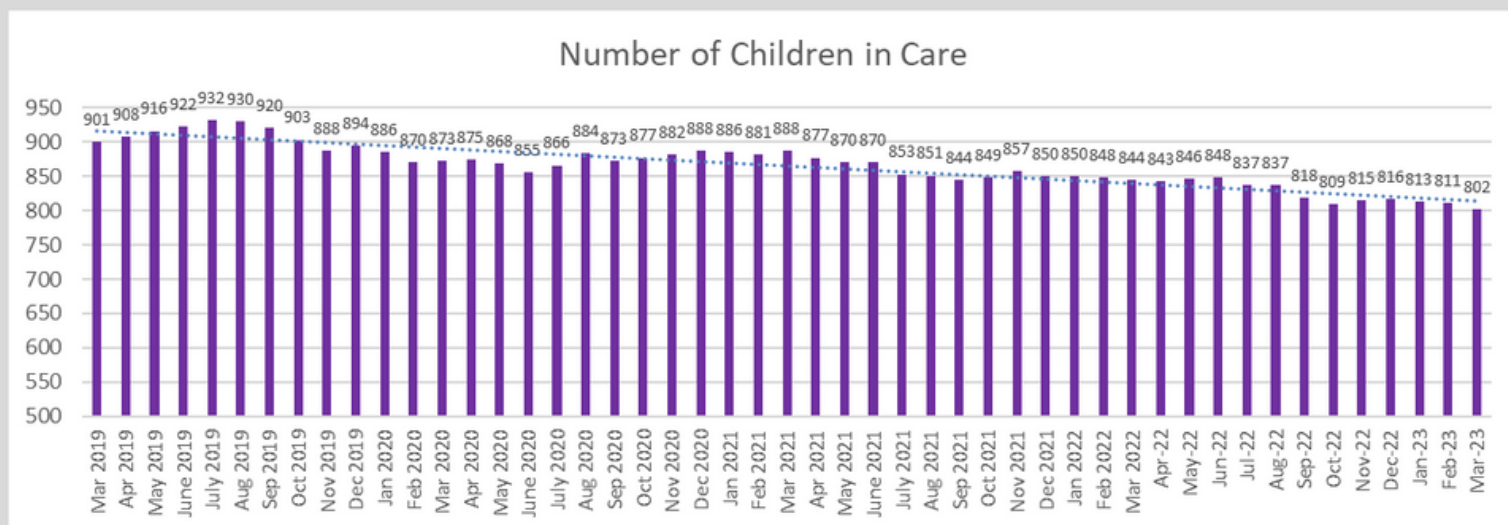
This has led to more Children ‘stepped down’ to a Child in Need plan, or a decision made to secure their long-term welfare. We have seen less Children stepping up from Child Protection to Care (this has been lower than previous years which has helped reduce our overall Children in Care Numbers). The service is regularly reviewing Children on Child Protection Plans for longer than 12 months to reduce the risk of drift and delay and to ensure Children’s plans are progressed safely and robustly. As of 31 March 2023 we currently have 22.7% of our Children on a Plan for 12+ months which is now more in line with our Statistical Neighbour and National averages than earlier in the financial year. The below graph shows decreases of Children on a Child Protection plan over last 4 years.



Children in Care

We began the financial year 2018/19 with 778 children in care and saw a sharp increase in the first 18 months up to 937 mid July 2019.

As of 31 March 2022 the number of Children in Care had reduced to 844 Children in Care (9.9% decrease), this financial year has seen a further decrease to 802 Children in Care as of 31 March 2023 (5% decrease) which now puts us at the lowest position since May 2018.



Although March 2023 information is not published for all our Statistical Neighbour Group, five West Midlands regional authorities are in our Statistical Neighbour Group. Our December 2022 data can be compared in line with the following Local Authorities up to this date, this gives you more up to date analysis to compare our performance at present time. As you can see we are below the average for these Local Authorities (although Stoke on Trent is a significant outlier regionally and nationally). Based on our latest Statistical Neighbour Average at 97.1 per 10,000, Sandwell are currently 2.6 per 10,000 lower than our comparator group, although we continue to be higher than England Average of 70 per 10,000.

We continue as a Trust to review all Children in Care Placed with Parents, undergoing Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) assessments and undergoing court proceedings to ensure discharges are swift for Children in Care, we have seen a 30% increase of Children exiting care on SGO in comparison to the previous 12 months (20 Children to 26 Children).

Children in Care of West Midlands regional authorities

Local Authority	Rate Per 10,000 Children in Care
Birmingham – December 2022	76
Coventry – December 2022	95
Sandwell – December 2022	96.2
Sandwell – March 2023	94.5
Stoke on Trent – December 2022	189
Walsall – December 2022	93
Wolverhampton – December 2022	79
Five Regional Stat Neighbour Average	106.4

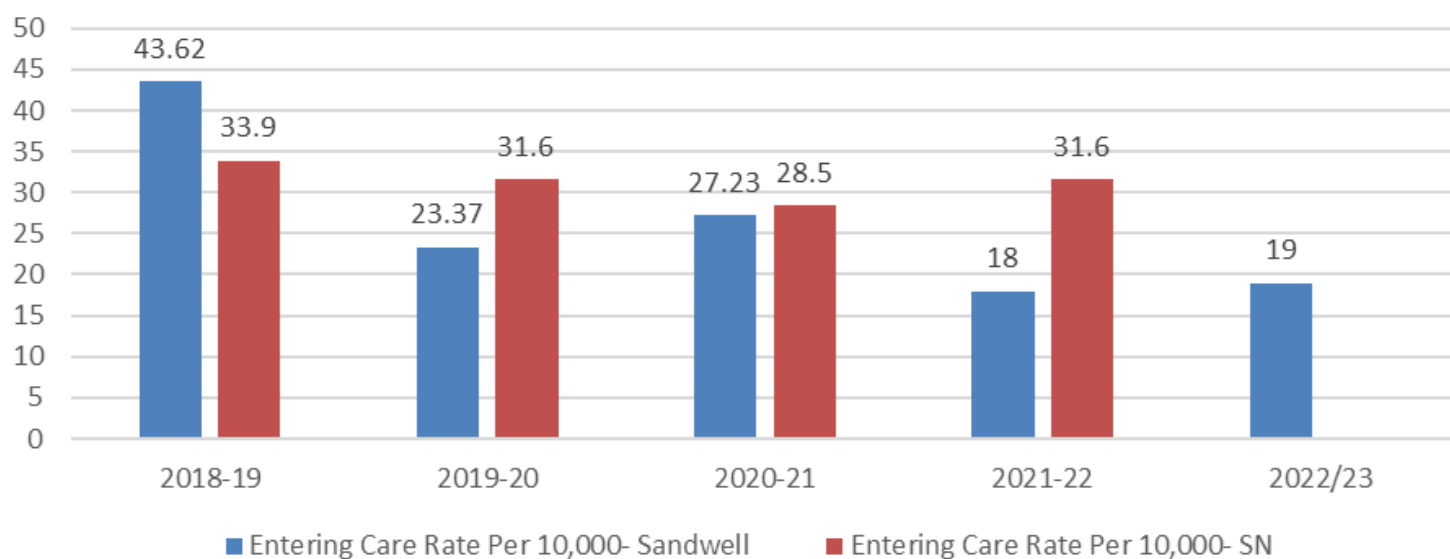
Children Entering and Ceasing Care

Between the 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the number of Children Entering Care was 161 with 208 Children Ceasing Care which is a further improvement on previous year which has helped support the reduction of Children in Care numbers further.

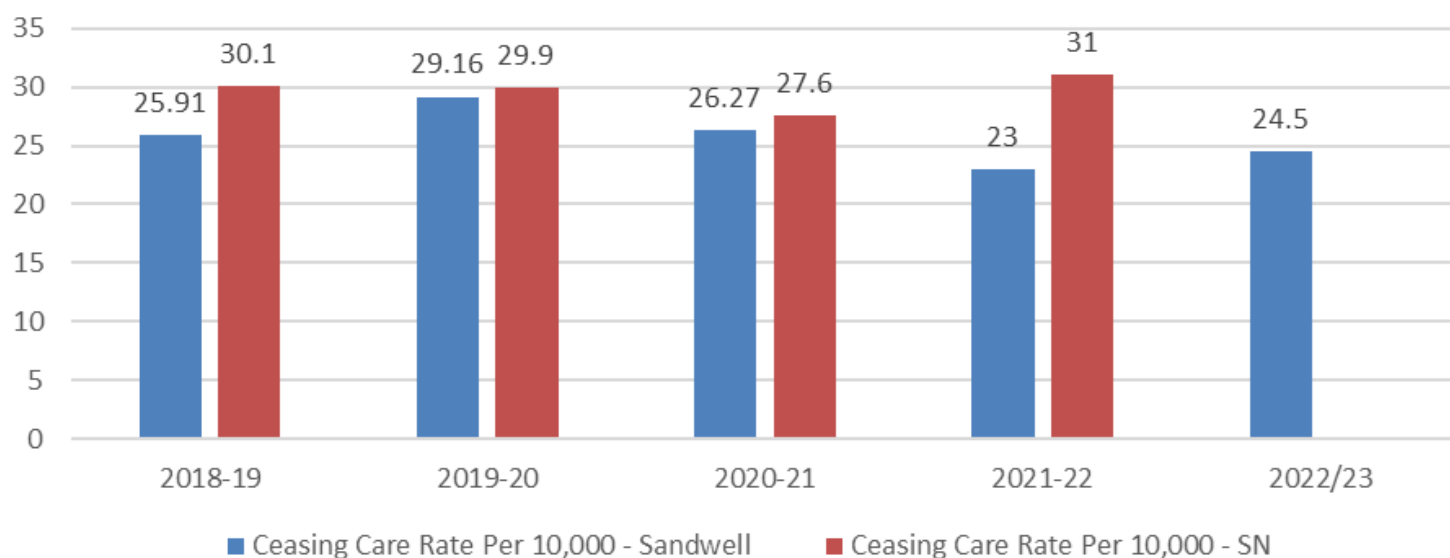
Summary of Becoming Looked After (BLA) and Ceasing Care by year

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
BLA by year	362	194	226	163	161
Ceasing Care by Year	215	242	218	201	208

Rate of Children Entering Care per 10,000 - Sandwell and Statistical Neighbour Average



Rate of Children Ceasing Care per 10,000 - Sandwell and Statistical Neighbour Average



The tables below compare our number of Children Entering and Ceasing Care against our latest Statistical Neighbour, West Midlands and England comparator data. Apart from April 2018-March 2019 you can see that the number of Children entering care is below our Statistical Neighbour comparators (this year a rate of 19 Children per 10,000 have entered Care), this is also the case for Children exiting care apart from year April 2019 - March 2020. This suggests that lower numbers are exiting the Care system than should be. We have started to undertake work in relation to children exiting care, this includes a bespoke exiting care project team which are reviewing children progressing to SGO and placed at home with parents. This will improve efficiency of children exiting care. Furthermore our improvement in our approach to Permanence will also increase the number of Children exiting care with greater robust planning and management oversight.

Table 9 : Summary of Becoming Looked After and Rates per 10,000

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	Latest SN Average	Latest WM Average	Latest Eng Average
BLA by year	362	194	226	163	161	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rates per 10,000	43.62	23.37	27.23	18	19	31.6	27	26

Table 10: Summary of Ceasing Care and Rates per 10,000

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	Latest SN Average	Latest WM Average	Latest Eng Average
Ceasing Care by year	215	242	218	201	208	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rates per 10,000	25.91	29.16	26.27	23	24.5	31	25	26

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

The Fostering Service was inspected by Ofsted in August 2021 and assessed as providing a 'Good' Service, with all elements of the inspection individually rated as 'Good', improving the service from the previous rating of 'Requires Improvement'. Generally impressed with the service the inspectors judged that children are well matched, with good placement stability and foster carers build positive relationships with children developing a strong sense of belonging which helps children to settle well. Managers have a good focus on care planning and permanency for children, and were judged to be implementing significant changes to drive up standards and ensure that they have a good operational overview of the impact of outcomes for the children, the foster carers and staff.

The table shows the number of Children in Internal Foster Placements between 31 March 2022 and 31 March 2023, as you can see that there has been a decrease in Children Placed in Internal Mainstream/Connected carer placements from 298 to 288 (reduction of 10 Children), furthermore there has been a similar reduction of Children placed in External Foster Care Placements from 328 to 316 (reduction of 12 Children).

Children in Internal and External Foster Care

	March 2022	April 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Jan 2023	Feb 2023	March 2023
Foster Placement Trust Carers	298	295	303	302	301	303	294	294	296	297	296	289	288
Foster Placement External	328	329	327	330	327	325	329	323	319	320	316	319	316

Recruitment activity

Recruitment of Foster carers continues to be a focus of the Trust making use of a range of media and marketing opportunities. Recent activity has meant that the number of new enquiries has returned to and increased on pre-pandemic figures. With more than 260 new enquiries in 2021/22, furthermore we had a further 213 enquiries in 2022/23 of which, 29 initial enquiry forms were completed and 9 foster carer mainstream approvals (enquiry form completed to approval 31%).

We did have 8 mainstream de-registrations over the same period so in theory a net gain of one mainstream carer this financial year. On the 31 March 2023 we had 98 mainstream foster carer households and 92 connected carer households.

Furthermore, our approach to residential care is progressing at pace in order that we can make better use of local residential provision for when this is the right option for children. Following a number of engagement events with private providers, relationships have improved and the Trust and council are aiming to access up to 9 beds locally through local providers which should impact positively on children being placed in their own communities.

Care Leavers

Table 12: Care Leavers by year

	March 2018	March 2019	March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	Variance Mar 18 - Mar 23
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355	356	88

Our care leavers service provides a service to children who are 16 or over who are still in care, with the expectation of a steady transition into Care Leavers 18+ service. This cohort has steadily increased over five years from 268 to 356 (an increase of 88 Care Leavers) with a slight increase from March 2022-March 2023 (355-356). From April 2018, a change in legislation meant that we have a statutory responsibility to support care leavers until they are 25 years of age which has resulted in a steady increase in the number of young people within this service area. Consequently, caseloads have increased from approximately 18 to 22 young people per worker. We also have a process in place to allocate Children in Care aged 17 years old to a PA to co-work and support robust transition into Care Leaving service.

The May 2022 Ofsted inspection observed that Care Leavers are well supported to find good-quality accommodation, that the Trust is focused on ensuring that Care Leavers receive the opportunities they are entitled to and that care leavers that become parents are well supported.

Section (g)

The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year

There were no formal action plans or rectification plans in the Contract year 2022/23.

Section (h)

Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure

Changes to Service Delivery Contract

- Market Supplement 2022/23
- Revision of Contract Review Timetable
- Additional Funding – Staffing 2022-23
- Transport Extension 2023 to 2024

Changes to Support Services Agreements

There were no changes to the support services agreements during the year, apart from extension for support level agreement for transport.

Other significant changes

On 30th January 2023 and 31 January 2023 Neil Cox and Vineeta Manchanda ceased as company directors. On the 15th March and 21 March 2023 Jane Bleach and Gillian Douglas were added as SCT company directors.

Section (i)

Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year

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

There are proposed changes to the 15 contract KPIs in the next contract year 2023/24 which are currently being finalised between SMBC and Sandwell Children's Trust.

Section (j)

The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)

KPI Changes

SCT is currently in discussion with SMBC to agree the new contract KPI's.

Section (k)

Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

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

Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 September 2023

Subject:	Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments
Director:	Director of Children & Education (DCS) Michael Jarrett, MBE
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director - Education Services Julie Andrews Julie_Andrews@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Members requested an update on Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>The Priority Areas Programme links with the Directorate Business plan commitment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenge and support schools to raise standards in all key stages to close the gaps with national. ▪ Increase the proportion of schools and academies rated good or better by Ofsted
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The programme aims to bring about rapid improvement in outcomes for pupils across the borough at the end of KS2 and KS4. This will help to enable them to be better prepared for the next stage in their education or employment and enhance their life chances and choices.

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Education Investment Areas (EIAs) and Priority Education Investment areas (PEIAs)

- In February 2022, HM Government announced that it would be delivering a package of measures in 55 EIAs to further drive school Improvement in England as part of the levelling up agenda. These were comprised of local authorities where educational outcomes at the end of both key stage 2 (KS2) and key stage 4 (KS4) were the weakest and others containing an Opportunity Area or areas previously identified for additional school improvement support.
- 24 of the EIAs have been identified as PEIAs and are receiving more intensive investment. Sandwell is one of these PEIAs and has been allocated £2.9m in Local Needs Funding to support this initiative and deliver the agreed priorities and improvements within the life of the programme.
- A Local Partnership Board has been established to work with Sandwell. Membership includes representatives from strong trusts, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), DfE, curriculum hubs, the Local Authority (LA) and local dioceses.
- The role of the Local Partnership Board includes helping to identify the main challenges to improving outcomes for children and young people, identifying a range of interventions to address these challenges and helping to drive support and activity within the PEIA. The Board has also contributed to the development of Sandwell's Local Needs Delivery Plan and will support the monitoring of progress towards the agreed criteria within it.
- Sandwell's Local Needs Plan focuses on 3 themes:
 - **Attainment in Maths:** Improving the quality of maths provision across targeted schools (£1.20m estimated costing).



- **Attainment in English:** Improving the teaching of literacy to ensure it is of good quality in all schools to enable learners to access the rest of the English curriculum and other subjects across both primary and secondary phases. (£1.10m estimated costing).
- **Speech and language:** Development has suffered due to the pandemic, resulting in challenges in learning phonics at early years and KS1, which will have a long-term impact on KS2 attainment. (£0.60m estimated costing). It is anticipated that this strand will include a focus on SEND.

4.2 Activity summer term 2023

- The Local Partnership Board held a launch event in June 2023 for all Sandwell schools and academies. This detailed the universal offer available to all Sandwell schools and the that for priority schools. This event was well attended, with positive engagement from stakeholders.
- Priority schools for each of the workstreams were contacted and invited to take up the support offer. This list may be reviewed in the autumn term, with other schools added subject to the outcomes of 2023 KS2 tests and KS4 examinations.
- The workstreams for KS2 Maths and KS3 Maths have been allocated to the Maths Hub. It is anticipated that activity with schools will commence in September 2023.
- Sponsored Trusts across the West Midlands were sent 'Invites to Tender' for each aspect of the local delivery plan. One bid was received for the SEND programme. This was assessed by the Board and referred to the Regional Director for approval and sign off.
- No bids were received were received for any of the other workstreams Consequently, 'Invites to Tender' for the KS2 English, KS4 English and Metacognition and Self-Regulation workstreams have been re-issued. The deadline for receipt of bids is 15 September 2023.

4.3 Next steps

- Commence delivery of the KS2 and KS4 Maths workstreams (from September 2023).
- Review lists of priority schools following publication of 2023 KS2 test and KS4 examination results and update as necessary.



- Assess bids for the KS2 English, KS4 English and Metacognition and Self-Regulation workstreams, select delivery partners and issue Grant Offer Letters.
- Commence delivery of the KS2 English, KS4 English and Metacognition and Self-Regulation workstreams (from autumn 2023).
- Monitor progress of each workstream towards the agreed criteria within it the Local Area Delivery Plan.

5 Implications

Resources:	Local Partnership Board PEIA Local Needs Funding (£2.9m) Delivery partners (to be confirmed following procurement)
Legal and Governance:	Compliance with Ministerial plans to drive intensive school improvement under the Priority Areas Programme.
Risk:	Close monitoring of progress on key metrics will need to take place to ensure that the expected improvement is achieved and can be evidenced, and that any necessary adjustments are made to the plan to support this.
Equality:	The Priority Areas Programme will address entrenched underperformance, including in literacy and numeracy, in areas with some of the highest rates of disadvantage in the country. It is closely aligned with HM Government's Levelling Up strategy.
Health and Wellbeing:	The speed at which intervention takes place for children and young people who need it will occur faster and be more targeted across the LA, ensuring that they receive the right support sooner.
Social Value:	The programme will support children and young people to progress fairly to further education, training and employment. It will also help to address the impact of the disruption to their studies caused by COVID 19.
Climate Change:	N/A



6 Appendices

N/A

7. Background Papers

Education Investment Areas - selection methodology

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-investment-areas-selection-methodology>

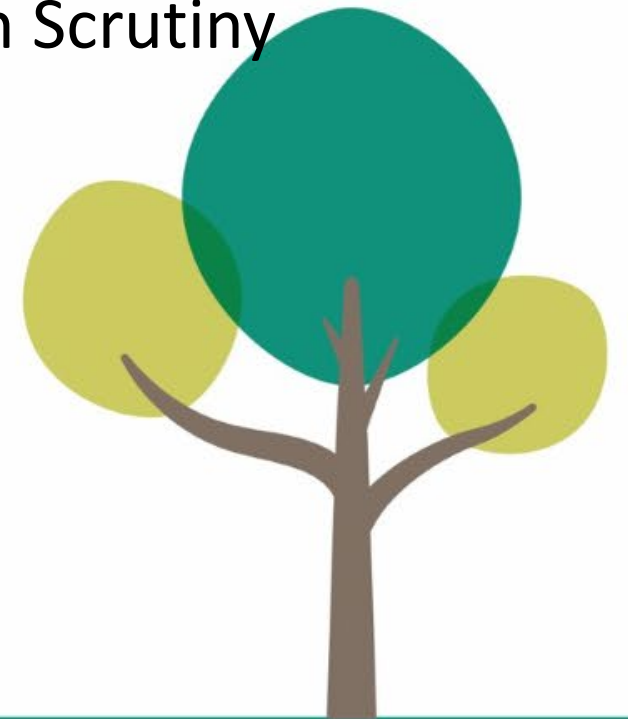


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Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments

Report to the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny
Board

Monday 11 September 2023



Context

Priority Areas Programme:

- 55 Education Investment Areas (EIAs)
- 24 Priority Education Investment Areas (PEIAs)
- Aims to bring about rapid improvement in outcomes for pupils at the end of KS2 and KS4.



Why Sandwell?

There are 55 Education Investment Areas in England

Of these areas 24 are Priority – and Sandwell is one of the Priority Education Investment Areas

Sandwell is a P-EIA because the percentage of pupils eligible for PP is higher than national. 70% of the town's schools are in the 5th lowest percentile for IDACI and persistent absence rates are above average.

Percentage of children achieving GLD by the end of the Early Years Stage is lower than national average. KS2 attainment outcomes are consistently below the national average.

KS4 progress and attainment outcomes are consistently below the national average. The gap for disadvantaged pupils remains a concern at all phases.



Educational Outcomes in Sandwell 2022

GLD

Sandwell: 59%
National: 65%

Phonics

Sandwell: 72%
National: 75%

KS2 RWM (EXS)

Sandwell: 54%
National: 59%

KS4 Att 8

Sandwell: 46%
National: 49%

KS1-2 Progress: R

Sandwell: 0.2
National: 0

KS1-2 Progress: W

Sandwell: 0.3
National: 0

KS1-2 Progress: M

Sandwell: 0
National: 0

KS4 Progress 8

Sandwell: -0.02
National: -0.03



Local Partnership Board

Representation from:

- DfE
- Local Authority
- Strong trust leaders
- Local dioceses
- Curriculum hubs
- Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)



Local Partnership Board

- Advisory role
- Review progress and implementation of the Local Needs Delivery Plan
- Procurement of delivery partners



Local Needs Delivery Plan

- Improvement in Sandwell's primary and secondary schools linked to 3 areas of focus
 - Mathematics
 - English
 - Speech and language (including a focus on SEND)





Targeted support



**Maths
Hub**



**English
Hub**

We are calling on the existing hub structure

**There will be offers that apply to all and
offers that apply to targeted schools**



Maths

- **The aim / purpose**
To support you and your maths education and therefore student outcomes in maths

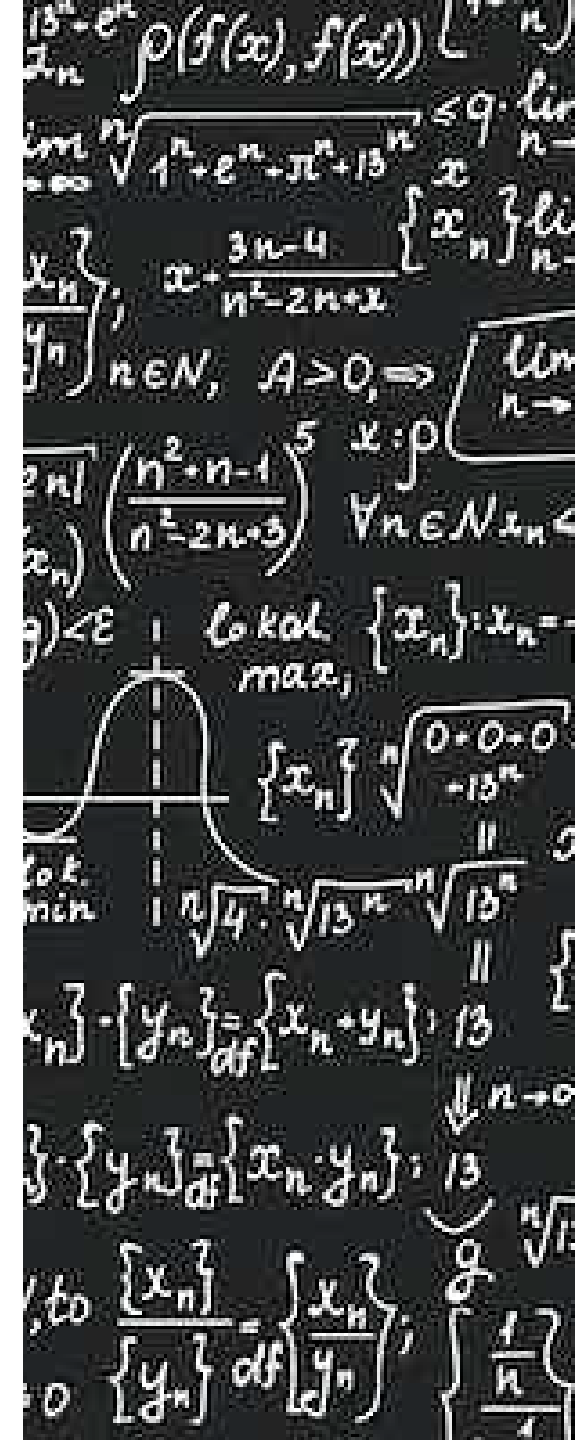
- **What we are going to do (and when)**

Universal Offer

- The Maths Hub offer a range of programmes from which your schools can benefit. This will include working with best practice peers across the Local Authority.
- The Maths Hub will promote and support teachers to access high quality resources, examples of best practice teaching and access to experts for support.

Priority Schools

- Several priority schools will be identified through careful data analysis and local knowledge of the needs of our schools. Priority schools will receive an increased, intensive offer based upon improving the teaching and learning in maths at KS2/KS4.
- The Maths Hub will work with priority schools next half term to work with you to identify need within your settings.
- **Our ask of you...**
Take the opportunity to learn from each other and share good practice in the teaching and learning of Maths at KS2 and KS4 – the likelihood is that this good practice will serve to inform best practice in other key stages.



English

- **The aim / purpose**
To support you and your English education and so increase attainment in English in Sandwell schools including in the Reception year.
- **What we are going to do (and when)**
Universal Offer
 - Opportunity to engage with a professional development evidence-based programme to improve pupil outcomes at KS2/KS4. This will be available in the autumn term 2023.*Priority Schools*
 - Priority schools will be identified through careful data analysis. They will receive an increased, intensive offer based upon improving the teaching and learning in English at KS2 and KS4.
 - Priority schools will also be identified for support with KS1 Phonics.
 - The English Hub will support schools identified as priority with KS1 Phonics.
 - A provider and their partners will be selected, through an expression of interest process, for work on English at KS2 and KS4, beginning in June 2023.
- **Our ask of you...**
Your engagement! This is an opportunity to develop effective English networks where we can share good practice, engage in study visits, develop learning communities and improve outcomes for pupils in Sandwell.



Metacognition and Self-Regulation

- **The aim / purpose**
The aim of this strand is to improve teacher and learner effectiveness with a focus on developing metacognition and self-regulation to improve student outcomes at KS2 and KS4 with a focus on English and maths.
- **What we are going to do (and when)**
Universal Offer
 - Launch with national/international expert
 - Metacognition and self-regulation CPL for school leaders and teachers (school leaders blended, face to face and virtual and teachers virtual)
 - Peer learning communities and shared excellent practice (including learning communities, study visits video, written case studies, celebration event)
 - One day school-based implementation support

Priority Schools

 - Three days of school-based diagnosis and implementation support
- **Our ask of you...**
 - Participate by building into your T&L developments and CPL plans
 - Contribute by providing capacity where you have excellent practice



SEND

- **The aim / purpose**
Children with SEND are identified earlier to ensure that they are getting the right support sooner
- **What we are going to do (and when)**
 - All schools having the opportunity to join a Nationally led project to self-evaluate priorities and needs, and enhance in-school knowledge and skills in Autumn Term 2023
 - Bespoke training and support in identified priority areas– potentially including Reception, early language and speech, language & communication
 - Priority schools matched with a specialist in SEND by Spring Term 2024, bespoke in-reach and out-reach support in place
 - Online SEND community established, open to all schools through the Platform
 - QA shows that identification and provision is timely and appropriate by end Summer 2024
- **Our ask of you...**
 - [Contribute by providing capacity where you have excellent practice](#)
 - [Engage in National and local opportunities](#)



Next steps

- Begin delivery of the KS2 and KS4 Maths workstreams (from September 2023).
- Review lists of priority schools following publication of 2023 KS2 test and KS4 examination results and update as necessary.
- Assess bids for the KS2 English, KS4 English and Metacognition and Self-Regulation workstreams, select delivery partners and issue Grant Offer Letters.
- Begin delivery of the KS2 English, KS4 English and Metacognition and Self-Regulation workstreams (from autumn 2 2023).
- Monitor progress of each workstream towards the agreed criteria within it the Local Area Delivery Plan.



Questions?



Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 September 2023

Subject:	The Cost of Living and its Impact on Attainment and Attendance
Director:	Michael Jarrett – Director of Children’s Services and Education
Contact Officer:	Democratic Services Officer, Connor Robinson connor1_robinson@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board consider and agree on the scope of the review into the cost of living and its impact on educational attainment and attendance in Sandwell.
- 1.2 That subject to 1.1 the Board to consider and agree the establishment of a working group and nominate seven members to undertake the review and feedback any findings and recommendations to a future Board meeting.


2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board has agreed to carry out a review of the cost of living and its impact on attainment and attendance in Sandwell. The scope document (appendix 1) sets out the rationale and suggested way forward for the review to progress.
- 2.2 The scope document (appendix 1) sets out the proposed areas of inquiry for the cost of living and its impact on attainment and attendance review, together with a description of range of methods that could be used to gather evidence including council officers, Sandwell Children’s Trust



partners, education partners, school leadership, and corporate parent partners. Views may also be sought from parents, pupils and other stakeholder organisations.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Sandwell Council want children to be ready for school and for schools to be ready for children. Families and communities being able to support that readiness are vital, the Council want to ensure the right measures are in place for children and young people and to prepare them for adult life with the necessary skills and development.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The review aims to gather evidence to inform current understanding and potential service provision going forward as it relates to educational attainment and attendance. Sandwell Council is committed to ensuring every Sandwell resident has the best start in life and that every available provision is being put in place to secure the best educational outcomes.
- 4.2 The review will gather evidence from stakeholders, the Council and partners, evaluate findings and options and make recommendations to influence strategies with regard to increasing the attainment and attendance in the borough.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.
Legal and Governance:	The Scrutiny Boards remit extends to all of the functions of the Council as an authority under the Education Acts, School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and all other relevant legislation in force from time to time (i.e. pre-school, statutory and post 16 education); as well as any other education related services for children and young people, and services for children, young people and families.
Risk:	There are no associated risks with this report.



Equality:	There are no specific equality implications arising from this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no specific health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.
Social Value:	There are no specific social value implications arising from this report.
Climate Change:	There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting:	The review will consider the attainment and attendance of those children in care and will seek to engage with the corporate parenting board.

6 Appendices

Scrutiny Review – Scoping Document



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Scrutiny Review – Scoping Document

Review Title:	The Cost of Living and its Impact on Attainment and Attendance
Scrutiny Board:	Children’s Services and Education
Date of Review:	September 2023 – March 2024

Reasons for undertaking the review:

On 21 April 2022 the Council declared a Cost of Living Crisis, this was followed by the declaration of a Cost of Living Emergency on 13 December 2022.

The move to declare a Cost of Living Emergency highlighted the difficult situations facing many Sandwell residents, a cost-of-living summit was subsequently held to bring partners together and work to address the ongoing challenges.

The Sutton Trust has stated “in state schools, 38% of teachers said a third or more of their class were living in families facing considerable financial pressures which they felt are impacting on the children’s ability to succeed in school. In addition, in state schools, 67% of teachers thought the cost of living crisis and associated impact on pupils would increase the attainment gap at their school, with 18% saying there would be a substantial increase. This figure was 72% in the most deprived state schools, compared to 60% in those with better-off intakes”.

The Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board had previously undertaken a review into the impact of lockdown on children and families which evidenced how the lockdown had negatively impacted children’s education. Since the review, the cost of living crisis has added additional pressure on children which has increased the barriers to their attendance and educational attainment. The Children’s Scrutiny Board wished to investigate this impact, understand its implications, and what is being done within Sandwell to alleviate and counteract its effects.

Sandwell Council is part of an effort to increase attainment through the Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments. The Board welcomed these developments and would like to review and understand what other initiatives are being developed and rolled out to combat the challenges faced by children in their attendance and attainment.

There was a consensus that the Board needed to establish a review to investigate and review the attendance and attainment in education with specific focus on understanding what was being done to increase outcomes for children and young people in education.

Membership of the Working Group will be agreed by the Board and a subsequent project plan will be completed for this review.

Key Lines of Enquiry – The Cost of Living and its Impact on Attainment and Attendance

- a) How the cost of living impacts engagement with education and attainment.
- b) Government and local investment going into education at a primary and secondary level.
- c) Council initiatives to engage with schools and parents around support with learning and school engagement.
- d) Development plans and catch up sessions developed by schools to increase attendance and attainment.
- e) The correlation between Free School Meals and attainment and attendance.
- f) Post-16 destination data – the impact of the cost of living on future educational and career pathways.
- g) Educational attainment and engagement with school for those children in care.
- h) The impact on those with SEND and their engagement with education.

Intended Outcomes:

to make further recommendations regarding areas considered and which would benefit from further scrutiny or policy development.

- To understand the level and nature of support being given and offered to schools and parents to increase school attendance and attainment.
- To understand the work of the Council in engaging with schools and parents.
- To understand what schools are doing to support children and young people in achieving their potential.
- Assess the impact of free school meals on increasing school engagement.
- The impact of the cost of living and post-16 destinations for young people.
- How the cost of living has impacted children and young people in care and how it has affected their school engagement and education outcomes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact of the cost of living on those children and young people with SEND, how it has affected their relationship with education and how it has impacted their attainment. 	
Officer Group (including partners):	
Links to Corporate Plan and Vision 2030:	<p>Best start in life for children and young people:</p> <p>Sandwell Council want children to be ready for school and for schools to be ready for children. Families and communities being able to support that readiness are vital, the Council want to ensure the right measures are in place for children and young people and to prepare them for adult life with the necessary skills and development.</p>
Scoping undertaken by:	Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board
Council Chief Officer (or partner equivalent):	Michael Jarrett –Director of Children's Services and Education
Existing data available for consideration:	
<p>The Sutton Trust – Cost of Living and Education 2022 (Web Link)</p> <p>Sandwell Council – Education Investment Area and Priority Investment Area Developments – 20/03/2023</p> <p>Sandwell Council – Education Investment Area and Priority Investment Area Developments – 11/09/2023</p>	
Potential witnesses	<p>Sandwell Council Officers</p> <p>Sandwell Children's Trust</p> <p>Social Care</p> <p>Corporate Parenting Board representatives</p> <p>Head Teachers representative</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Young people</p> <p>Parent/Carer organisations</p>
Activities	<p>Desk top research</p> <p>Survey</p> <p>Focus group(s)</p> <p>Meetings</p>

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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Scrutiny Board

11 September 2023

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







That the Board considers the items within the recommendations tracker and notes the progress on their implementation.

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



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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board 2022/23					
Scrutiny Board Date	Agenda Item Title	Action/Recommendation	Responsible Director /Body	Activity Log as at 23 June 23	Update
20 March 2023	The 16+ provision at the Westminster School	That the Cabinet Member for Children and Education give a response to the Children's Scrutiny Board on his plans to increase the number of inclusive apprenticeships offered by Sandwell Council and its contractors	Cabinet Member	Added to the work programme – to be considered at the November meeting.	Sally Giles
20 March 2023	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	That the Chair of the Thrive Board presents a report to the scrutiny Board outlining its work and the impact of, in relation to the impact of the pandemic on students' mental health and well-being.	Democratic Services	Added to the work programme – to be considered at the January meeting.	Sally Giles
		That representatives of the SEND Strategic Board/SEND Operational Board report to the Board on the services and support provided to SEND children and the impact, including attainment data.	Democratic Services	Added to the work programme – to be considered at the January meeting.	Paul Smith & Julie Andrews
		That, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board is requested to	Democratic Services	Discussions had with clerk to the	

		undertake a review and monitors the recovery strategy of mental health services within the Borough.		Board about adding it to the Health and Adult Social Care work programme.	
		The Chair of the Children's Services and Education Board writes to the Sandwell Children's Trust to request details of their plans to address the challenges of recruitment and retention of social workers.	Democratic Services	SCT presents a 6-month performance review to the Board which will include an update on workforce.	
		That the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Board writes to the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board to request details of their plans to address the challenges faced by children in care and care leavers and to understand how the pandemic has impacted them and what has been done to address this.	Democratic Services	Added to the work programme – to be considered over future meeting.	Sally Giles

Recommendations Approved by Cabinet on 15 February 2023					
		that the Director of Children and Education is proactive in considering suitable locations in the Borough for specialist sixth-form free schools which are funded by central government	Director of Children and Education		Julie Andrews
		that the Council joins the Department for Education's 1-2-1 attendance mentoring pilot to monitor issues in schools across the Borough.	Children and Education	Regular meetings in place with the DfE Attendance Advisor Training for staff to be showcased with other Councils as exemplar practice	Julie Andrews
		that, the Cabinet Member for Children and Education pledges 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;	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education		Julie Andrews













		that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for Education, to request that the Government actively engages 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.	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education		Julie Andrews
		That the Director of Children and Education 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;	the Director of Children and Education		Julie Andrews
		that the Director of Children and Education reviews the Council's partnership working with education providers and the Sandwell	the Director of Children and Education Michael		Julie Andrews

		Children's Trust to ensure that actions, outcomes and best practice work are shared to ensure we are working cohesively together.			
		<p>That the Cabinet Member for Children and Education investigates ways to connect with young people and offer extra support, mentoring and encouragement including, but not limited to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) establishing a peer mentoring programme; b) encouraging social youth work, sports, drama, and outdoor activities; c) engaging with local businesses to improve the number of available apprenticeships; d) supporting a holistic youth services experience which accompanies physical and digital offer; 	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education		Sally Giles















		e) supporting and championing the new Eco Bus with young people's involvement.			
		that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for Education, to lobby for recurrent yearly funding which will allow for consistent support to address young people's emotional wellbeing and (low level) mental health as we recovery from COVID and the impact that it caused, whilst supporting the Council's ambition to improve academic performance, socialisation, conversation, mental health and wellbeing;	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education		Sally Giles
		That, the Director of Children and Education works with multi-agency partners to support, engage and monitor the stability within the early years settings;	the Director of Children and Education		Julie Andrews

Work Programme 2023/24




Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Meeting Date	Item	Links with Strategic Aims	Notes
3 July 2023	Corporate Parenting Board		
11 September 2023	Sandwell Children's Trust 6-month Performance Review Headline on: • Fostering • Children in our care and our care leavers	  	
	Annual Regional Adoption Report	  	
	Education Investment Area and Priority Education Investment Area developments – update and progress.	 	
	SEND Inspection Headlines		
13 November 2023	Post-16 Pathways – provision and outcomes for young people. The take up of training, apprenticeships and	 	



	<p>further education. Mainstem and Special Provision</p> <p>Reducing unemployment amongst young people.</p> <p>Provision for those who are NEET and NEET SEND.</p>		
	Virtual School Outcomes	 	
	Transition to Adulthood	  	
	SEND strategy and inspection outcomes		
8 January 2024	Safeguarding - Serious Case Reviews	 	
	Childhood Obesity – Invite Health Scrutiny	 	
	Attainment of SEND students - SEND Strategic Board/SEND Operational Board – update		
	Health and Wellbeing of Students - Thrive Board Update	  	



<p>25 March 2024</p>	<p>Sandwell Children's Trust 6-month Performance review Spotlight on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locality working • Accommodation strategy • Early Help 		
	<p>Residential Children's Homes – sufficiency strategy</p>		
	<p>Corporate Parenting Update</p>		

<p>Items to be scheduled</p>
Empty space for scheduling items



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The following items set out key decisions to be taken by the Executive:-

	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
1	<p>Hamstead Infant School Tanhouse Avenue, and Hamstead Junior School, Hamstead Road, Great Barr - Proposed Closure and Expansion</p> <p>Contact Officer: Martyn Roberts</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett - Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 September 2023</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Report by Director of Children and Education</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
2	<p>Schools Capital Programme; Shenstone Lodge School, The Brades Lodge, City Road, Tividale, Oldbury – Proposed Expansion</p> <p>There is a need to provide additional school places for children / young people with SEND.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Martyn Roberts</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 September 2023</p>		<p>Report</p>



Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
<p>3</p> <p>Moat Farm Infant School – Making significant changes (prescribed alternations) consultation outcome; change of age range Approve change of age range</p> <p>Contact Officer: Rachel Hill</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>13 September 2023</p>		<p>Report</p>



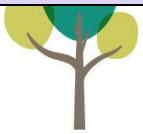
Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
<p>4</p> <p>Extension of contract for a non-executive director of Sandwell Children’s Trust Board</p> <p>Contact Officer: Mandip Chahal</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett – Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>		<p>18 October 2023</p>		<p>Report</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
5	<p>Sandwell Children’s Trust Annual Review 2022/2023</p> <p>Contact Officer: Mandip Chahal</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>18 October 2023</p>	<p>11 September 2023</p>	<p>Report</p> <p>Sandwell Children’s Trust Annual Review</p>



Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
<p>6</p> <p>Proposed Relocation of Causeway Green Primary School to Brandhall Village Development, Oldbury</p> <p>Contact Officer: Martyn Roberts</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett - Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>18 October 2023</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Report by Director of Children and Education</p>



Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
<p>7 School’s Model Pay Policy 2023-24 and Unattached Teachers’ Pay Policy 2022/23</p> <p>Contact Officer: Darron Evans</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education / Simone Hines, Director of Finance</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>		<p>October/ November 2023</p>		<p>Report</p> <p>School’s Model Pay Policy 2023-24</p> <p>Unattached Teachers’ Pay Policy 2022/23</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
8	<p>BSF/PFI School Funding</p> <p>Contact Officer: Abi Asimolowo</p> <p>Directors: Michael Jarrett – Director of Children and Education and Simone Hines – Director of Finance</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>18 October 2023</p>		<p>Report</p>



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
9	<p>Sandwell Residential Education Service fees and charges</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett – Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Cabinet – Children, Young People and Education (Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>18 October 2023</p>		



	Title/Subject	Decision Maker	Public or exempt report? If exempt – state reason for exemption	Decision Date	Pre or post decision Scrutiny to be carried out? (Board and date)	List of documents to be considered
10	<p>Childcare Sufficiency Report 2023-24</p> <p>Contact Officers: Sally Dowie/Sara Baber</p> <p>Director: Michael Jarrett, Director of Children and Education</p>	<p>Children, Young People and Education</p> <p>(Cllr Hackett)</p>	<p>Public</p>	<p>October</p>		<p>Report</p> <p>Childcare Sufficiency Report 2023-24</p>

