

# Agenda

## Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**Monday 25 March 2024 at 6.00 pm**  
**in the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

- |          |  |                |
|----------|--|----------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Apologies for Absence</b>   | <b>5 - 6</b>   |
|          | To receive any apologies for absence.  |                |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Declarations of Interest</b>  | <b>7 - 8</b>   |
|          | Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.                              |                |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Minutes</b>   | <b>9 - 20</b>  |
|          | To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2024 as a correct record.                        |                |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Urgent Additional Items of Business</b>   |                |
|          | To determine whether there are any additional items of business to be considered as a matter of urgency. |                |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Sandwell Children's Trust Performance Update</b>  | <b>21 - 26</b> |
|          | To consider the Sandwell Children's Trust Performance Update.  |                |



- |   |  |          |
|---|--|----------|
| 6 | <b>Residential Sufficiency and Audit of Planning Applications for Children's Homes</b>       | 27 - 36  |
|   | To consider Residential Sufficiency and Audit of Planning Applications for Children's Homes. |          |
| 7 | <b>Corporate Parenting Board 12-Month Update</b>   | 37 - 50  |
|   | To consider the Corporate Parenting Board 12-Month Update.                                   |          |
| 8 | <b>Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022/23</b>                    | 51 - 94  |
|   | To consider Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022/23.              |          |
| 9 | <b>Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations</b>                                   | 95 - 104 |
|   | To consider the Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations                          |          |

**Shokat Lal**  
**Chief Executive**  
Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
Oldbury  
West Midlands

**Distribution**  
Councillor Hinchliff (Chair)  
Councillors Chambers, Allcock, Ashraf, Choudhry, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Mayo, Pall, Uddin and Weston  
Barrie Scott - Church of England diocese representative;  
Carmel Hinton - Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative.

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

## Information about meetings in Sandwell



If you are attending the meeting and require assistance to access the venue, please contact Democratic Services ([democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)).



If the fire alarm sounds, please follow the instructions of the officers present and leave the building by the nearest exit.



Only people invited to speak at a meeting may do so. Everyone at the meeting is expected to be respectful and listen to the discussion.



Agendas with reports with exempt information should be treated as private and confidential. It is your responsibility to ensure that any such reports are kept secure. After the meeting confidential papers should be disposed of in a secure way.



This meeting may be recorded and broadcast on the Internet. If this is the case, it will be confirmed at the meeting and further information will be provided.



You are allowed to use devices for the purposes of recording or reporting during the public session of the meeting. When using your devices they must not disrupt the meeting – please ensure they are set to silent.



Members who cannot attend the meeting should submit apologies by contacting Democratic Services ([democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk))



All agenda, reports, minutes for Sandwell Council's meetings, councillor details and more are available from our [website](#)



## Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

### Apologies for Absence

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



This page is intentionally left blank

## Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

### Declarations of Interest

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



This page is intentionally left blank



## Minutes of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**Monday 8 January 2024 at 6.00pm**  
**in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Hinchliff (Chair);  
Councillors Mayo, Pall, Uddin and Weston.  
Barrie Scott Co-opted Member - Church of England dioceses  
of Birmingham and Lichfield Representative and Yvonne  
Ologbo - Parent Governor representative.

**Officers:** Sally Giles – (Assistant Director - Strategic Partnerships and  
Commissioning); Gillian Ming (Children's Safeguarding  
Partnership Business Manager); Samantha Harman (Holiday  
Activity and Food Programme Manager); Claire Tate (Senior  
Transformation Lead for Emotional Wellbeing and MH);  
Emma Aspinall and Nicky Mountford (Child and Adolescent  
Mental Health Service) and Stephnie Hancock (Deputy  
Democratic Services Manager).

### 1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allcock,  
Ashraf and Choudry.

### 2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.



3/24 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2023 are approved as a correct record.

4/24 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

5/24 **The Effectiveness of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership's Response to Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents**

The Board considered a report and presentation detailing the operations of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership in relation to its response to serious child safeguarding incidents.

Introduced in 2018 the Local Safeguarding Partnerships gave equal responsibility to three statutory agencies which included local authorities, Police and the then Clinical Commissioning Groups (now known as Integrated Commissioning Boards (ICBs)) for agreeing the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Sandwell had added a fourth equal statutory partner, Sandwell Children's Trust, which delivered the children's social care functions on behalf of the Council. These four key agencies were known locally as Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP).

The four leading partners at SCSP were required to agree on ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding functions; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging other partners and stakeholders; and implement local and national learning including from serious child safeguarding incidents.

The SCSP focused on children's welfare across Sandwell. It was the ambition of the service that every child in Sandwell was able to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. The service worked to provide high quality and effective support to any child who needed



it. Individuals, agencies and organisations worked as a partnership to ensure and promote the welfare of all children across Sandwell.

Local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, had specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their local authority area. The SCSP had specific duties which included taking action if they believed a child had suffered or was likely to suffer significant harm, and maintaining robust processes where abuse or neglect was known or suspected to be a causal factor, and if a child had died or been seriously harmed.

Since the inception of the SCSP on 1 April 2019, there had been 20 serious child safeguarding incidents across Sandwell which had been scrutinised through the Rapid Review process. Of those 20 cases, 13 (65%) had met the criteria for further learning and improvement activity, known as a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). Across the 13 LCSPRs that had been initiated over this period, the following themes had emerged:-

Emerging Theme	Reoccurring in no. of LCSPRs
Under 1s	7/13
Child from Black and minoritized ethnic background	6/13
Mental ill health of parents/carers	10/13
Issue with information sharing/communication	13/13
Neglect	10/13
Core safeguarding procedures/processes (e.g. application of thresholds, quality of assessments, plan progression)	10/13
Substance/alcohol misuse (child or parent)	8/13
Domestic abuse	7/13

Requirements for undertaking rapid reviews and timescales for the statutory review processes were set in guidance and monitored by the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (NCSPRP). All rapid reviews in Sandwell were submitted to the NCSPRP within the prescribed 15 working days timescale, with the NCSPRP concurring with the decision of the Sandwell Learning from Practice Reviews (SLPR) Panel in 18 of the 20 serious incidents considered.



Where (LCSPRs) were commissioned, they were to be completed through to publication within 6 months, however this had not been the case in Sandwell due to other competing processes such as criminal and coroner's investigations. The Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) had published 6 of the 13 LCSPRs in full. 3 LCSPRs were currently embargoed awaiting the conclusions of parallel proceedings and 3 remained in progress.

The SCSP framework for undertaking this function was highly regarded both regionally, and nationally where Sandwell had been referenced as an area of good practice and cited by the NCSPP in its annual report for 2020/21.

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

- the proportion of BME children coming into contact with the Partnership was disproportionate in relation to Sandwell's population and there was in some cases a connection to gun, gang and knife crime and it was recognised that further work was required to engage with communities;
- a Cultural Competence Framework and associated training had been developed and regionally recognised;
- the effectiveness of the service was dependent on partnership working, which could always improve;
- challenges in partnership working came from being unable to share data and transfer data across different systems;
- services shared data across local authority boards where appropriate;
- it was important that any lessons learned were imbedded into practice and oversights and mistakes not repeated;
- across the Black Country Sandwell had the highest proportion of child deaths;
- Sandwell worked to ensure lessons were learned from all serious incidents.



The Board agreed that it would be beneficial to review the effectiveness of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership's annually and this would be added to its work programme.

6/24

## Child Friendly Sandwell

The Board considered a report outlining the proposal for the Council to submit an expression of interest, and subsequent application, to UNICEF to receive Child Friendly City (Borough) status. The Cabinet was due to consider the proposal on 17 January 2024.

A Child Friendly City was a place that respected and promoted the rights of children and young people and provided them with opportunities to participate in its social, cultural, political and economic life. Developing a Child Friendly Borough involved engaging with children and young people as active citizens, ensuring their safety and wellbeing, and creating inclusive and accessible spaces and services for them. A Child Friendly Borough was not only beneficial for children and young people, but also for the whole community, as it fostered social cohesion, diversity, sustainability, and innovation.

The guiding principles of building a Child Friendly Borough mirrored the overarching principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The initiative required adoption of the following principles for good governance:-

- equity and inclusion
- accountability and transparency
- public participation
- adaptability and sustainability

Delivering a Child Friendly Borough would support the Council to deliver its commitments to equality and diversity and key elements of both the Corporate Plan and the Improvement Plan.

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



- work had already begun on ensuring that all service areas were considering the impact on children and promoting a wider culture change within the organisation following feedback from other authorities that had sought Child Friendly status;
- the process was long and likely to take between three and five years from expression of interest to assessment and award of the status;
- if the Cabinet approved the proposal, work would commence on a task and finish group and building a partnership network focused on project delivery;
- the project would require reaching out to children and young people across the borough from all backgrounds;

The Board welcomed the proposal wholeheartedly and members undertook to support the process by advocating for Child Friendly Sandwell in everything they did.

**Resolved** that the proposal for Sandwell to seek Child Friendly City (Borough) Status from the United Nations is endorsed.

7/24

## Health and Wellbeing of Students - Thrive Board Update

The Board received a report and presentation detailing the work of the Sandwell Thrive Board in the development, implementation, and review of its strategic plan to ensure that the emotional mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people in Sandwell were met.

The Sandwell Thrive Board was established in November 2021 and was responsible for the development, implementation, and review of a strategic plan to ensure that the emotional mental health and well-being needs of children and young people of Sandwell were met in a timely, effective, and sustainable manner.

The Board had a strategic focus, with representation from health, education, social care, police, schools and the voluntary sector. It



was chaired by the Senior Children and Young Person Mental Health Commissioner, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Members worked within their respective governance and monitoring processes of each organisation, to enable timely development and delivery.

The Board noted the following key headlines:-

- the Thrive Board ensured multi-agency governance for the Thrive Plan in Sandwell;
- the Thrive Board maintained a skilled and knowledgeable multi-agency workforce through delivery of emotional wellbeing and mental health training;
- the Thrive Board ensured that engagement with children, young people and families continued through the SHAPE Board and wider young people's fora, and development areas;
- there was a development of a 'whole system' approach to commissioning, identifying commissioning gaps and improving transition;
- the service continued to address the surge in demand caused by the Coronavirus pandemic;
- I Thrive Framework:-
  - mapped all services within the framework to help understand both commissioned and non-commissioned services;
  - a youth-specific iThrive Model and a co-produced video to demonstrate the services and how to access them had been developed;
  - a Sandwell-specific directory for emotional wellbeing and mental health services had been created;
  - events for practitioners to enhance their understanding had been facilitated;
  - facilitation of Q&A sessions with specialist leads, and commissioned services had been held to improve communication across partners;
  - additional digital services had been commissioned to support children who find it difficult to access mainstream services;



- Mental Health Support Teams:-
  - Mental Health Support Team professional was provided to 51 of 131 schools;
  - a new focussed activity programme was in place including LGBTQ+, holiday activities, and Advantage mentoring programme with West Bromwich Albion FC;
- School Nursing:-
  - there continued to be interactive emotional health and wellbeing roadshows in secondary schools across Sandwell;
  - drop-in sessions across secondary schools were held monthly around the 'Here for You; programme;
  - there existed a confidential chat health text messaging service for young people;
- Education – Attendance Service:-
  - there were nine Attendance Service officers, across the service who were assigned to 14 schools;
  - there was a termly meeting to conduct an Attendance 'Audit';
  - the service worked closely with Exploitation and Youth Justice;
  - a recent forum attended by over 30 partner agencies, enabled school representatives to find agencies that could support their students' needs;
  - a new panel had been established to discuss cases where multiple interventions had been tried to improve school attendance;
- Sandwell Emotional Wellbeing Programme – Phase 2:-
  - a consultation was held as part of Phase 1 with schools and young people and identified specific needs, of children and young people which enabled a more targeted approach;
  - Phase 2 of the programme had been successfully implemented from October 2022 to December 2023;
  - a total of 51 schools had accessed support throughout Phase 2;
  - since June 2021, over 2,600 children and young people had been able to access support;





- voluntary sector providers had accessed training to adopt an approach to provide young people with consistent emotional well-being language;
- the programme had been nationally recognised at the Municipal Journal Awards 2023 for its partnership and innovative approach to providing early intervention;
- ICB Health Inequalities funding:-
  - funding was targeted to provide provision where gaps were identified;
  - focus was on young black boys, new to uk children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16-25, and families;
  - there had been a significant number of referrals for focused areas and for providers in applying for additional funding to support young people;
  - there had been a recognition of the need for additional assistance for the emotional wellbeing of headteachers;
- Children in Care and Care Leavers 'Getting Help' service:-
  - there was a dedicated service for children and those with care experience to access 'getting help';
  - there were three focussed pilot programmes planned, starting January 2024;
  - there had been the development of a care leavers specific emotional wellbeing resource;
- Social, Emotional Competency Framework:-
  - training needs of individuals had been identified for those who worked with children and young people;
  - the framework had been rolled out to service areas over the last 12 months;
- Senior Mental Health Leads and Forums:-
  - there had been 92 schools that had successfully trained a School Mental Health Lead;
  - termly peer support forums had been set up to provide a supportive community;
- the Thrive Board had identified a number of challenges including:-
  - demand for emotional wellbeing and mental health services had increased by 20%;



- funding was not recurrent, which impacted on the provision of early intervention support for children in need;
- there was a shortage of staff across key services including School nursing, the voluntary sector, and CAMHS;
- children and young people continued to miss school due to mental health reasons and anxieties;

The Board was also updated on the going initiatives and developments across the service:-

- Thrive Board multi-agency workshop:-
  - a Sandwell Thrive strategy was under development which would align the service with the wider Black Country Health Foundation Trust Transformation plan, SEND strategy, and Public Health Better Mental Health Strategy;
  - ongoing opportunities for joint commissioning of services was under review;
- Education:-
  - the service was collaborating with CAMHS SPA, in instances where schools were not specified in the referral, to progress the referral process quicker;
  - the service was working to gather information from schools regarding the reasons for modified timetables, which would enable the attendance team to provide support where necessary;
  - where attendance had decreased due to specific needs, active work with Inclusive Learning Service would take place to discuss and handle cases ensuring that the child was placed in the appropriate educational provision;
- Emotional wellbeing programme:-
  - the service was moving toward the implementation of Phase 3 of the programme;
  - there was an open grants round to support community-based provision and deliver provision based on identified needs and gaps;



- there was an increased engagement by CAMHS and Inclusive Learning Services to deliver Sandwell's Emotional Wellbeing Charter Mark with voluntary providers;
- Mental Health Support Teams:-
  - key developments were underway including autism and mental health, ADHD and mental health, staff wellbeing;
  - the development of support mechanisms for home-schooled children, young people at risk of exclusion, and children exhibiting emotional-based school non-attendance;
- School Nursing:-
  - there was an increase drop-in services to fortnightly;
  - the service continued to promote the emotional well-being roadshows to increase participation in schools.

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

- issues around attendance continued post pandemic, a significant number of families had disengaged with education and work was underway to re-engage them, with dedicated attendance officers in place;
- all schools had access to the attendance officers and the service provided;
- support was provided to families through targeted support meetings and wider support through schools and other agencies;
- the number of children and young people who were electively home educated continued to increase and had significantly increased since the pandemic;
- those who were electively home educated had access to dedicated support from within the Council which provided guidance and signposted resources;



- if a school was not accessing services to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people the service reached out to engage with them;
- staff and children and young people were engaged to understand their views and how the service operated from their perspective;
- the waiting lists for CAMHS support was around 21 weeks after the first referral with a follow up meeting around 50 weeks later;
- those who required urgent CAMHS support had a 2 week waiting time;
- there was an average of 400 referrals to CAMHS every month and around 100 children and young people on the waiting list at any given time;
- the stress on the CAMHS service was national and related to the shortage of staff, limited funds available and numbers of referrals;
- the reasoning behind CAMHS referrals were recorded and monitored.

#### 8/24 **Scrutiny Action Tracker**

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

#### 9/24 **Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan**

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

Meeting ended at 8.03pm

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



## Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

25 March 2024

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children’s Trust Performance Update
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sally Giles, Interim Director of Children and Education <a href="mailto:Sally_giles@sandwell.gov.uk">Sally_giles@sandwell.gov.uk</a> Mandip S. Chahal, Senior Commissioning Manager for Statutory Services <a href="mailto:Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk">Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations


- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board considers and comments on Sandwell Children’s Trust 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><b>Best start in life for children and young people</b></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>
---	--

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The contract with SCT is underpinned by comprehensive 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, this occurs at the Operational Partnership Board meeting. In addition, each quarter, the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Executive meet with the Chair of the SCT Board and the Chief Executive of SCT and DCS, 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.
- 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, this inspection included children's services across the Council and partners, an inspection of adoption services in December 2022 and was part of the Local Area SEND Inspection that took place in July 2023.
- 4.5 The judgement following the inspection undertaken in May 2022 was one of 'requires improvement to be good'. When coupled with the judgements of 'good' received for both the fostering service (Aug 2021) and adoption service (Dec 2022) shows a trajectory of service improvement. In addition, the Youth Justice Service was inspected by HMI of Probation in November 2018, with a 'Good' rated outcome.
- 4.6 The Contract between the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust includes a suite of 15 Key Performance Indicators against which SCT are required to report monthly. Since Sept 2023 only one KPI has been in the performance failure zone, for a period of one month. There are currently no KPIs in the performance failure zone.
- 4.7 The Council and SCT have agreed a new set of KPIs, that will be effective from the 01 April 2024. These will be reported to the Operational Partnership Board monthly.
- 4.8 The 2023/24 financial performance is being measured against the agreed 2023/24 Contract Sum. Cabinet approved the contract sum, £74.475m for 2023/24 which was an increase of £2.5m or approximately 3.5% compared with 2022/23.



- 4.9 At the end of Q3 SCT projected a year end deficit of £3.63m against the Contract Sum; in real terms this is an overspend of £4.37m as there was an expectation for them to achieve a surplus of £742k by the end of the year. This is against a national backdrop of significant increases in cost and availability of placements.
- 4.10 The average cost of a residential placement has risen from £5,225 in 2022/23 to £6,075 2023/24 year to date, an increase of 16.26%. Based on there being 62 children in residential care that equates to almost £2.75m of additional cost solely due to the increasing cost of residential care.
- 4.11 There is a national issue in respect of the availability of suitable placements for children who have more complex needs. In February 2024 the ADCS President released a statement that articulated this. He said 'Local authorities face many challenges when finding a home for a child, particularly as we are seeing the emergence of more solo or low occupancy homes, meaning that need continues to outstrip supply. The uneven distribution of homes across the country is an added challenge with homes frequently opening up where housing is cheaper not where they're needed most. There can also be an unwillingness of some providers to take children with any level of complexity, or increasingly serving immediate or inappropriate notice periods, for fear of the impact on their Ofsted rating. Local authorities increasingly can pay tens of thousands of pounds per week for places, yet providers can choose which children to accept and at what cost.'
- 4.10 In March 2023 the number of Sandwell children placed in residential care was 49; since then the number has increased to 62, as of December 2023. SCT are projecting an overspend on placements, against what they had budgeted of £5.91m. Despite the increase overall in the number of children in residential placement there are still fewer in residential care in comparisons to the national average.
- 4.11 In July 2023 Cabinet agreed a package of financial incentives to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers. This is collectively known as the Sandwell Deal.





4.12 Since Dec 2022 there has been an improvement in the balance of agency to permanent social workers, with agency workers now accounting for under 20% of the total social worker cohort. In addition to there being a better balance, there are also fewer vacancies. Over the last quarter the number of vacancies has fallen by just over 5% to an all-time low

## 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><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>The Council agreed a contract sum for 2023/24 of £74.475m to deliver the Council’s statutory responsibilities for children’s social care and to provide targeted early help services. In addition to this, further sums have been provided to SCT in year to cover the cost of high cost agency workers, the pay award and the Sandwell Deal. The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.</p>
<p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p>	<p>The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and SCT is performance managed via a monthly Operational Partnership Board, a quarterly Strategic Partnership Board, and SCT is required to attend up to two Children’s Scrutiny Board meetings and a Budget Scrutiny meeting each year. There is a partnership Improvement Board independently</p>



	chaired by a DfE appointed consultant. Additionally, the Trust is required to submit its Annual Review to the Council.
<b>Risk:</b>	The Council's strategic risk register identifies no red risks relevant to this report. Following the inspection in May 2022 and the improved Ofsted judgement the previous red risk was moved to amber. This risk is regularly monitored and reported to the Council's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.
<b>Equality:</b>	An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children's services will have a positive effect on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.
<b>Social Value</b>	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.
<b>Climate change</b>	There is no direct climate change impact associated with this report.
<b>Corporate Parenting</b>	Ensuring that SCT continues on its improvement journey will support the Council in delivering its corporate parenting responsibilities.

## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None



## Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**25 March 2024**

<b>Subject:</b>	Residential Sufficiency and Audit of Planning Applications for Children’s Homes
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Interim Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles <a href="mailto:Sally_giles@sandwell.gov.uk">Sally_giles@sandwell.gov.uk</a> Mandip S. Chahal, Senior Commissioning Manager for Statutory Services <a href="mailto:Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk">Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations


- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board considers and comments on the issue of residential sufficiency and reviews recent planning applications for children’s homes in this context.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board requested that a report be presented to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny providing details on planning decisions in respect of children’s homes.



### 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 that children who are in the care of the Council have access to high quality residential care provision within Sandwell.</p>
---	--

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 There are currently 19 registered children’s homes in Sandwell ranging in size from single occupancy to 4 bed homes. Nine of these homes opened over the last two years with three others closing over the same period.
- 4.2 One home is rated as outstanding, 12 are rated as good, three as requiring improvement, one as inadequate and two are yet to be inspected. Assuming an average home size of 3 beds it would suggest there are 57 residential placements available in Sandwell.
- 4.3 In 2022 the Competition and Markets Authority undertook a market study into children’s social care provision. They found there is a shortage of appropriate places in children’s homes. This shortage of places has driven up prices and the study found that private sector investors appear to be making higher profits in England and Wales than would expect in a well-functioning and competitive market.
- 4.4 There is in addition a national issue in respect of the availability of suitable placements for children who have more complex needs. In February 2024 the ADCS President released a statement that articulated this, commenting that ‘Local authorities face many challenges when finding a home for a child, particularly as we are



seeing the emergence of more solo or low occupancy homes, meaning that need continues to outstrip supply. The uneven distribution of homes across the country is an added challenge with homes frequently opening up where housing is cheaper not where they're needed most. There can also be an unwillingness of some providers to take children with any level of complexity, or increasingly serving immediate or inappropriate notice periods, for fear of the impact on their Ofsted rating. Local authorities increasingly can pay tens of thousands of pounds per week for places, yet providers can choose which children to accept and at what cost.'

- 4.5 There has been a 67% increase in the number of children living in residential placements (secure, children's homes and semi-independent living) since 2016. With 14,580 living in residential settings in 2023.
- 4.6 While demand for placements has increased, the number of children's home placements has not increased at the same rate. Between 2016-2021 there was an increase of 4,110 children in residential settings while the number of places increased by 1,974. This has meant that where there was spare capacity previously, which allowed matching of children's needs, this is no longer the case.
- 4.7 Sandwell currently has 62 children placed in residential care of these 6 are placed in homes in Sandwell. The preference is for children who are in our care to be placed in Sandwell, so they are better able to access services and support networks, however for some children due to their specific needs this is not possible.



- 4.8 Over the last 12 months the average cost of a residential placement has risen by around £850 per week per child. Based on there currently being 62 children in residential care that equates to almost £2.75m of additional cost.
- 4.9 As of Dec 2023, approximately 7.5% of children in care in Sandwell were placed in residential care, this is significantly lower than the national average which sits at 11%. This equates to around 30 fewer children in residential care when compared to the national average rate.
- 4.10 Sandwell Council does not currently operate any children's homes, with the last Council operated home closing in 2014 following successive inadequate inspection judgements.
- 4.11 The Council, in partnership with Sandwell Children's Trust, is undertaking a feasibility study on opening 'internal' children's homes. This would be a home that is in Sandwell and solely available for the use of the Council/SCT.
- 4.12 When a provider wants to open a children's home in Sandwell they are required to apply for planning permission or seek a Lawful Development Certificate.
- 4.13 Not all cases of developing children's homes will necessitate planning permission. A provider can seek to obtain a Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) to confirm that the existing use of a building is lawful for planning purposes or that the proposal does not require planning permission.



- 4.14 In 2023, 11 planning applications to open children’s homes were received by the Council, of these 11 applications two were approved. In addition to these, eight applications for LDC’s were received of which, five were approved.
- 4.15 There can be stigma associated with children’s homes, much of it is based on a lack of understanding of how modern children’s homes operate, how they are regulated, and the avenues open to residents to complain if there are issues with a local home. As with all planning applications the Council is required to consult with neighbours, in some cases this can lead to local campaigns to oppose planning approval.
- 4.16 When assessing an application for a children’s homes the Council has to consider the impact on the amenity of nearby occupiers. Relevant factors will include the movements to and from the premises associated with such a use, including shift patterns, the need for visitors on a regular basis (including the emergency services).
- 4.17 If a planning application is submitted then generally, if the premises in question provides for sufficient parking, outdoor space and the amenity effects on neighbouring dwellings are capable of being mitigated, it is the case that these developments would normally be appropriate uses, in planning terms, in residential areas.
- 4.18 Where applications for children’s homes have been refused, they are generally refused on the basis of:
- i. The intensity of the use would be contrary to policy SAD H4 of Sandwell's Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document; as the proposed use would be unsuited to the immediate area due to the impact of increased comings and goings and resultant disturbance to residential amenity.



- ii. The proposal would have a detrimental impact on highway safety and the convenience of other highway users due to the proposal having insufficient parking within the curtilage of the development; contrary to paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework which requires development to function well and add to the overall quality of the area.

- 4.19 When an application is refused the applicant is given clear reasons for the refusal and they can appeal the decision.
- 4.20 The planning team will routinely consult with both public health and highways when a planning application is received. Thought is currently being given as to who else should be routinely consulted so that any decision is made with due consideration of the local area and possible future residents who may be cared for e.g. children's services, police.
- 4.21 A leaflet is being produced, that will be shared with members, the gives an overview of what a children's home is and how they operate so, if residents do approach local Councillors when an application is received they are able to share this with them.
- 4.22 Sandwell Children's Trust has been working to build relationships with local providers to improve access to local beds for Sandwell Children. There is a residential provider forum, that brings together homes providers, registered managers and SCT staff. This forum is used to engage with providers, share relevant information with them about local services and give them an idea of upcoming placement demand.
- 4.23 Information on planning applications is publicly available on the Council's website, when an application to open a children's home is approved Sandwell Children's Trust will be notified and they can then





open discussions with providers to plan for when their home opens for the benefit of Sandwell children..

## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Children in the care of the Council can be accommodated in a several ways e.g. foster care, at home under supervision and residential care. Accommodation should be based on their needs but is also reliant on the availability of the type of accommodation required. Where a child needs to be accommodated to safeguard them based on their needs the Council is required to do so, this function is discharged by Sandwell Children’s Trust under the Service Delivery Contract in place for the provision of social care.
- 5.2 There is a legal requirement to seek planning approval when a new building is to be erected, a major change is proposed that falls outside of permitted development or there is to be a change of use of the building that means it will change category e.g. move from being a Dwelling House (C3) to a residential institution (C2). There are no alternative options for consideration.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The planning fees are set by Government and anyone wanting to submit an application must pay these. Applicants are also able to avail themselves of pre-application advice, at a cost, which will help them to consider the appropriateness of their application and things they may wish to consider.  The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service
-------------------	---



	Delivery Contract included within this is the budget for residential placements.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<p>Sandwell Children’s Trust delivers the Council’s statutory responsibilities for children’s social care, this includes the provision of care placements for children and young people based on their needs.</p> <p>There is a legal requirement to seek planning approval when a new building is to be erected, a major change is proposed that falls outside of permitted development or there is to be a change of use of the building that means it will change category e.g. move from being a Dwelling House (C3) to a residential institution (C2)</p>
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>There is a risk of challenge when the Council makes a determination in respect of a planning application. Applicants can appeal decisions and if successful a planning decision made by the Council can be overturned.</p> <p>Not having sufficient local provision means children and young people that require residential placements are placed at a distance from Sandwell. Placing children outside of Sandwell can lead to increased costs i.e. the cost of visiting, arranging contact and not being able to access services that are universally available to Sandwell residents.</p>
<b>Equality:</b>	An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	There are no direct health and well-being impacts associated with this report.
<b>Social Value</b>	There are no direct social value impacts associated with this report.



<b>Climate change</b>	There is no direct climate change impact associated with this report.
<b>Corporate Parenting</b>	Ensuring that children, who are unable to live at home with family, have safe and nurturing home sits within collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, as corporate parents.

**7. Appendices**

None

**8. Background Papers**

None



This page is intentionally left blank

## Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

25 March 2024

<b>Subject:</b>	Corporate Parenting Board 12-Month Update
<b>Director:</b>	Interim Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles Director of Quality & Performance Teodora Bot
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Corporate Parenting Project Officer Rosa Da Silva <a href="mailto:Rosa_DaSilva@sandwell.gov.uk">Rosa_DaSilva@sandwell.gov.uk</a>


### 1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments on the developments made by the Corporate Parenting Board.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to provide a 12-month update for consideration regarding how services are supporting Sandwell children in care and care experienced young people.

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

	<p><b>Best start in life for children and young people</b></p> <p>Corporate Parenting aims to give children in our care the best possible beginning in life and experiences by providing them with opportunities to fulfil their potential. This involves making sure that all children in our care, who consider Sandwell their “Corporate Parents,” grow up in stable homes, receive good quality care and have their needs prioritised and promoted. Supporting our young people as they transition into adulthood, through provision of services and assistance to help them thrive, and become independent, resilient young adults.</p>
---	--



## 4 Context

Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is co-chaired by the Elected Cabinet Member Councillor for Children and Education Services, and the Chairs of the Voice Of Sandwell (VOS - forum for 11-18-year old) and Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA - forum for 18-25 year old). This arrangement is in place to ensure the focus remains on key areas affecting our children in care and care experienced young people and provides them the opportunity to participate, influence and co-produce the delivery of services.

The Children & Social Care Act 2017 sets out 7 Corporate Parenting principles which are guidelines that Local Authorities and partners follow when providing services to children in care and care experienced young people: [The 7 Corporate Parenting Principle](#)

The Board has representation from Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT), Education, Skills, Employment and Training, Housing, Social Care, Foster Carers, children and young people, NHS/ICB, West Midlands Police, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Elected Members including the Leader of the opposition.

The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG) is formed by Board officers and multiagency partners. Its purpose is to monitor, review, and address key areas affecting children and young people in the care of Sandwell Local Authority.

Focused areas include:

- The child and young person's voice
- Education
- Skills, Employments and Training
- Physical Health
- Emotional, Wellbeing and Mental health
- Access to Services
- Safeguarding, Fostering and Stability
- Preparation for adulthood.



During the reporting period, the Board has identified 5 key priorities:

- The education, employment and training of care experienced young people, age 19 years +
- Homes' sufficiency: the development and implementation of Foster Friendly Sandwell programme to aid with the recruitment and retention of highly skilled and able foster carers for our children in care; homes' stability
- Physical, emotional wellbeing and mental health provisions to support our children in care and care experienced young adults
- Access to Services: Local offer
- Enable elected members and partners to have a better understanding of their service areas and provide effective change.

## 5 What Is Working Well?

### 5.1 Governance and Development to the Board

In April 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) and SMBC collaborated to provide Corporate Parenting training to Cabinet members, Elected members, and the CPB members. As a result, the CPB decided to revise its terms of reference to enhance governance, ensure appropriate partners' presence, and improve its effectiveness.

The updated terms of reference were reviewed and approved by the CPB and SCPG. In May 2023, the Annual Council officially endorsed the new terms of reference and as a result the CPB now meets every 10 weeks.

### 5.2 The Council Impact Assessment

In December 2022, the LGA facilitated Corporate Parenting training for the CPB. The training focused on identifying what the Board had in place to support Sandwell children in care, and care experienced young people and what further support can be put in place to raise the profile of Corporate Parenting in Sandwell.

In March 2023, SMBC Democratic Services confirmed that all report templates include Corporate Parenting as part of the implications



section. Report authors are now required to consider Corporate Parenting when writing reports that involve changes or decisions affecting children in care or care experienced young people.

### 5.3 Assistant Directors Workshop and Corporate Business Planning Sessions

Assistant Directors met during Corporate Parenting Week in June 2023 to discuss their role and how they can contribute towards the Corporate Parenting agenda. Subsequently, two additional meetings were organised to explore how services can support children in care and care experienced young people. The participation of young people who shared their personal journey had a significant impact. As a result, Corporate Parenting has now been identified as a key priority within the corporate business planning process.

In November 2023, Corporate Parenting presented at three business planning sessions. The aim was to encourage Assistant Directors to consider care experienced young people in their new corporate business plans. This involved identifying potential support through work experience, employment opportunities, and employment mentoring.

### 5.4 Corporate Parenting Week 2023

The first annual Sandwell Corporate Parenting Week took place from 12 June - 16 June 2023. As a partnership, SMBC, SCT, Black Country NHS Foundation and CAHMS colleagues celebrated the week to:

- Raise the profile of Corporate Parenting across partnerships.
- Ensure a clear understanding of what it means to be a Corporate Parent.
- Enable individuals to develop the confidence to be more effective Corporate Parents.

During the week, over 600 colleagues participated in a live virtual event led by a care-experienced young person who shared their journey through the care system. The week included webinars on trauma-informed care, Corporate Parenting training sessions for newly Elected Members, a workshop on developing a new Corporate Parenting





strategy, health awareness initiatives, education-focused discussions, and employment support.

Feedback throughout the week was positive, and there was clear learning across the Council, SCT, and partners. As a result, key actions have been identified for the next 12 months. Moving forward, Corporate Parenting Week will be held annually to continue raising awareness.

### 5.5 Care Experienced Week

The week took place between 25th October to 1st November 2023, it included various activities for young people. The Care Experienced Young People Awards Ceremony highlighted the ongoing work required in areas of apprenticeships, higher education, accommodation, and combating stigma associated with children in care and care experienced young people.

### 5.6 Corporate Parenting Board Deep Dives

Following a self-evaluation, the Board agreed an annual programme of meetings based on thematic deep dives. In October 2022, the first deep dive focused on the Physical, Emotional and Wellbeing, Mental Health and Life Story Work for children in our care. Children in Care and care experienced young people shared feedback through VOS and FIYA. Their concerns included medical, dental, and optician's prescription costs, access to their files to gain an understanding of their health history, and whether there is a fast-track process for children in care to access CAMHS.

The second deep dive explored into Education, Skills, Employment and Training. VOS and FIYA led the meeting, emphasising the need for better support tailored to individual children and young people. Young people face challenges when aiming to attend university, particularly related to the costs and emotional support required.

The Board acknowledged the strength and commitment Sandwell Virtual School have for our children and young people. It continues to provide ongoing support to ensure access to quality education and ensure each child can achieve their full potential. 88% of children in care attend an education setting that is 'good/outstanding' this is an increase of 8%



since 2020. Attendance of Sandwell children in care is at 93.96% which is higher than all children nationally (92.5% Autumn 2023). The percentage of children achieving 4+ in English and Maths has doubled since 2017 to 32% in 2023.

To ensure that a child's education is not disrupted, any required school moves must seek approval from Sandwell Childrens Trust Directors. It is identified that Early Years (EYS), good level of development (GLD) fell by 5%, whilst this pertained to 1 child. Of the 36 children in EYS 38% have SEND support or an EHCP.

The Board has requested a benchmark against other Local Authorities to identify how it can increase the support and provide an outstanding offer to children and young people.

The Skills, Employment and Training Team focussed on addressing the level of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) 19-21 years old. Whilst there is an emphasis on apprenticeships, work experience placements and supporting young people into education, employment and training (EET), there has only been a 1.8% increase in young people entering into formal education, employment or training since March 2023, this is slower than expected. It is highlighted that young people face barriers which impact their progress to enter employment. Young people identified social anxiety, PTSD, mental health and emotional wellbeing, placement stability and having limited social networks as being the main reasons to why they struggle.

In March 2023, the Board focussed on Stability and Safeguarding: The Journey of the Child. SCT presentation covered:

- Children in care services and care leaving service
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Fostering Service
- Participation Service

The presentation highlighted the importance of placement stability, the need for additional foster care placements, support to maintain placements when they are at risk of disruptions, and the importance of



trusting relationships being developed between children, carers and the team around the child.

It was acknowledged that when children enter care, they experience loss and suffer some form of trauma, and appropriate access to timely emotional well-being support services is absolutely vital.

In response to the recognised need for services that support the emotional wellbeing of children in our care, SCPG pursued the initiative to create and develop an Emotional and Wellbeing Hub specifically for children who are currently in or have been in our care. This initiative led to the launch of the new Emotional Wellbeing Hub in January 2024, funded by the SMBC. Starting as a pilot and pathfinder project, it aims to offer support to children entering care, those in care, and care leavers by providing specialist assessment and intervention. The service is designed to complement and enhance the bespoke CAHMS provision that is already available to these children. The Hub is delivered by Barnardo's, being hosted and managed by the Trust. It is worth noting that the Pilot is funded until March 2025 and if successful, further consideration will need to be given in relation to the funding streams.

## 5.7 Voice of Children and Young People

VOS and FIYA forums continue to provide reports to CPB on work they undertake. During 2023 this included participation in Holiday Activities (Malt House Stables, Drayton Manor, barbeque afternoon, weekly sports sessions and employability workshops) which were funded by the HAF programme, parent consultations, drop-in sessions, presenting at SCT's AGM, developing and supporting the NHS redesign and House Project, FIYA Awards, and Care Leavers Week.

On 21 February 2024, Children and Education Services Scrutiny Board met with Sandwell VOS and FIYA for an engagement session. The session focused on children in care and young people presented what positive work is in place for them and what they hope will change in the future.



Children and young people were asked to identify areas they feel need more attention to improve their development and care experiences which include:

- Protective characteristics
- Policies are developed with children and young people at the centre
- Corporate parents to use loving language
- Being treated as children first and children in care second – they are children first.

## 5.8 Christmas Gifts

In December 2023, at the height of the cost of living crisis, SMBC, SCT and the Black Country NHS contributed £2020 to ensure current care experienced young people received a Christmas gift this holiday.

## 5.9 Webpages Update

Corporate Parenting intranet pages have been updated to provide comprehensive information about Corporate Parenting:

<https://intranet.sandwell.gov.uk/corporateparenting>

## 6 What Are We Worried About?

### 6.1 Local Offer

In 2022, the West Midlands ADCS developed a blueprint for a Local Offer aimed at care-experienced young people aged 16-25. Work has progressed for Sandwell's local offer, with some proposals being implemented using the existing resources and reconfiguration of services. However, several aspirations remain unachieved due to a shortage of necessary resources.

- Bridging the apprenticeship wage gap to the national living wage
- An increase to the care leavers university bursary
- Providing free eye tests and glasses
- Offering a birthday present and festival allowance
- Establishing a mentoring scheme

### 6.2 Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET)



While the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) figures increased to 1.8% for 19-21-year olds with care experience in March 2023, this continues to be a significant concern for the Board.

The Board conducted a review of the Not in Education, Employment, and Training (NEET) strategy and action plan. The primary focus was on identifying young people at risk, facilitating their transition to adulthood, offering specialised support, enhancing post-16 education, and expanding training and employment prospects. Additionally, ongoing efforts aim to improve opportunities and boost the participation of young individuals in education, employment, or training (EET).

### 6.3 Sufficiency of homes for our children in our care

It is well recognised that we are facing a national crisis regarding placement sufficiency within children's social care. The situation continues to impact directly on children whose needs are not fully met whilst in care, as well as the financial implications that arise because of insufficient suitable provision within the care market. We know care planning prior to care is critical and analysis tells us that children are entering care appropriately. Positively, analysis of practice has shown that more children are being prevented from entering care and as of April 2023, the rate of entrants into care was 20.4 per 10,000. This is lower than statistical neighbours (31.6), West Midlands (27) and England averages (26). There is more consistent and appropriate decision making when care is required; and for children in residential care, a more proactive approach is seeing some children step down into foster care. There may be limitations due to placement availability, but the commissioning and operational team are actively trying to reintegrate children into family living where possible. However, overwhelmingly the biggest factor is the lack of available and appropriate care placements to meet children's identified needs. This impacts significantly on the finances required because in many situations, there is no choice but to accept the only available placement, irrespective of cost and whether it is a suitable match.

To this extent, in addition to the involvement through the regional and regional forms, SMBC and SCT are working towards embarking on a



major project to - an integrated approach to care and engage partners and other stakeholders to achieve Fostering Friendly status for Sandwell.

#### **6.4 Sustainability of Funding – Emotional and Well being Hub**

There is continued concern with regards to the absence of recurrent funding to support the prevention emotional well-being, which is crucial for providing consistent early intervention support for those children who need it, but through the pilot programmes and evaluation of impact the services have had it is hoped that any savings can support a reinvest model.

### **7 Next Steps**

#### **7.1 Corporate Parenting Strategy**

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 is currently undergoing a refresh. Children, young people, and partners are co-producing this strategy. The finalised version will be reviewed and approved in the next financial year.

#### **7.2 Local Offer**

Cabinet Member for Children and Education Services, Cllr Simon Hackett, and Michael Jarrett (previous Director for Children and Education) have led on efforts relating to corporate sponsorship as part of our social value initiatives.

In February 2024, Michael Jarrett, met with UK Director and European Director for Infosys's UK to explore the possibility of their support for the Sandwell Local Offer aimed at care-experienced young people. This process will be continued by the Interim Director of Children and Education Services, Sally Gilles

#### **7.3 NEET**

As already alluded to, the Skills, Employment and Training Team presented a deep dive update into Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) at CPB in January 2024. It was identified that Sandwell youth unemployment is an issue affecting not only care experienced Young people but also their peers. The team is working closely with Elected Member for Children and Education Services to hold a Youth Employment Summit in Summer 2024.



Sandwell Social Value team continues to collaborate with local businesses and organisation to identify opportunities for Care Experienced Young People including Lovell and Sandwell Anchor Network. All identified opportunities are shared with the Skills, Employment and Training team who allocate it to a interested young person.

Think Sandwell will continue to complete monthly drop-in sessions at Metsec, this has been an opportunity to build relationships and understand the needs of individuals and provide support to prepare them for the world of work. Young people will also be able to access home visits if they are unable to attend the drop-in sessions. Short training courses have been utilised to build confidence in the workplace, become work ready, identifying interests and these have proved successful with 1 care leaver accessing an apprenticeship following completion.

Board members will visit Coventry Local Authority to meet with lead officers for Skills, Employment and Training team, the Participation team, and Virtual School. This is part of a partnership collaboration prompted by Coventry being identified as having an outstanding practices in the following areas.

Following the Assistant Directors business planning workshops, they have been asked to consider our care-experienced young people when writing their new corporate business plans. The aim is to identify how services could support our young people, whether this could be through providing work experience, employment opportunities, and employment mentoring.

#### 7.4 Voice of Children and Young People

Children in care and care-experienced young people have identified their focus areas for 2024, which include ensuring the continuation of HAF funding, parent forum involvement, foster carer appreciation days, year-end celebrations, and a Christmas party.



## 7.5 Mandatory E-Training

Corporate Parenting Mandatory E-training is currently being developed and is due to be published in the new financial year. Corporate Parenting training will be delivered to the leadership team and all councillors during Corporate Parenting week: Monday 10 – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

## 7.6 Protected Characteristics

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh McCallister, put forward two key recommendations aimed at improving the well-being of individuals with care experience:

- The government should recognise care experience as a protected characteristic.
- New laws should be enacted to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to a broader range of public bodies and organisations.

While the UK government has not yet approved care experience as a protected characteristic, Local Authorities are taking action at a local level. Sandwell aims to join the 78 other Authorities that have already approved care experience as a protected characteristic with this process to be completed by June 2024.

## 8 Summary

The CPB acknowledges the progress made by the Council and partner agencies over the past year. However, it is recognising areas for improvement in supporting children in care and care experienced young people.

While positive changes have been made, the CPB will continue to focus on several key areas:

- NEET
- Health Assessments and Dental Care
- Preparation for Adulthood.
- Early Intervention for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health
- Sufficiency of homes for our children in care





The Board has a clear plan for 2024, emphasising collaboration to meet the needs of our children and care-experienced young people.

## 9 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The nonrecurrent funding provides uncertainty and instability of delivery services and the ability to plan for long term programmes to make a sustained impact.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	n/a
<b>Risk:</b>	n/a
<b>Equality:</b>	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	If the services are not provided, it could likely lead to negative effects on the health and wellbeing of our communities.
<b>Social Value:</b>	n/a
<b>Climate Change:</b>	n/a
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	Without targeted service, Children in care and care leavers are more likely than their peers to have poor life outcomes and struggle with their long-term physical, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

## 10 Background Papers

[Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023](#)

[Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021 – 2023](#)

[Protective characteristics Report by Terry Galloway](#)



This page is intentionally left blank

## Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**25 March 2024**

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022/23
<b>Director:</b>	Sally Giles Interim Director of Children and Education
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Gillian Ming Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Business Manager <a href="mailto:gillian_ming@sandwellchildrenstrust.org">gillian_ming@sandwellchildrenstrust.org</a>

### 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board considers and notes the 2022/23 Sandwell Children Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 introduced Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) giving equal responsibilities to 3 statutory agencies (Local Authorities, Police and Integrated Commissioning Boards - ICB’s) for agreeing and ensuring the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Sandwell have added a fourth equal statutory partner, being Sandwell Children’s Trust who are the providers for children’s targeted and social care services in the Borough. These four key agencies are known locally and leads Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP).
- 2.2 To bring transparency for children, families and all practitioners about the activity undertaken, the safeguarding partners are duty bound to publish a report at least once in every 12-month period. The report must set:



- SCSP's summary of activities during 22/23, to include Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.
- The priorities for the reported period and what activities took place to take forward these priorities.
- Evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training and the impact on practice for improved outcomes for children and families, from Early Help to children in care and care leavers.
- Any resulting improvements from activities (including from Rapid Reviews and Local or National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews)
- The scrutiny arrangements in place and how successful they have been to support the MASA
- The role, visibility and voice of children and families in the safeguarding activities.

2.3 The attached annual report published by SCSP outlines the activities undertaken in line with the requirements during 2022/23 and provides an overview of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Sandwell during that period.



2.4 The report provides evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies and demonstrates where increased attention and additional developmental activities have taken place to areas identified for improvement and to strengthen multi agency working to safeguard vulnerable children and families.

2.5 Throughout the annual report, SCSP are able to evidence the delivery of the core functions, including training; monitoring outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers; a record of decisions and actions taken by the partners during the year (or planned to be taken) to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, including any resulting in improvements; and the ways in which partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.



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

3.1 The work of SCSP, and the annual report itself, provides a transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of the local safeguarding arrangements. This enables a holistic view in respect of the Council's Vision 2030 and in particular:

	<p><b>Best start in life for children and young people</b></p> <p>Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.</p>
	<p><b>Strong resilient communities</b></p> <p>Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.</p>

### 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) was established on 1 April 2019 as the local strategic body with shared and equal duties placed on four named key agencies to ensure joined-up arrangements are developed, and effective for all local agencies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Sandwell.

4.2 The local Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) was initially developed and published in 2019 following full consultation with relevant agencies, children and young people and is widely shared to ensure safeguarding children in Sandwell is everyone's responsibility and all children have the opportunities to achieve their full potential as well as for all children and families to receive services at the right time according to their individual needs and in a co-ordinated way.

4.3 In compliance with the requirements for LSP, the SCSP have a programme of scrutiny activities to continuously 'test out' the effectiveness of the MASA and the work of the SCSP. This annual report demonstrates the areas and themes scrutinised by the resident Independent Scrutineer and includes areas identified for development



arising from the annual scrutiny activities including any actions relevant to partner agencies.

- 4.4 Working Together 2018 encourages the Independent Scrutineer to comment on the accuracy of LSP's annual reports prior to publication. This can also be seen in the final section of this year's annual report.
- 4.5 The SCSP currently have an Independent Chair and the future of this role is under review. It is intended for the outcome of this review to inform the leadership arrangements as of April 2024.
- 4.6 The SCSP met on 6 occasions (bi-monthly) to manage the core and progressing business, with a further 2 additional partnership development events taking place during 22/23.

### **The current position**

- 4.7 The SCSP have maintained its two substantive priority areas as: tackling child neglect and exploitation with the additional area for focus on 'early help' identified from the previous year and the progress made is included in this annual report.
- 4.8 There continues to be a comprehensive partnership training programme to ensure that the children's workforce remain abreast of new national, regional and local practice updates and receive effective and timely learning and development opportunities.
- 4.9 The local arrangements for the review of child deaths, through the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) sit within the auspices of the local authorities Public Health and ICB's and are monitored via the formation of a Black Country CDOP. SCSP is represented as members within this group with the SCSP receiving annual updates as is referenced in the annual report by the SCSP.

### **Consultation**

- 4.12 The Partnership has been widely consulted on the annual report which was ratified by the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership on 25 October 2023 and shared with other strategic boards to inform work happening locally to support children and families. This includes the member of the 5+ Boards as; Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB),



Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB), Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership (DASP), Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) Improvement Boards and Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board Meeting (SSPPCB).

4.14 The annual report is published on the SCSP website and a copy was sent to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, Department for Education (DfE), Police & Crime Commissioner and the What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care within seven days of being published.

### Sustainability of Proposals

4.15 Areas for development or assurance relevant to each agency, are set out in the Annual Report. The delivery of these actions continues to be monitored, together with the impact on outcomes.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. The formulation of the annual report was met from existing resources.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	In accordance with Working Together 2018, a copy of the report has been sent to the Chief Executive of Sandwell MBC, Chief Executive of Sandwell Children’s Trust, Leader of the Council, Chair of Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board, Chair of the Health and Well-being Board and Police and Crime Commissioner and the NHS Integrated Care Board. The report is also made publicly available on each of the Safeguarding Partners respective websites.
<b>Risk:</b>	There are no risk implications arising from this report.
<b>Equality:</b>	The SCSP annual report is the responsibility of the SCSP and is a summary and assessment of the work of all partners in meeting the safeguarding agenda. This report is for information only and the actions contained within the Board’s plan will have their own Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) as required.



<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Ensuring that partners work together to keep children safe underpins their right to enjoy health and wellbeing. Sharing intelligence and data about the prevalence of safeguarding concerns provides opportunities to intervene earlier to protect children from harm.
<b>Social Value:</b>	As a partnership our vision is for all children to be safe at home and in their communities, where they are loved, cared for, and have the stability to grow healthily and to achieve their ambition.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	N/A

## 6 Appendices

2022/23 Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report.

## 7. Background Papers

None.







## FOREWORD: LESLEY HAGGER, INDEPENDENT CHAIR, SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP.



Welcome to the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership's Annual Report for the year April 2022 to March 2023. In this report you will hear about the work that has taken place to strengthen, improve and evidence our joined-up and effective safeguarding practice; you will see the results of the important work carried out by our Independent Scrutineer; and you will also read about the priorities for our future work.

Statutory safeguarding partners in Sandwell have continued to work closely together with an ambition to provide visible and significant leadership across the

Borough to safeguard Sandwell's children and young people. The Partnership has continued to benefit from representation and involvement from other relevant partners such as our schools, the voluntary and community sector, and faith organisations, all of which are key providers of support to children, young people, and their families.

Our two key priorities, neglect and exploitation, have continued to drive the work of the Partnership, with the inclusion during the year of a third area of focus: Early Help. The development and publication of a robust quality assurance framework during the year has helped the Partnership to deepen its understanding of safeguarding activity in Sandwell and take actions to respond to those findings and improve our ways of working.

At the start of the year, we began to distribute a newsletter following each Partnership meeting, so that the widest possible number of agencies and individuals can be kept in touch with the work of the Partnership. Feedback has indicated that this has been a useful way of communicating key messages and securing feedback and involvement from the widest range of practitioners and organisations. A range of other resources were published including a new website for all practitioners, [sandwellearlyhelp.info](http://sandwellearlyhelp.info), an updated multi-agency child exploitation strategy, and multi-agency 'Was Not Brought' guidance to support all practitioners working with children who may not be attending health appointments, home visits or school.

May 2022 saw the Ofsted ILACS inspection in Sandwell. Whilst this is primarily an inspection of children's social care services, there were important messages for all agencies regarding the application of thresholds when referring to children's social care to ensure children and families receive the right service. As a result, the Partnership published its updated Threshold Guidance in June 2022, which was supported by a series of workshops to support agencies with their understanding and use of the guidance. Messaging was further strengthened later in the year to reflect the shared responsibilities that all agencies have to keep children safe even once a Multi-Agency Request Form has been submitted. However, this is an area that still needs significant improvement and will continue to be a high priority of focus next year.

One of the most insightful meetings that took place during the year was the Take-Over Day, when young people 'took-over' the Partnership meeting. Young people told us about their concerns around gangs, knife crime, 'what next?' after school/college, drug use and bullying in schools. A range of actions were progressed including the Bullying Awareness training course for education staff that became over-subscribed as a result.

The Partnership has continued to engage with regional and national work, including having a better understanding of equality, diversity, and inclusion in safeguarding with a view to addressing disproportionality and creating a better understanding of the rich and diverse community that is Sandwell.

The biggest challenge in a report such as this is being able to demonstrate the difference that the Partnership's activities have made, and asking the question: are children safer as a result? There is a great deal of evidence in this Annual Report, although the more questions we ask, the more we find that needs to be done, and in a nutshell that is the core purpose of the Partnership – to ask the right questions, to bring analysis to the answers, and then collectively to make improvements to the system to protect our children and young people. I hope that this Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of child safeguarding in Sandwell and that you can see and share the commitment to continuous improvement.

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
<b>1. Introduction What is Safeguarding</b>	Page 4
• Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Structure	Page 4
• SCSP Vision & Priorities for 22/23	Page 5
<b>2. Sandwell’s Child Population</b>	Page 7
<b>3. An Overview of Sandwell’s Child Population – Accessing and receiving Multi-Agency Help and Support during 22/23:</b>	Page 8
• Vulnerable Children and Social Care Population in Sandwell	Page 9
<b>4. Leadership functions in driving the MASA during 22/23</b>	Page 14
• The Structural Arrangements delivering the safeguarding functions	Page 14
• Activities undertaken to deliver the SCSP MASA	Page 14
• Independent Chair	Page 15
• Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	Page 15
• Integrated Care Board	Page 16
<b>5. Delivering the Core Functions during 22/23</b>	Page 17
• Sandwell Learning from Practice and Review	Page 17
• Quality of Practice, Performance and Assurance	Page 19
• Learning and Development	Page 20
<b>6. Subgroups for Priority Area</b>	Page 23
• Tackling Neglect	Page 23
• Child Exploitation Board	Page 24
• Early Help	Page 24
<b>7. Safeguarding Reference Groups</b>	Page 27
• Community Safeguarding	Page 27
• Sandwell Safeguarding Health Partnership	Page 28
<b>8. Scrutiny Activities during 22 -23</b>	Page 30
<b>9. Activities of Significance to the SCSP MASA during 22/23</b>	Page 31
• Ofsted Inspection May 2022	Page 31
• SHAPE Takeover October 2022	Page 31
<b>10. Summarising the work of SCSP during 22/23</b>	Page 33
<b>11. Improvement Activities and Direction of travel for 23/24</b>	Page 35
<b>12. Glossary of Terms</b>	Page 36
<b>13. Independent Scrutiny of SCSP Annual Report 2022-23</b>	Page 37

Local Children’s Safeguarding Partnerships (LCSPs) are in place in each local authority area having responsibility for ensuring that children of all ages and abilities get the help, support and protection they need to keep them safe from abuse and harm. The legislation which orders the existence of LCSPs stems from the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which places a duty on key statutory agencies to work together with other agencies in the local areas and agree local Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

### What is Safeguarding?

For the purposes of this report, the remit and focus for safeguarding is about the actions taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. Safeguarding in Sandwell is everyone’s responsibility, and every single person who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play.

Child Protection is part of safeguarding and refers to the activity undertaken to protect children suffering from, or at risk of, significant harm (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018).

From the above distinct areas mentioned, the SCSP describes the above to all partners as:

- The actions that we must all take to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.
- Adhering to the multi-agency systems, processes and arrangements in place to ensure that all children in Sandwell can be protected from abuse and maltreatment.
- Abiding with the agreed robust structures and pathways for preventing harm to children’s health or development.
- Utilising the available provisions to ensure children of all ages, from all backgrounds and abilities have equal opportunities to grow up within provisions of safe and effective care.
- Being proactive, skilled and confident to recognise the early signs that children are in need of help, support and/or protection and take action to enable all children and young people to have the best possible outcomes.

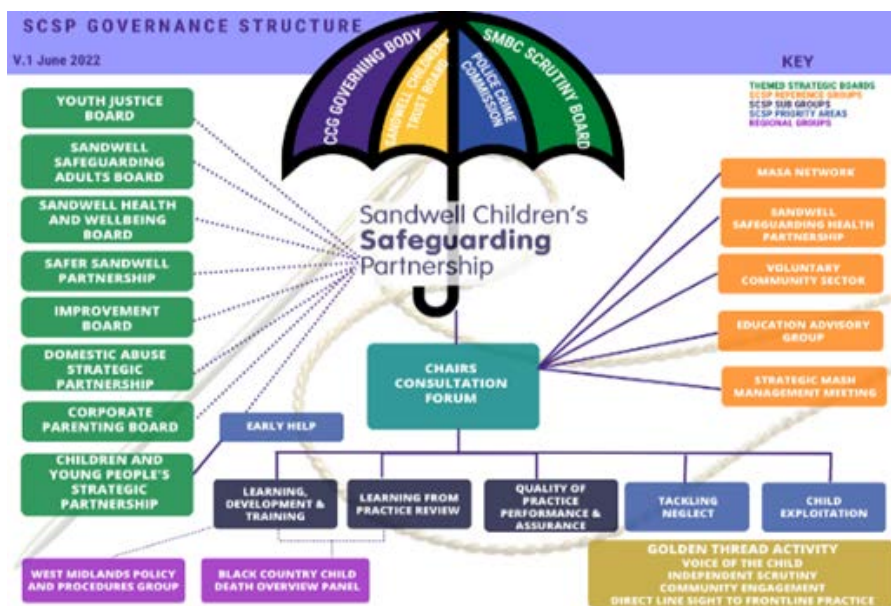
### The SCSP Structure

Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) was established in April 2019 to ensure effective arrangements for ‘Safeguarding’ as is described above. The leadership functions sit within the auspices of 4 Statutory Safeguarding Partners, namely:

- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC)
- West Midlands Police (WMP)
- NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) (formerly CCG); and
- Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) as a 4th partner, hosting the provision of Children’s Social Care services in Sandwell.

These agencies as named, working in collaboration with other agencies, have agreed the local structures and MASA required to respond to the local safeguarding needs of the child population in Sandwell.

The Safeguarding Leads have statutory responsibilities for setting the priorities for the SCSP, agreeing its budget, contributions and resources. Its prime role is to ensure robust local multi agency arrangements exist to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Sandwell, particularly those at the greatest need of help and/or protection from the actions or inaction of other people.



The SCSP has a 3-tiered structure comprising of the SCSP main board where all four Strategic Leads join together on a bi-monthly basis to include Professional Advisors, a Local Council Member and named relevant partners from Education and Sandwell Community and Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). An Independent Scrutineer as is named in Statutory guidance attends this 'top-tier', where meetings are led/facilitated by an Independent Chair.

In addition to routine meetings, four extraordinary/exceptions meetings were arranged during the reporting year 22/23 to include the four safeguarding leads, the 'Independent Chair' and Business Manager only. In addition to the meetings alluded to above, the SCSP Chair, Independent Scrutineer and Business Manager meet on a bi-monthly basis to consider on-going strategic safeguarding priorities and operational matters arising that may impact on the delivery of effective multi agency working, and therefore to be directed to the SCSP agenda for further deliberation.

The SCSP Chair and Business Manager represented the SCSP at a 5+ allied board of partnerships, including the Safeguarding Adult Board, Community Safety Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board, Children and Families Strategic Partnership and the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership, bringing to the attention of the SCSP any safeguarding initiatives undertaken by these bodies as well as any issues emergent in other portfolio areas.

The SCSP reviews its structure each year, with the most recent being in January 2022 when the governance and reporting processes of the reference and subgroups were refreshed and reinforced to ensure a clear line of sight and improved monitoring of effective delivery of its core functions and priorities.

The SCSP expects all organisations named, (and those who are not named in the structure however do come in to contact and/or provide services to children and families in the line of their duties) to cooperate with the local MASA[1] and act as a 'Relevant Partner' to collaborate with the SCSP, particularly as they may have duties under section 10 and/or section 11 of the Children Act 2004. A list of relevant agencies is set out in: [The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency \(England\) Regulations 2018](#)

The structure illustrated aids the SCSP to organise its Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system whereby:

- Children are safeguarded, and their welfare promoted.
- Partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share, and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively.
- There is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats.
- Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice.
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

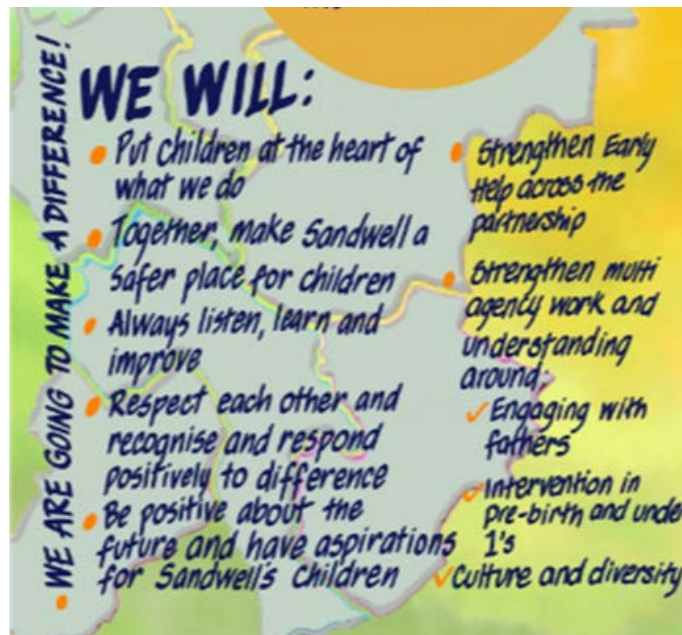
### **SCSP Vision and Priorities for 2022 / 2023**

The 2021 SCSP MASA as publicised articulates the collective vision and priority areas of focus for three years with the flexibility to add and amend the delivery plans on a yearly basis.

The SCSP vision born from consultation with the workforce and feedback from children and young people living in Sandwell underpins the MASA and as such is identifiable across all agencies who have individually and collectively committed to:

“Our vision is for all children to be safe at home and in their communities, where they are loved, cared for and have the stability to grow healthily and to achieve their ambition”

The value statements hinging 'our vision are as follows: -



## 22-23 Priorities for the SCSP

- Neglect
- Exploitation,
- Early Help (from 2021)

Additional areas identified and elevated as themed areas for improvement during 2022 –23 include:

- Focus on Front Door, Early Help and the responsibilities of agencies.
- Refreshing and strengthening the threshold guidance.
- Under 1s and injuries in non-mobile babies: this includes activities to increase awareness of the role of Sandwell Unborn Baby Network (SUBN) in identifying concerns 'early' and applying appropriate preventative support.
- Creating a culturally competent workforce.
- Increased engagement with voluntary, community and faith-based organisations.
- Better engagement with fathers and significant others.
- Emotional wellbeing of children and young people.
- Responding to regional and national reviews.

The role and functions for LSCPs are further defined in the statutory guidance Working Together 2018, within which there is a requirement for safeguarding partners to publish a report at least once in every twelve-month period detailing the partnership activities undertaken during the year. At a local level, this means:

- What the SCSP have done during 22/23 because of the arrangements, including in relation to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.
- The priorities for the report period and what activities took place to take forward these priorities.
- Evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training and the impact on practice for improved outcomes for children and families, from Early Help to children in care and care leavers.
- Any resulting improvements from activities (including from Rapid Reviews and Local or National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews)
- The scrutiny arrangements in place and how successful they have been to support the MASA
- The role, visibility and voice of children and families in the safeguarding activities.

While the fundamental purpose of this report is to depict the work undertaken by the SCSP over the last 12 months, it is important to 'set the scene' and give a sense of Sandwell, the demographics, the population and the child population accessing and receiving services, including Multi-Agency Early Help and Statutory Social Care support over the reporting period.

Sandwell is an urban area lying in the centre of the West Midlands conurbation, made up of six small urban towns.

The population of Sandwell is 328,450 people (The Office for National Statistics 2019), of which approximately 82,995 are children and young people under the age of 18 years. This is 25.1% of the total population in the area. Sandwell is ranked 12th in the most deprived Local Authorities out of the 317 in England (Indices of Deprivation IoD, 2019, Rank of Average Score).



Sandwell is an ethnically diverse borough, with children and young people from minority ethnic groups accounting for 49% of all children compared with 26.2% in England (0-17 years). The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are of Indian origin (8,246) and Pakistani origin (5,917). 57.1% of school children are from minority ethnic groups.

The Public Health England (PHE) Child Health Profile (March 2020) stated the Health and Wellbeing of children in Sandwell is worse than the majority of other areas in England particularly in terms of infant mortality, teenage pregnancy and child obesity.

25.5% of children aged 16 years were recorded as living in poverty (2016), 2.7% of school pupils had social, emotional and mental health needs (2018) and 4.3% of young people aged 16 to 18 were not in education, employment and training.

The proportion of children entitled to free school meals in primary school is 26.3% (the national average is 21.6%); in secondary schools it is 27.6% (the national average is 18.9%). The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary school is 32.4% (the national average is 20.9%); in secondary schools it is 29.2% (the national average is 17.2%).

From what is known and stated above in respect of the child population in Sandwell, it would be expected that children and young people receiving support from services would be higher than that of many other local authority areas across England.



29,729 Total Contacts, with 4194 Referrals to MASH



625 open to Strengthening Families  
367 Multi-Agency Early Help Assessments



802 Children in Care



68 First Time Entrants into Youth Justice



4048 Early Help Assessments completed



1574 Child Abuse Crimes



641 Children in Need

**82,995 Children and Young People under 18**

Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership



862 re-referrals to MASH



47% Initial Health Assessments completed in timescale



339 Children on Child Protection Plans



72.1% Early Help Success Rate



1678 Missing Episodes



6.7% subject to second or subsequent Child Protection Plan



89.7% Care Plans in Timescale



## Contacts and Referrals

- 29,563 contacts were received to SCT Front Door from 1st April 2022 through to 31st March 2023.
- 10,581 of those contacts were received from Police, making up 36% of the total, with Education contacting 4,489 times at 15.2% of the total.
- 7,010 (23.7%) of the 29,563 contacts had an outcome of action for SCT
- 4,194 referrals were received by SCT, with 850 of those from Education (20.3%) and 1,436 from Police (34.2%). This is an average of 350 referrals per month.
- 3,613 of the 4,194 referrals went to Single Assessment, with a conversion rate of 86.1%.

## Domestic Abuse Contacts

- 4,798 Domestic Abuse contacts were received by SCT totalling 16.2% of the contacts received. This is slightly lower than the previous end of year position which was 16.9%.
- Of the 4,798 Domestic Abuse contacts received, 4,783 of those were from Police (99.7%). Nearly half of the contacts that are made to SCT from Police are in relation to Domestic Abuse (45.2%).

## Missing Children and Episodes

- 1053 young people had a missing episode within the 2022-2023 year. There were 1678 missing episodes in total, meaning that on average children went missing for 1.6 episodes each. Given the number of children and young people in Sandwell, there were on average 87 children missing each month at an average rate of 10 children in every 10,000 going missing for a period of time.
- 87% of children that went missing received a 'return home interview' to discuss why they went missing, where they had been and to advise of the risks of going missing. 82% of these were completed within 72 hours of the young person returning home.

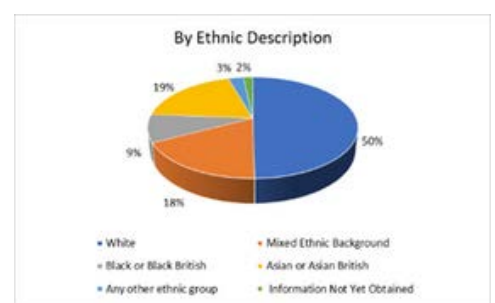
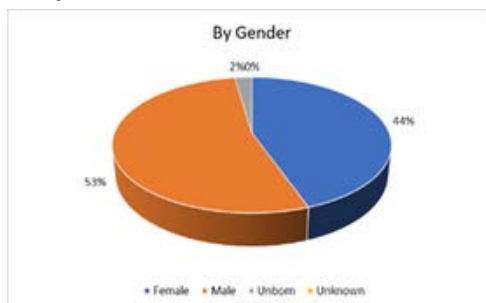
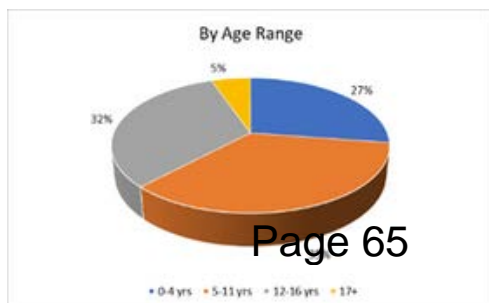
## Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation

- 50 children were assessed as being at risk of Child Exploitation by the end of March 2023.
- None were assessed as 'low risk,' 39 (78%) were assessed as 'medium risk' and 9 (18%) were assessed as 'high risk'.
- Of the 50 children at risk of Child Exploitation, 13 were assessed as at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (26%).

Contact to Referral/Met Threshold for EH	Q1 2022 - 2023	Q2 2022 - 2023	Q3 2022 - 2023	Q4 2022 - 2023
Total Contacts	7496	7072	7233	7925
Met Threshold for EH	2338	2330	2060	1872
% Met Threshold for EH	31.2%	32.9%	28.5%	23.6%

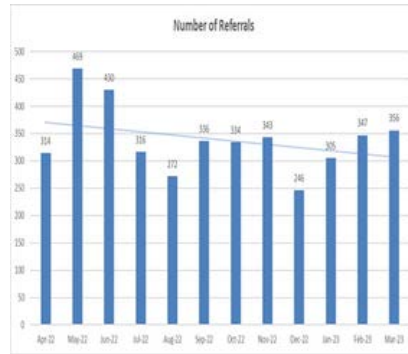
## Children in Need

- At the end of March 2022 there were 641 young people on a Child in Need Plan. This is a rate of 81 young people in every 10,000 in Sandwell - around 2.5 full classrooms of children.
- 16.5% of the young people on a Child in Need Plan have been so for 9 months or longer.
- 341 (53%) are male, 285 (44%) are female, with 15 (2%) unborn.
- 67 young people (10.5%) were identified as having a disability.
- 50% were White British, 18% from a Mixed ethnic origin, 19% were Asian or Asian British, 9% were Black or Black British and 5% were from Other Ethnic backgrounds.
- 175 of the 641 are under 4 years old - 27%.
- 24 of the 641 are between 5 and 11 years old - 35%.



## Re-Referrals

·967 (23%) of the 4,194 referrals received by SCT Front Door over the reporting period were re-referrals. This is above the West Midlands average (19.1%), the Statistical Neighbour average (20.4%) and the England average (21.5%).

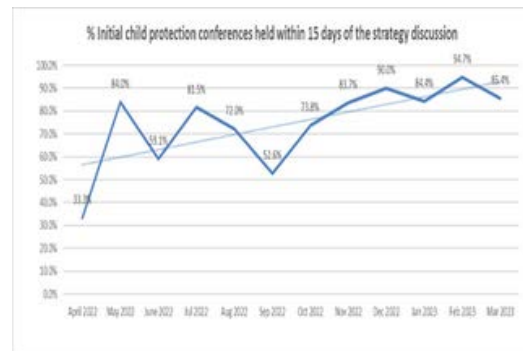
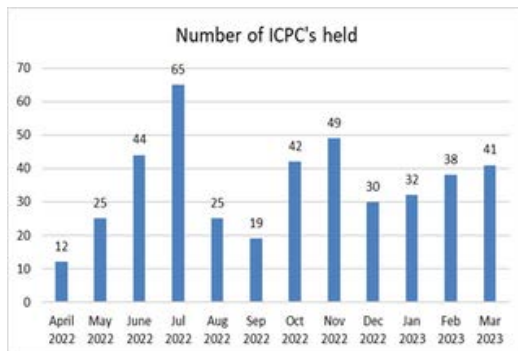


## Police Protection Orders

·Police issued 84 Protection orders over 2022-2023 that involved 130 young people.

## Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC)

- 422 ICPCs were held in the year 2022-2023 and on average 78% of these were held within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion. This is below the West Midlands average (85%), below the England average (83%) and also the Statistical Neighbour average (80.5%).
- 82.5% of ICPCs that were held by SCT resulted in a Child Protection Plan.



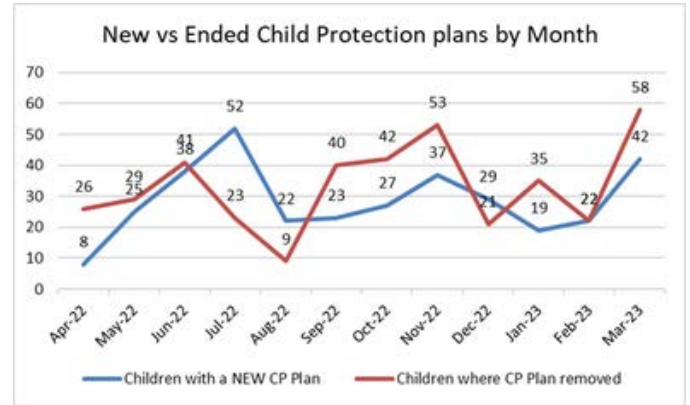
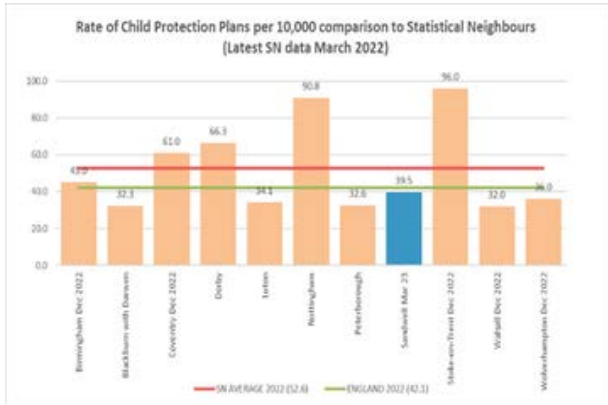
## Single Assessments

- 4,244 Single Assessments were completed by SCT over the course of the 2022-2023 year. 3,034 of these were completed within 45 working days (65.3%).
- 3,221 new assessments were completed, with 2,467 of these completed within 45 working days (67.8%).
- 2,377 initial visits as part of the assessment were completed within 5 working days of the assessment commencing (56%).
- Over the year, 2,583 of the 4,244 assessments (61%) concluded that there was either no further action required, that it could be stepped down to Early Help, or a referral was made to another agency that was not social services.

## Child Protection Plans

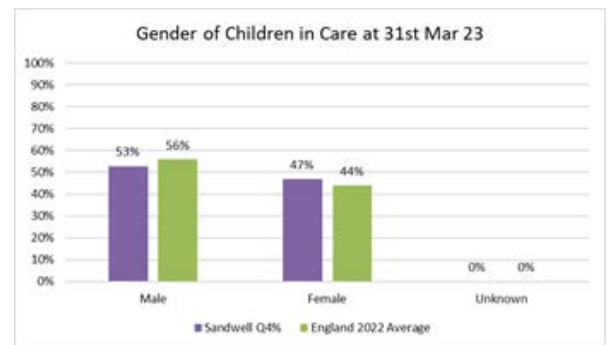
- At the end of March 2023 there were 339 young people on a Child Protection Plan. This is a rate of 39 young people in every 10,000 in Sandwell. This is below the England average of 42.1 young people and below the Statistical Neighbour average of 52.6.
- Over the course of 2022-2023, 344 young people started a Child Protection Plan whilst 399 were removed from Child Protection Plans (deficit of 55 young people).
- 70% of these young people have been on a Child Protection Plan for less than 9 months, with 4.7% being on a plan for longer than 2 years (16 young people).
- 106 (31%) of these young people have previously been on a Child Protection Plan.
- On average 9.3% of the visits made to young people during 22/23 were within timescale (20 working days).

- In March 2023, 82% of young people on Child Protection Plans had their plan updated within timescale (6 months).
- 54% of the young people are male whilst 43% are female. 3% are unborn

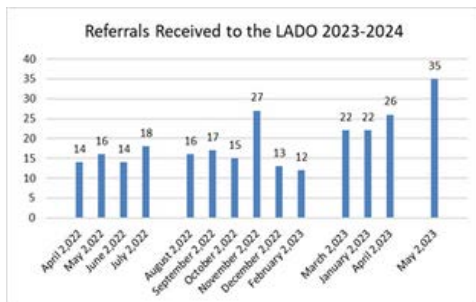


### Children in Care

- At the end of the year 2022-2023 there were 802 Children in Care in Sandwell. That equates to 94 children in every 10,000 in Sandwell. This was below the Statistical Neighbour average of 97.6 and above the England average of 70.
- 53% of the young people were male, with 47% female.
- 53% were White British, 25% from a Mixed ethnic origin, 9% were Asian or Asian British, 10% were Black or Black British and 3% were from Other Ethnic backgrounds.
- 63% were between the ages of 5 and 15 years old.
- 39% were in external foster placements, 17% in internal foster placements, 19% placed with connected carers and 11% placed at home with parents. The remaining 16% were in various other placement types.
- 81% of the children in care were assessed as at risk of abuse or neglect.
- 96.7% of children in care had their review health assessments completed within the past 12 months.
- On average, 90% of children in care aged 0-15 years old had their care planning completed within timescale, with 91% of them having a single or multiple track plan of permanence at their first LAC review.
- 94% of children in care had a Personal Education Plan (PEP) completed.



### LADO Referrals



Through the LADO, Sandwell complies with the statutory duty and manages allegations for people in 'positions of trust'. The LADO is responsible for managing all child protection allegations made against staff and volunteers who work with children and young people in Sandwell. This includes Council/SCT staff, staff from partner agencies and volunteers. Reports on the activity of the LADO are received annually by members of the SCSP to ensure a full oversight of this important aspect of the safeguarding systems. The table above illustrates new referrals received by the LADO by month during the report period.

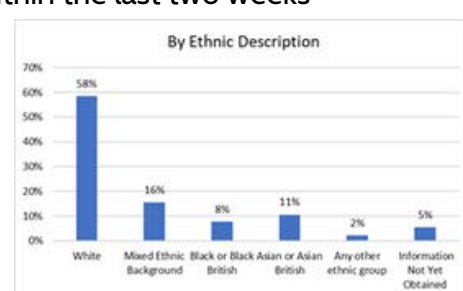
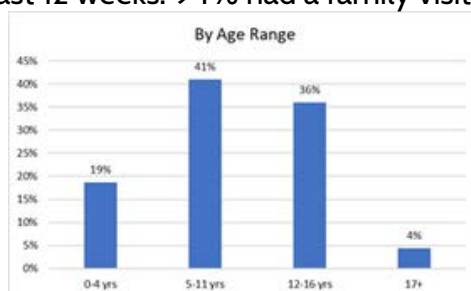
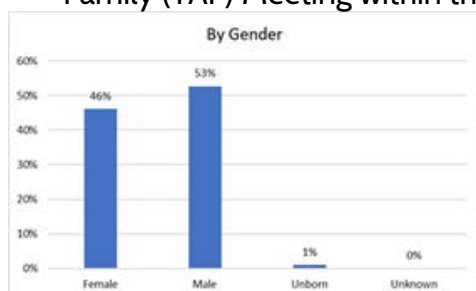
## Private Fostering Arrangements

At the end of 22/23, the annual report for Private Fostering Arrangements as presented to the SCSP recorded that there were 13 children who are subject to private fostering arrangements in Sandwell during the period. This is an increase of 4 from the previous year's (21/22) report which highlighted 9 children who were subject to these arrangements.

- A&E Admittance of Young People
- 26 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell for Alcohol misuse.
- 186 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell for Overdose.
- 42 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell for Self-Harm
- 50 young people were seen in A&E in Sandwell as a Victim of Assault

## Strengthening Families and Multi-Agency Early Help

- At the end of 2022-2023 there were 1017 young people open to Multi Agency Early Help and Strengthening Families Service.
- 53% of those were Male, 46% Female & 1% Unborn.
- 58% were White British, 11% Asian or Asian British, 16% from a Mixed Ethnic Group, 8% Black or Black British, 2% were from Other Ethnic Backgrounds and 5% Information not Obtained.
- 19% were between the ages of 0-4, 41% between 5-11, 36% between 12-16 and 4% were 17 years+.
- Of the young people open to Strengthening Families on 31 March 2023, 97% had a Team Around the Family (TAF) Meeting within the last 12 weeks. 94% had a family visit within the last two weeks



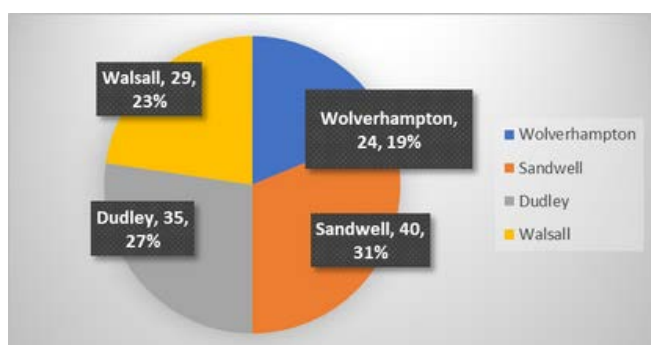
## Child Death during 22/23

Sandwell is a member of the Black Country Child Death Overview Panel (BC CDOP) as an inter-agency forum set up to conduct reviews for Child Death across the Black Country local authority areas (Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton).

The Child Death Overview Panel has a remit to provide scrutiny of a child's death for the purpose of: -

- identifying any matters of concern affecting the safety and welfare of children relating to the death or deaths,
- to consider any actions or recommendations that can be taken based on a death (or a pattern of deaths) to identify trends that require a multidisciplinary response.

## Deaths Notified in 2022-23



During 22/23 there were 128 child deaths notified across the Black Country. Chart 1 (left), provides a breakdown by area, with Chart 2 below showing a 4-year comparison across the Black Country areas since April 2019.

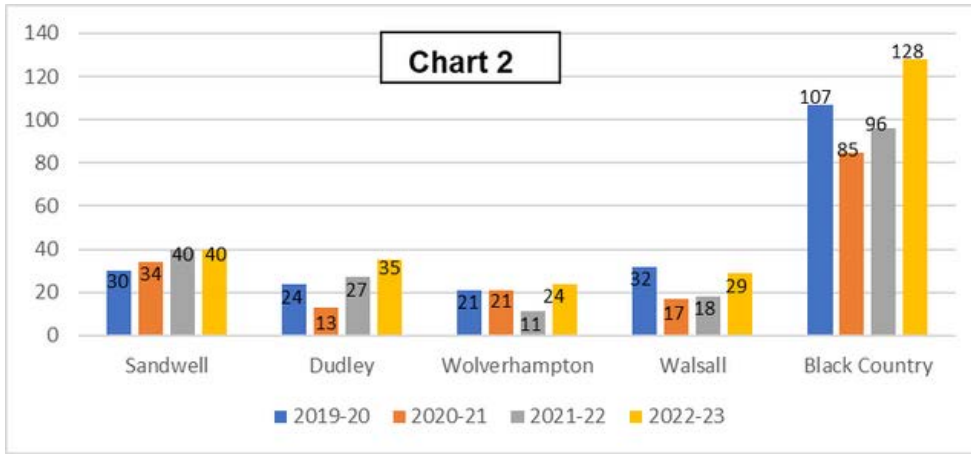


Chart 2 above shows that in the 3 years preceding 2022-23, Sandwell saw a year on year increase in the number of child deaths however the total for 2022-23 has remained the same as the previous year.



Chart 3 presents Sandwell specific data and shows that deaths in babies aged under 28 days have remained the same as the previous year, whereas there has been a decrease in the number of deaths in the 1-4 years and 10-14 years age ranges. Deaths in the 5-9 age range have risen by 3, and deaths in adolescents between the ages of 15-17 years have risen by 1.

Of the 128 deaths notified across the Black Country in 2022-23, 62 have required further scrutiny via a Joint Agency Response (JAR) meeting, 10 of which were attributed to Sandwell child deaths. From these 10 JAR meetings, 1 was referred to the SLPR subgroup and led to a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

**The Structural Arrangements delivering the Safeguarding Functions during 22/23**

The SCSP have a number of operational subgroups which focus on particular aspects of its work. Each group operates to a bespoke terms of reference with multi-agency memberships as pooled from nominated representatives from key agencies, as well as relevant partners from Education and third sector organisations. Members of each group have been specifically selected for having a particular knowledge that links them to the subgroup theme. Delivery plans are agreed annually with the SCSP receiving programme updates at each meeting.

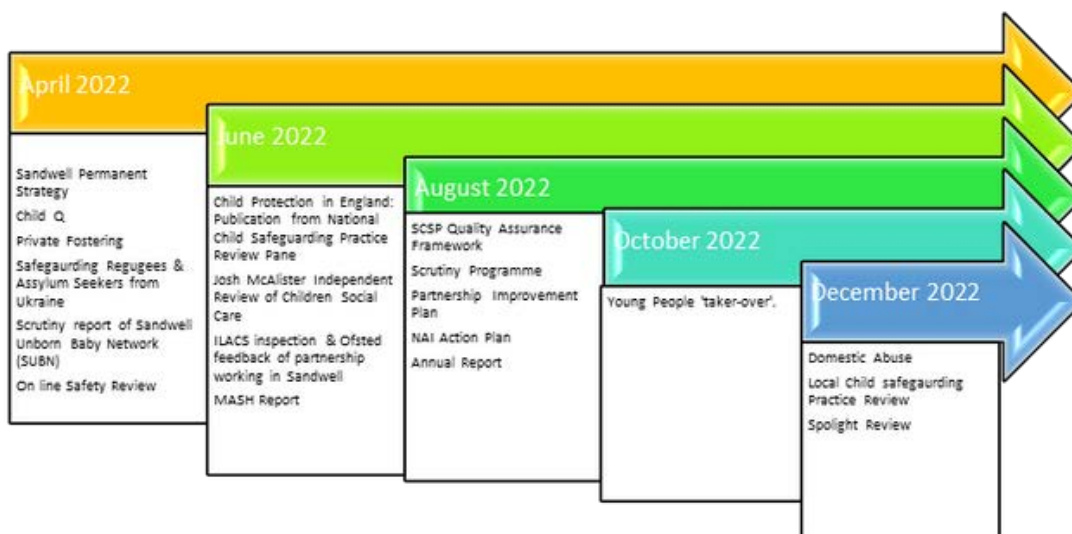
In addition to the SCSP multi agency subgroups, there are three single agency safeguarding reference groups that have been established. Sandwell Safeguarding Health Partnership formed by ICB for all the 'Health' economy, including commissioners and provider care services, and two reference groups created by the Local Authority for Education and the voluntary, community and faith-based organisations. These reference groups have a remit for transporting safeguarding messages, monitoring the effectiveness of single agency actions and providing reports and assurance to the SCSP on compliance and effectiveness.

Throughout this year's report there are links to YouTube audio form interviews facilitated by young people with each Safeguarding Partner, Sub and Reference group Chair, as well as the Independent Chair. At the start of the next section the Independent Chair shares her reflections on the effectiveness of the year's activities and any improvement work identified.

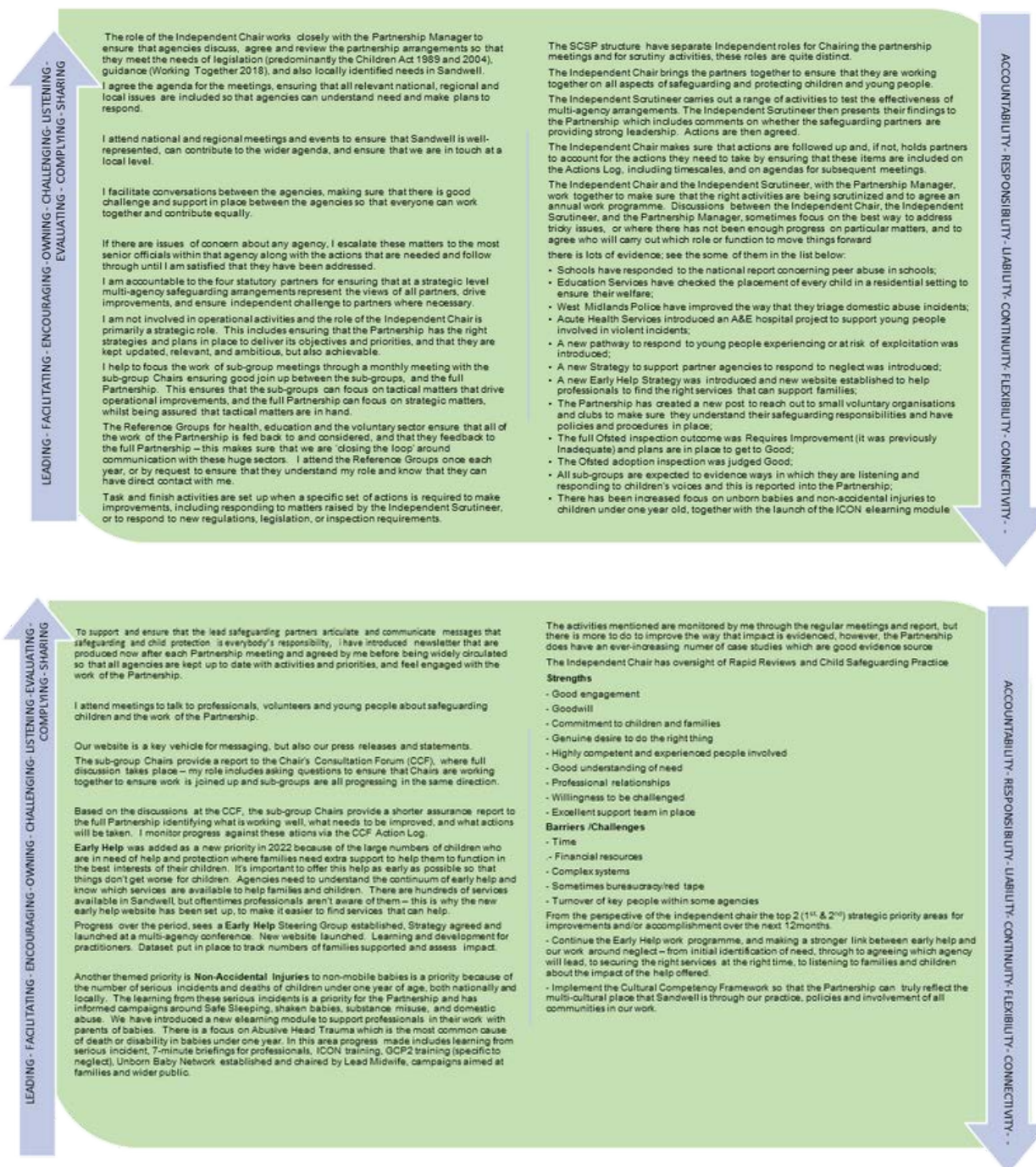
Leading into the details of activities undertaken across each tier of the SCSP structure to deliver the core functions, strategic priorities and elevated themes, the next section starts with an account from the Independent Chair Lesley Hagger responding to a series of questions when interviewed by young people. This will be followed by accounts taken from two of the four Statutory Safeguarding Partners outlining their role and what each have done to own, lead and drive forward the MASA over the period.

**Activities undertaken to deliver the SCSP MASA during 22/23**

The Independent Chair facilitates the SCSP meetings revolving the agenda to constantly seek assurance on quality and compliance with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. Much of the activities are delivered via subgroups that have been established to concentrate on the core functions and the agreed priority areas. In addition, across the period, the SCSP have covered a wide span of safeguarding themes, some of which are captured here:



Here the Independent Chair Lesley Hagger talks to young people about her role which is followed by a detailed account of the progress made against the themes identified and elevated for improvement during 22/23 from the previous year's annual report.



In addition to the narrative provided by the Independent Chair above, statutory partners have also been quizzed by young people as to how they have each delivered their leadership functions to safeguard children during the year. We have included the responses from the following two agency leads in this section of the report.

**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) Membership on SCSP is delegated to the Director of Children Services, Michael Jarrett. Here <https://youtu.be/v3mHXOm6d-g> Michael talks to young people about his role as a Statutory Partner and one of the leading members of the SCSP, followed by additional narrative below.**

LEADING - FACILITATING - ENCOURAGING - OWNING - CHALLENGING - EVALUATING - COMPLYING - SHARING

As the DCS, there is a requirement to work across a range of partners on all areas of children's services including, though not limited to, safeguarding and keeping children safe.

This level of collaboration is key to the delivery of key strategic priorities outlined in Keeping Children Safe which forms the basis of safeguarding arrangements for children and young people.

Working collaboratively, there are ongoing opportunities to strengthen practice and improve safeguarding arrangements (more heads are better than one mentality).

There are shared priorities across the partnership, and I am keen to work with all stakeholders and partners in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for all CYP including some of the most vulnerable.

Work undertaken and key to improving local practice was refreshing and strengthening the threshold guidance, continuum of help and support, including increasing the understanding and application of the threshold, gaining consent and information sharing and the role of the 'lead professional'

another area of focus this year was in relation to Domestic Abuse

- On the back of the launch and year on discussions re Early Help we need to see further partner ownership in relation to Early Help and for partners to take on the role of Lead Professional role to reduce bottlenecks across statutory services.
- In response to this priority I am coordinating a meeting with statutory and strategic leads across the system to strengthen the approach and develop a more systemic governance approach.

In relation to early help, SMBC children's services are active partners in shaping partnership working and addressing strategic priorities and in terms of Domestic Abuse, outside of the DASP (strategic partnership) SMBC children's services has secured funding to roll out perpetrator programmes to address the void left following the withdrawal of PCC (police and crime commission) withdrawal of funding.

I have also ensured that Cabinet and wider governance has overseen these strategic decisions and Resulting improvements

Areas for continued progress is strengthening the work across practice reviews including building more resilience across education services, and DA commissioning of programmes to address identified gaps.

**Strengths of SCSP includes:**

- Partners are very willing to take part – strong partnership arrangements

**Barriers and Challenges are:**

Capacity, ownership and accountability

The top 2 partnership priorities for 23/24

EH – system wide ownership and embedding of practice

Workforce – addressing the issues arising from the Care Review and local challenges across all areas of children's services. a

ACCOUNTABILITY - RESPONSIBILITY - LIABILITY - CONTINUITY - FLEXIBILITY - -

The NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB, formerly CCG) representative for SCSP is delegated to Maria Kilcoyne, the Associated Director for Safeguarding and Partnerships.

Here <https://youtu.be/3vHxrKdtBHI>, you can listen to Maria's response to questions posed to her by young people. Maria has also provided additional commentary as captured below.

We work as active members of the Safeguarding Partnership and are involved with the delivery of priorities and the examination of how effectively we are safeguarding at an operational and strategic level.

We participate in the Safeguarding Partnership Meetings delivering on their action plans and report regularly on progress, assisting in scrutiny of how well arrangements are working in Sandwell.

We have a very effective health coordination function as part of the Sandwell Safeguarding Partnership. There is a meeting that meets regularly with all health partners and it is chaired by our Designated Nurse for Safeguarding children.

As an ICB we use our NHS contracting process to ensure that safeguarding is at the heart of health delivery and that we are fully aware of the delivery of safeguarding training and supervision within the organisation providing services to children. We have a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are regularly reported and reviewed at Place and System level.

We are always looking at ways to strengthen communications and use a variety of means currently including newsletters, seven minute briefings, pod casts etc.

We collate thematic learning from reviews which is disseminated widely.

Much of the activities during this year focused on Front Door, Early Help and the responsibilities of all agencies

Clear data from audit and inspection that the front door was not working effectively and new processes, new MARF introduced. Information cascaded to all health staff. Clear drive on improving the early help offer to families to assist with this too.

Refreshing and strengthening the threshold guidance; continuum of help and support, including increasing the understanding and application of the threshold, gaining consent and information sharing and the role of the 'lead professional'

Again the inspection and audit information highlighted this as an area for improvement and it a great deal of effort has gone into raising awareness in health. This is about ensuring families get suitable help when they need it

-Neglect is an issue in terms of the effectiveness in how we deal with neglect identified through reviews and has required widescale cascade (focus on use of validated assessment tools (GCP2) and partner 'buy in' by developing service plans which outline agency response, commitment to raising awareness and training compliance with senior organisational sign off)

-We also have nearing the creation of a programme to upskill the workforce to be more culturally competent.

-Are seeing increased engagement with voluntary, community and faith-based organisations

-More engagement with fathers and significant others – include fathers etc in all assessments and gain their view and input.

Our attention is directed to a focus on Emotional wellbeing of children and young people work across the system to gain their voice and listen to what concerns they have (SHAPE board instrumental), and we have responded to the Solihull JTAI meant that we reviewed the ICB oversight of health input to MASH. This resulted in the introduction of a clear MASH specification and set of KPIs during 2022-3 which has now become part of our contracted process with health providers. This gives us a solid basis on which to review MASH performance in health and consider fluctuations in demand and resource requirements in future.

We also reviewed all supervision arrangements for health staff working within MASH and are about to embark up on a review of the MASH specification for health colleagues to include MASH KPIs for health and regular reporting on the MASH dashboard

Sandwell Interface Meeting offers an open forum to discuss current communication issues between SCT and Health partners partners (i.e., systems and notifications of meetings) enabling conversations to ensure strategies put in place are monitored for their effectiveness.

The Strengths of the SCSP and Partnership working:

Multi Agency commitment

Regular Multi agency audits

Knowing ourselves

The Barriers /Challenges identified are

Workforce/ capacity/turnover

Deprivation impacting on the population.

Top two priorities for progress and improvement in the coming year 23/24 are:

Communication to underpin above across all partners

Futher embed SUBN.

Under 1's and injuries in non-mobile babies, this includes activities to increase awareness of the role of Sandwell Unborn Baby Network (SUBN) in identifying concerns, early and applying appropriate preventative support.



The sections to follow in this year's report covers the activities undertaken to deliver the MASA. The report will include the progress of each subgroup, as well as an overview of the work undertaken by reference groups focusing on wellbeing and safeguarding, from early interventions by universal services through to the ever more specialised services and sometimes statutory provision.

### Sandwell Learning from Practice Reviews Subgroup

Working Together 2018 requires the safeguarding partners to make arrangements to review serious child safeguarding cases and others where there may be learning in order to prevent or reduce the likelihood of recurrence of similar incidents.

Sandwell Children's Trust is duty-bound to notify the Department for Education and OFSTED, and by extension the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (NCSPRP) if it knows or suspects a child has died or been seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. The SLPR subgroup (SLPR) carries out reviews of the cases that are notified to NCSPRP and other safeguarding cases where there has been multiagency involvement which could support learning.



In the year April 2022 to end of March 2023, SLPR have undertaken the following:

- 3 Notifications were made to the NCSPRP in 2022/23
- 4 Cases were directed to Sandwell Learning from Practice Reviews Group (SLPR) in 2022/2023 by partners for consideration
- 3 Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPR) are waiting publication (due to ongoing Police investigations)
- 2 Of the 3 notifications to the NCSPRP, 2 were progressed to a LCSPR following a Rapid Review meeting during 22/2023. See a brief coverage from each child's story as follows:

**Child 1** – a young person over the age of 16 who sustained serious injuries in an assault in spring 2022. A Serious Incident notification was made to the regulators within the specified timescale and the RR panel met on day 10 after receiving the referral. The decision of RRP was to initiate a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review, which the National Panel agreed with. Key learning themes identified included how information is used/analysed to inform assessments and plans, co-ordination of support by multiple agencies, how to successfully engage young people involved in criminal activity/exploitation and the transition between Children's and Adults' services. The LSCPR was ratified in February 2023 and remains embargoed due to competing parallel proceedings.

**Child 3** – a child with complex additional needs under the age of 8 who died suddenly in winter 2022. A Serious Incident notification was made to regulators within the specified timescale and the RR Panel met on day 9. The decision of the RRP was to initiate a thematic LCSPR which the National Panel agreed with. The key themes were the stubborn practice challenges when intervening in cases of persistent neglect, and how to safeguard children at risk of or experiencing neglect who also have complex needs. The LCSPR remains in progress as of 31/3/23 and is expected to complete in winter 2023

**Child 2** – a baby under the age of 6 months who received serious non-accidental injuries in summer 2022. A Serious Incident notification was made to regulators although there were conflicting views on whether the injuries were inflicted or had a medical cause. The decision of the Rapid Review Panel (RRP) was that the threshold for a LCSPR was not met, however identified areas of learning for the Health economy and requested a Tabletop Review. The National Panel concurred with this decision and the Tabletop Review was held in January 2023. Key learning focussed on use of routine questions during antenatal care, working with families who speak EAL and communication between midwifery and health visiting services.

Rapid Review meetings are held within 15 days of the incident coming to the attention of the safeguarding partners. They gather facts about the case, identify whether any immediate action is required to secure the child's safety, whether there is immediate learning, and whether a local or national Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) is warranted.

For each review undertaken there are detailed action plans created and undertaken to address the identified need. These are monitored quarterly within the SLPR meetings and regular reports on progress are made to the SCSP. It is the view of the SCSP that LCSPRs are not published until all due processes are concluded to ensure there is no conflict or influence on other statutory parallel investigations.

More about the work of this group can be heard via this link: <https://youtu.be/t5gPzMgnCNc>, where young people speak to the former SLPR subgroup Chair Dez Lambert about how SLPR ensures that serious and challenging themes are tackled by systematic formal processes and how these feed into professional practice, training and reflection to better safeguard children in Sandwell.

### Delivering the SLPR Mandate Between April 22 to March 23

Delivering the SLPR	key focused areas	Achievements	key group priorities	Impact	Child's Voice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Via a stable partnership attendance/representation.</li> <li>Meetings are held bimonthly with standing agenda items as well as exception reports on emerging learning and the ongoing subgroup activities. The Terms of Reference was refreshed in December 2022.</li> <li>The subgroup continues to have dedicated support through the SCSP Business Unit to co-ordinate all of the work involved including setting agendas, meetings and tracking actions.</li> <li>Updates on the activity of the subgroup, including any risks/challenges are reported to Chairs Consultation Forum every two months with headlines being shared at the full SCSP Board meeting every 2 months to evidence the partnership mandate being met.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivering a robust and timely process</li> <li>Commitment to learn and improve from serious child safeguarding- these are completed within timescale</li> <li>Commitment to share learning openly and transparently</li> <li>2 children's cases progressed to a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (1 ratified in February 2023, 1 remains in progress to complete in 2023-24)</li> <li>Devised Spotlight Review process to address an identified gap in learning from incidents that do not meet the statutory threshold for a CSPR</li> <li>Completed 1 Spotlight Review and received 4 other referrals, 1 of which did not require any further action and 3 which are being progressed as learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to hold Rapid Reviews and progress CSPRs to timescale</li> <li>Strengthened processes to hold partners to account for their actions and increase visibility of all partners (Rapid Reviews/single agency actions)</li> <li>Improved oversight and independent scrutiny of the Rapid Review process</li> <li>Identification of repeat themes and ability to bring this to the attention of SCSP</li> <li>More dynamic ways of sharing learning and evidencing impact across partners</li> <li>Addressing gap in children's cases where there was learning but statutory threshold not met – Spotlight Review process</li> <li>Continue to build on and improve work with other subgroups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning from all types of reviews is the whole remit of this subgroup and shapes every agenda. It can be mapped to the activities of the wider SCSP workstreams. Emerging learning/themes from local and national reviews can be identified in the audit work undertaken via QPPA (e.g. the national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson), the disproportionality and school exclusions focus of CEB and the whole developing approach to neglect in the Tackling Neglect subgroup. Where training needs are identified, this informs the updates to the L&amp;D training programme, part of which is delivered by the CSPP co-ordinator to share the latest local learning from reviews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning from all types of reviews is the whole remit of this subgroup and shapes every agenda. It can be mapped to the activities of the wider SCSP workstreams. Emerging learning/themes from local and national reviews can be identified in the audit work undertaken via QPPA (e.g. the national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson), the disproportionality and school exclusions focus of CEB and the whole developing approach to neglect in the Tackling Neglect subgroup. Where training needs are identified, this informs the updates to the L&amp;D training programme, part of which is delivered by the CSPP co-ordinator to share the latest local learning from reviews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is done slightly differently in this subgroup as it links to emerging learning, priority areas and/or actions taken as a result of recommendations. For example, SLPR received a case study on the implementation of the ICON programme, linked to the subtheme of Pre Birth/work with under 1s and the national review on non-accidental injuries to under 1s.</li> <li>All families are offered the opportunity to contribute to the review process – unfortunately during this year none have agreed to do so.</li> <li>Two learning events (1 CSPP and 1 Spotlight Review) used a segment written 'from the view of the child' to support practitioners to see the world through the child's eyes prior to discussion, which was effective.</li> </ul>

## Strengths

- Good core membership, attendance and engagement at SLPR and Rapid Reviews
- Positive feedback from National Panel on quality of Rapid Reviews
- Emerging learning from this group underpins and informs actions taken across whole SCSP – themes can be mapped to activities of all subgroups
- Clear processes in place from initial incident through to publication – always subject to continual reflection and updating
- Spotlight Review process
- Good liaison with National Panel

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DID WE MAKE?

Tracking and assurance on implementation of recommendations/actions from reviews continually improves safeguarding systems, practice and processes. An example is a change within SCT on how concerns are logged on open children's cases – this is a result of learning from the VS CSPR.

## Barriers /Challenges

- Clarity on Chairing in 2023-24
- Embedding Serious Incident Notification process with partners
- Continuing to share learning in a dynamic way taking into account demands on time for practitioners
- Clarity on purpose and role of Joint Agency Review and Rapid Review processes when there has been a child death

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DID WE MAKE?

Feedback on the quality of Rapid Review minutes continues to be positive from the National Panel – one was described as 'comprehensive and concise that was sensitive in the way it addressed the young person's experience' with a 'clear rationale' for decision making

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DID WE MAKE?

Feedback from a staff member from a local primary school after attending the Learning from Practice Reviews training said the following had been done as a result of learning from a local CSPR: 'The school recognised that only teachers and senior leads were regularly updated on learning from reviews and safeguarding updates. All other staff received an annual update in September. It was felt that some staff didn't need all of the information but on reflection it is important that they have an understanding of how bad it can be, and it has been an eye opener for many. A slot at weekly team meetings to discuss safeguarding has now been added and all staff are now involved in team meetings. An audit has been completed with the school governor with responsibility for safeguarding and created an action plan. They now have a termly meeting to share and update on safeguarding information – this could be replicated across other schools as good practice.'

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DID WE MAKE?

As a result of learning identified in the YS CSPR, the Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership shared that the following work has been undertaken: secured funding to support children in the community, delivery of community events e.g. Coffee Mornings, development of a DA Matrix for professionals to use and the funding of two specialist posts (family support worker/resettlement worker) to support victims of DA and their children. Both workers provided a case study to show the impact of their work. A 'healthy relationships' programme for young men has also been funded, linking to the subtheme of working with male carers.

## Quality of Practice, Performance and Assurance (QPPA) Subgroup

The QPPA Subgroup seeks to assure and contribute to the development of child safeguarding practice in line with national and local drivers and strategy. This is achieved by providing healthy challenge and holding professionals to account with respect to safeguarding children practice.

The group meets on a bi-monthly basis with membership representative of the wide range of agencies working with children and families across Sandwell. The group is chaired by the Independent Scrutineer which allows for objectivity and challenge and ensures the joining up of improvement activities. The group also has the support of a data analyst whose input is vital to support and aid with understanding how well services are keeping children safe.

As well as consistently monitoring and testing out the quality of practice and performance at the 'frontline', the group seeks assurance via single agency audits, as well as completing our own multi agency audits, which provides a real overview of good practice and areas for improvement and also tells us about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in Sandwell.

Updates on the activity of the subgroup, including any risks/challenges, are reported to CCF with headlines being shared at the full SCSP Board meeting to evidence the partnership mandate being met.

The work of the subgroup is influenced by local, regional and national learning, and this year much of the activities have arisen from the findings and outcomes of scrutiny activities, areas for improvement as recommended from the SCSP and national reviews including that following the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

## Delivering the QPPA Mandate - April 22 to March 23

Delivering the Key Priorities	Key successes	Influencing activities	Strategic oversight	Evidence of Voice of Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of the outcomes based Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and underpinning implementation plan</li> <li>Focus on children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing</li> <li>Focus on babies which is a strategic priority for SCSP. QPPA monitors an improvement plan for the Sandwell Unborn Baby Network</li> <li>Explored ethnicity of children on child protection plans and children who are looked after which has led to identification of areas to explore further</li> <li>How children and families get the help at the right time was raised in the Ofsted inspection so QPPA has monitored the number of referrals to Sandwell Children's Trust, how many are appropriate and how many parents knew the referral was being made</li> <li>Neglect is a priority for SCSP the group has considered new guidance about school attendance as low school attendance might be an early sign of neglect to raise awareness of educational neglect and school attendance being everyone's business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of QAF and implementation plan</li> <li>Multi agency case audit – these have been determined by the group linked to emerging local themes including from local and national case reviews</li> <li>Single agency audit assurance rota links to emerging learning and other activities. Agencies must demonstrate how their findings impact on practice and improve outcomes presented to QPPA annually. Findings have informed future updates e.g. the role of safeguarding governors.</li> <li>Completed Section 11 biennial audit including undertaking a survey of practitioners on some of the broader themes. Key points drawn from the voice of practitioners e.g. request for more face to face learning opportunities included; request for webinars as 'snapshots' of information, the pivotal role of supervision which has been identified as key learning in other areas of QPPA. The audit showed assurance of 'Good' practice across the 19 participating agencies.</li> <li>Performance dataset – this has been integral in highlighting good practice and gaps/areas for improvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ongoing development of a full partnership dataset has been integral in understanding more about the local safeguarding landscape, including good practice identified as well as critical areas of focus for QPPA work and the wider partnership.</li> <li>Multi and single agency audit work has identified repeat themes, which have been identified for further focussed attention of the SCSP</li> <li>There has been a revised referral form for Sandwell Unborn Baby Network</li> <li>through the QPPA work, the local response to neglect (including for children with disabilities) has been raised to focus much wider than home conditions for example.</li> <li>QPPA has also suggested that there needs to be an awareness raising campaign to show how harmful neglect can be</li> <li>There has been a pathway agreed for how severe or persistent school absence will be managed</li> <li>The S175 audit identified the need for school governors to monitor how children are kept safe in schools.</li> <li>Section 11 survey identified the need for supervision training for managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detailed reports and discussion takes place at CCF and key headlines/risks to SCSP.</li> <li>Specific points for discussion/support requests can be put as recommendations to either CCF or SCSP however sometimes having enough time to explore the issues raised is a challenge.</li> <li>To date the SCSP does not receive a performance dataset on a regular basis though there are plans for this to happen in 2023-24.</li> <li>The learning from rapid reviews and local or national reviews informs SCSP priorities and the work of QPPA is clearly linked to these priorities.</li> <li>QPPA has undertaken a MACFA to test out whether when referrals about physical abuse are made to Sandwell Children's Trust by non professionals, they receive an appropriate response. This was a learning theme in the national review that took place following Star and Arthur's murders. MACFAs always test out how well services have involved fathers/male carers in their work and how well assessments have understood what life is really like for the child.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All of the work of the subgroup is underpinned by testing out whether children get the help they need - a good example is the focus on emotional health and wellbeing.</li> <li>The deep dive Spotlight Review undertaken in conjunction with SLPR was structured to fully explore what life was like for the child in that family who was experiencing persistent neglect.</li> <li>In March 2023, QPPA considered the SHAPE survey findings and have suggested that bullying should have a stronger profile in the work of SCSP as this is clearly very important to young people in Sandwell.</li> </ul>

### Strengths

Data means we know the strengths and challenges of the safeguarding system in Sandwell

QPPA helps SCSP to identify important things that need to change or improve

QPPA have started to have a stronger focus on understanding the experiences of children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds

Input and attendance of partners is generally good

The findings of the subgroup's work shows synergy with the May 2022 Ofsted findings (SCT) as well as endorsing the chosen priorities of the SCSP

Development of outcomes based QAF linked to priorities

Voice of practitioners evident

### Barriers /Challenges

Some of the challenges identified about the safeguarding system have been known for longer than this year: partners need to get better at acting on these challenges

Agencies need to present their single agency audits as this will help improve quality assurance of how effectively agencies are safeguarding children

Questions regarding the accuracy of some of the data provided, as well as the variable provision of narrative by agencies

Fully delivering the implementation plan to more clearly show the voice of children and families – to date this is only usually evident should they agree to participate in MACFAs

### Improvement Activity

Discrepancies in data across different agencies makes it challenging to accurately assess the situation and make decisions

It can take a long time to resolve issues that have been identified via QPPA work. An example is long term counseling for children who have been sexually abused and another is GPs providing reports for Child Protection Conferences.

QPPA should ensure it sees more single agency assurance reports as per the agreed rota.

## Learning and Development (L&D) Subgroup

The L&D subgroup has a membership drawn together from the full range of statutory and relevant partners who can drive practice improvement through their own organisations as a result of learning that has been identified not only from SLPR work and recommendations but from wider sources in research, or the work of national, regional or local bodies.

The group operates to a clear workplan and priorities which are devolved from the overarching SCSP Priorities and the aims and steer of the partnership keeps the agenda on track.

The Chair has a direct link to providers of Education, and also delivers from the SCSP training programme on behalf of the partnership and uses these contact points to hear first-hand some of the issues and challenges facing frontline practitioners which contribute to ensuring learning is influenced by the voice and skillset needs of the workforce.

The group is held to account through the Chairs Consultation Forum and the SCSP as well as the individual members within L&D who are committed and focused on our deliverables.

## Workforce Development activities addressing the key Strategic themed priorities and focus areas

<p><b>Focus on Front Door, Early Help and the responsibilities of all agencies</b></p> <p>Multi agency threshold training has been offered bi monthly covering processes as well as how to use thresholds.</p> <p>Thresholds are threaded through CWT as well as the EH training offer.</p> <p>EH training offer was increased in 22/23, including Lead Professional, Intro to Early Help, and EHM system training.</p> <p>Early identification and intervention for children young people is threaded through all learning and development</p>	<p><b>Refreshing and strengthening the threshold guidance; continuum of help and support, including increasing the understanding and application of the threshold, gaining consent and information sharing and the role of the 'lead professional'</b></p> <p>Multi agency threshold training has been offered bi monthly covering processes as well as how to use thresholds</p>	<p><b>Exploitation</b></p> <p>4 eLearning courses are offered covering different areas of exploitation, this is for level 1 awareness of these issues. A full day training session is also offered to partners. Some of these sessions were cancelled due to low take up.</p>	<p><b>Neglect</b></p> <p>Level 1 neglect awareness eLearning was available throughout this reporting year</p> <p>GCP2 training sessions were run regularly throughout 22/23 and take up of this training was high.</p> <p>Due to the early identification and interventions around neglect being a concern across Sandwell a task and finish group was started to look at the training offer eLearning was reviewed as part of this, the group continue to move forward with other learning activities being reviewed in to 23/34.</p>	<p><b>Domestic abuse</b></p> <p>This learning is developed/commissioned and delivered by the domestic abuse team within SMBC. In order to ensure that we are linking up with this team DA training coordinator is part of the L&amp;D training pool and we share the PHEW booking system meaning training is all in one place for partners to book.</p>	<p><b>Under 1's and injuries in non-mobile babies, this includes activities to increase awareness of the role of Sandwell Unborn Baby Network (SUBN) in identifying concerns 'early' and applying appropriate preventative support</b></p> <p>This is included within CWT when discussing learning from reviews, it is also threaded through the Multi agency threshold training via one of the activities delivered. SCSP website now has information about SUBN including the referral criteria and referral form</p>	<p><b>Creating a culturally competent workforce</b></p> <p>This is a piece of work that has been commissioned, however we are awaiting the final practice guidance as well as training materials in order to roll this out.</p> <p><b>Better engagement with fathers and significant others</b></p> <p>Training is commissioned around working with fathers and male carers, 'Hidden Men' 120 spaces were made available to partners in 2022/23</p>
---	---	---	--	---	---	---

### 22/23 Workplan deliverables

Guidance documents- impact as there is now clear guidance for partners as to what training is available and what they should be completing based on their job role

Governance documents- how L&D work as a group has been defined to ensure work plan is met, communication is taking place to and from partner agencies, correct representation on subgroup

Charging policy implemented and processes put in place

Commissioning of high quality trainers to deliver on some priority areas, such as hidden men, working with resistance, EH training offer.

Quality assurance (mystery shopper) completed on externally commissioned training.

Voice of the child to be more evident across our training and whilst we started working with SHAPE to progress this there are still areas of focus to be moved forward to the next year's workplan.

Impact is demonstrated through delegate feedback on evaluations

### Barriers /Challenges

Review of training offer, this started in 22/23 however due to change of L&D officer little progress was made. This has been carried over to 23/24 where all core training is being reviewed and redeveloped.

The majority of our courses were run to capacity

Impact evaluation has been difficult to capture, this has been the same for other L&D groups across the UK. This is being taken forward in 23/24 with a review of the evaluation process as a whole and to include case studies that evidence impact.

### Improvement Activity

The learning offer is regularly updated following any local or national reviews where partnership learning has been identified.

Briefing papers were published

Course review completed including neglect awareness to reflect learning from activities

Findings of SHAPE survey discussed training updated accordingly

Young peoples take over event of SCSP meeting, concerns and key points raised discussed and learning activities review. This has helped us to start to plan the next safeguarding today event.

We recognise there is more work to do around translating this in to training and the shaping of training during 23/24

The L&D subgroup have created a training guidance and expectations document in order to support professionals to identify what training they need to access based on their roles and safeguarding responsibilities. The training and expectations guidance document underpins the training programme. This is currently in its 'infancy and will require wide dissemination across the partnership in the coming year.

Delivering of the SCSP training programme is undertaken via a combination of a locally well-established cross partnership training pool and external facilitators. All trainers have been selected for the specialist knowledge of the subject area, with the vital commodity of being to ensure all trainers are familiar with the local practice and MASA arrangements.

### Top 10 Courses delivered during 22/23

COURSE TITLE:	Available Spaces	Allocated Places	No shows
Core Working Together – (CWT)	371	371	42
Thresholds	150	127	21
Managing Allegations	112	90	19
Neglect (GCP2)	135	121	17
Exploitation	60	39	9
Intro to Early Help	135	122	20
Early Help & the Role of the Lead Professional	120	113	23
Hidden Men	120	73	4
Disguise Compliance: Working with Resistance-	160	12	20
Gender Identity -	120	101	12

#### What difference did training make on Practice?

Feedback and evaluations from courses are routinely very positive, however this is collected in the days following a course rather than at a later stage to truly see the difference being made to practice. That said, records of knowledge tests prior to course attendance is in most cases averaging at 40% whereas post course measures show increases in knowledge scoring in the upper 90% for every course, with the widest margin being captured from Hidden Men training where the quality of the training was rated highly with 91.3% scoring it a 4 or 5 out of 5. Pre-session knowledge measures scored 23.91% and Post session at 97.83%.

#### eLearning Modules Completed during 22/23

ICON: 'Babies cry, you can cope'	285
SCSP Learning from Serious Cases - When Will We Learn?	39
SCSP Module 1 - Childhood Regained: Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness	109
SCSP Module 2 - Childhood Regained: County Lines Awareness	152
SCSP Module 3 - Childhood Regained: Gangs Awareness	84
SCSP Module 4 Childhood Regained: Knife Crime	86
SCSP Neglect Awareness	270
SCSP Private Fostering Module. under review)	15
SCSP Refresher Level 3 Core Working Together to Safeguard Children and Young People-	117

Hear more about the L&D group here <https://youtu.be/sGOKL8bm8O8> from Lisa Harvey who talks to young people about her role as Chair and the activities of the subgroup.

## Tackling Neglect Subgroup

The SCSP have identified Child Neglect as one of its' priority areas and in doing so have established a dedicated workstream via a subgroup consisting of a membership from across statutory and relevant agencies (including Education and the voluntary sector) to deliver on the mandated functions.

The year 22/23 has seen some changes within the membership - the most significant being the chairing arrangements for the group which up to November 22 was chaired by the Lead Nurse for Safeguarding (SWBNHS). However, following a resignation due to reduced working hours, the role of chairing was nominated to the Strategic Lead for Early Help and Partnerships based with SCT as of January 23. The meetings of the Tackling Neglect subgroup have remained consistent, taking place on a bi-monthly basis, with set agenda items where progress is monitored against the delivery of the workplan.

The group operates within the parameter of the terms of reference which was reviewed by the group and approved by the SCSP in March 23.

Here <https://youtu.be/5s-91ps7QFM>, the former and current Tackling Neglect Chairs, along with the programme lead, are quizzed by young people about the work of the subgroup.

### Delivering the SCSP Mandate for Tackling Neglect - April 22 to March 23

Tackling Neglect Workplan Activities	key achievements	influencing activities	23/24 Priorities for Tackling Neglect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare/Prevent/Protect</li> <li>- Use 'Child's Voice' case studies to understand the lived experience and impact of neglect on children</li> <li>• Undertake a Training analysis, to understand the developmental needs of the workforce.</li> <li>• update GCP2 training</li> <li>• Introduce a Neglect dataset</li> <li>• groups and agencies u</li> <li>• Neglect 7-minute briefing developed to share across the partnership.</li> <li>- Gain understanding of what partners are doing within their own organisation/service to Tackle neglect</li> <li>- Continue to grow the membership ensuring that it is representative of the partnership</li> <li>• Forge stronger connections to the work and activities of the Early Help Partnership and other related strategies and priorities.</li> <li>• support the production of guidance to raise awareness of educational neglect and school attendance being everyone's business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs assessment of Sandwell/ data and indicators were devised and agreed within subgroup to create a neglect data set for the partnership. Indicators were identified via partner contribution and consideration of what data would support subgroup to understand the Sandwell's landscape of neglect. Learning from a CSRP highlighted the need for ethnicity being captured and this was included throughout the planning of the neglect dataset.</li> <li>• Refinement of the Unborn baby network to strengthen the response to families requiring additional support before prior to a baby being born.</li> <li>• Single agency plans developed to ensure all partners signed up and committed to use of assessment tools in order to identify neglect at its earliest juncture.</li> <li>• Portraying the impact of neglect through the eyes of children and young people will ensure practitioners, managers and Strategic Leads have a firm understanding of neglect on children and their ability to thrive and grow. This will be achieved through Child Voices case studies.</li> <li>• champion a change in culture that is necessary to implement the Early Help strategy to achieve the ambition for all practitioners to provide 'the right support, at the right time, in the right place' as the only multi-agency approach to tackling neglect to the earliest opportunity.</li> <li>• Spotlight review SR1 in relation to a 'near miss' re child neglect was tabled at subgroup to share learning and connect to the workplan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduction of the neglect data set is now live and received regularly, this provides an opportunity for the group to analyse, interrogated and better understand the local profile in relation to child neglect in Sandwell.</li> <li>• Full review of Sandwell's Unborn Baby Network and referral pathway reinforced and a revised implementation plan in place.</li> <li>• Partnership case studies and in particular health visiting, and education highlighted benefits of partnership working to improve home conditions and lived experience of the child.</li> <li>• Greater reflection on the survey produce by Shape has focused the workplan into areas such as bullying, and the role neglect can play within this area.</li> <li>• Strategically linked in work plans with the Early Help and Attendance is Everyone business agenda will ensure a consistent approach response to neglect and ensuring these responses occur as early as possible</li> <li>• SCSP now have a firm grip on the activity of the Subgroup and will probe and challenge if there is a lack of progress.</li> <li>• SCSP now holding each other to accountable and will challenge in a direct and proactive approach, now early signs of breaking down barriers and bridging gaps in a positive direction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSRP's/ Spotlight reviews has demonstrated that there are multi-concerns linked to neglect and how tools or assessment, joined up working, sharing of information is not consistent within practice. This has led to refocus of the workplan and priorities.</li> <li>• Disproportionality from CSRP focus in group and heightened the importance of ethnicity data and links with heightened vulnerabilities for child who are neglected</li> <li>• Consideration of the response to neglect e.g. is GCP2 the right tool to identify neglect for Sandwell, if it is how can we strengthen this</li> <li>• A champion to be considered to get practitioner reflecting 'is this good enough for your Child</li> <li>• Strategy Refresh over the last 12 months learning has highlighted some key element for neglect and changes across EH need to be visible within strategy for practitioner to have most up to guidance</li> <li>• Focus on data capture to enable a more quantitative response to neglect and impact of partnership activity in this area of work.</li> <li>• Case study/good practice examples to be rolled out &amp; used across the partnership.</li> </ul>

## Strengths of the Tackling Neglect Group

Increased membership, group is representative of the key agencies, including early years, voluntary sector and education.

Neglect data recently introduced providing greater opportunities and line of sight to areas requiring improvement and targeted support directed accordingly

There is a Partnership committed to improving its response to neglect, this is evident by a dedicated programme lead to support 'Chair and coordinator the function deliverables.

The Partnership have invested in an assessment tool via GCP2 to aid practitioners to better identify and effectively respond to neglect as soon as possible to reduce the likelihood of escalating harm and the need for statutory social care interventions.

## Barriers /Challenges

Sandwell Children continue to die at the hands of neglect

The number of GCP2 assessment tools completed across the partnership remain low.

Lack of evidence of neglect been tackled within the Early Help space

Ownership and accountability of partners to act and intervene to tackle neglect is not evident

Sustainability plans for families who have been subject to entrenched neglect to ensure progress can be maintained.

## Improvement Activity

A review of the GCP2 tool and the barriers and direct work with practitioners to understand the basis for the low usage to aid the response to neglect e.g. is GCP2 the right tool to identify neglect for Sandwell?

A champion to be considered to get practitioner reflecting 'is this good enough for your child'.

Despite the investment in GCP2, the refreshed threshold guidance, the improved focus on SUBN, launch of the Early Help Strategy (March 22), updated training, and the new eLearning module to name a few, the pace of change remains a concern. Together with the Strategic leads plans are in the early stages to address the deep rooted practice issues 'head on' and an improvement plan will be implemented and form the workplan for the year ahead.

Work to understand child neglect and the offer of support, as well as take up of support to 'black and ethnic minority groups. Early indicators via the recently introduced dataset has indicated greater work is required to ensure all children able to benefit from all levels of support at the right time of need.

## Child Exploitation Board (CEB)

The SCSP has made a strategic commitment to tackle all forms of child exploitation and to respond effectively to emerging themes of abuse.

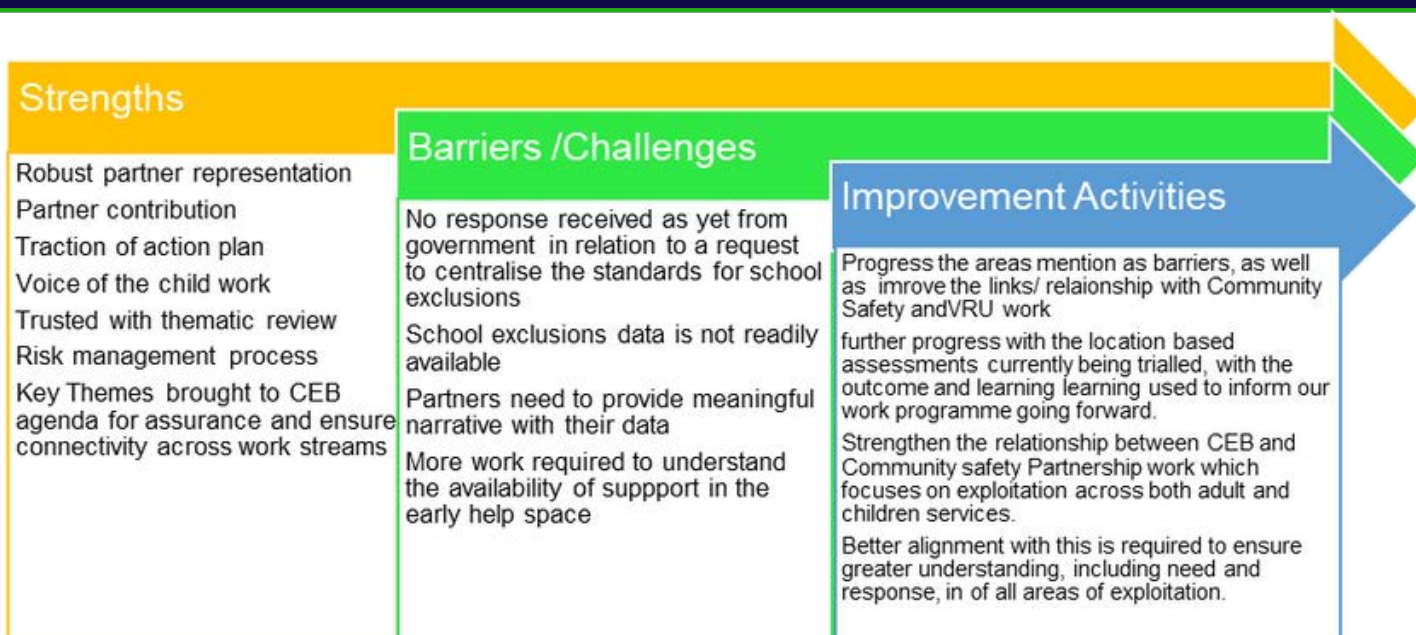
Through the nominated representatives from across statutory and relevant partners, there is a well-established and highly committed membership, with meetings taking place bi-monthly. Agenda items are agreed in advance and progress against the workplan is reviewed at each meeting. The Chair meets with the programme lead in between these meetings to consider new emerging themes resulting from local, regional and/or national research, reviews and initiatives. The Chair attends the Chairs Consultation Forum on a bi-monthly basis and is held to account for delivering the strategic ambitions of the SCSP, as well as to ensure there is the joining of all subgroup agendas and activities.

More about the work of CEB is captured here: <https://youtu.be/zuawipSfWX4> where Louise Wright, the chair of the group is questioned by young people about the work of CEB.

### Delivering the CEB Mandate - April 22 to March 23

Key activities for CEB	Key successes	Influencing activities	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child's Voice – presented at each meeting by partners, according to the rota. insightful and does bring learning of how service are perceived by children &amp; young people.</li> <li>through monitoring, able to evidence effective SCT intervention for SEN/EHCP children who are exploited. Focus to replicate this engagement in the Early Help space for prevention.</li> <li>Disproportionality – data and narrative required from each partner, for example, police's stop and search data informs us that more young black males are stopped more so than any other ethnic background.</li> <li>School exclusions leading to increased vulnerability – We have written to the Home Secretary to request a national legislation change for schools. We aim to seek that any child due to be excluded or sent through Pupil Referral Unit processes would require a multi-agency panel decision, to ensure all vulnerabilities and issues are considered.</li> <li>Early Help Directory – is reviewed and routinely updated</li> <li>Voluntary organisations and faith groups – are now represented within CEB – more work to achieve here</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The recent Ofsted inspection showed that Exploitation is well considered, and the Horizons team are visible for all children where this is required.</li> <li>The Sub group workplan captures the information mentioned above, we contribute and steer this plan according to our findings. Multi-agency working is extremely strong in the exploitation arena, this remains positive.</li> <li>CEB is working on a new risk management system for children and young people who are exploited, meaning these children should not be considered as child protection. Due to be piloted in the next 3 – 6 months.</li> <li>CEB was tasked with a thematic review or a serious case review, following a sad fatality of an exploited young male. One of the issues highlighted is the way in which young black males are more prevalent within stop and searches, school exclusions and not being offered early help. There is much work to achieve here</li> <li>Through the child voice cases heard, children said CAMHS do not offer a good service, this was met with CAMHS working on their 'Did not attend' process to change to 'Was not brought' which changed work ethos and focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of what was identified via the review of SC was already a part of the workstreams through CEB, which is why we were trusted to achieve this review. This did however shine a light on disproportionality with a greater focus and also supported us communicating with the Home Secretary relating to the need for national action for criteria leading to exclusions from school.</li> <li>CEB is one of the only subgroups which achieves child's voice work routinely and sets targets against the findings. As noted above, the most significant change is how we contributed to the need for the 'was not brought' policy within CAMHS.</li> <li>Although SCSP is not able to capture all the work achieved in CEB, they are well sighted on any risks, issues and how we aim to resolve these. The workplan is used to measure activities and progress made against these. Risks and issues are highlighted to SCSP if these cannot be resolved within CEB however this is a rarity given the excellent partnership offer and contribution to CEB.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is been a hugely positive that we have gained buy in for a different risk management (safeguarding) system. This is a brave move, and will benefit our children significantly. Families on the whole will be worked with rather than done to.</li> <li>The focus on shared data means that all agencies are in a position to address activity which is not seen as positive to children and young people.</li> <li>Children and young people are seen as victims before they are seen as perpetrators.</li> <li>Community safety and location based assessments are currently being trialled. One location based assessment has been undertaken and the learning from this being considered.</li> <li>Partners are no longer viewing removal to care as the answer to resolving exploitation.</li> </ul>





## Early Help

In 2021, following a challenge between partners in Sandwell, it became apparent that the threshold for statutory social care was not clearly understood or duly applied across the partnership. This was evident in the high numbers of inappropriate Multi-Agency Referral Forms (MARFs) being received at the SCT Front Door with little or no evidence of activities (Early Help) or support offered prior to seeking statutory interventions.

In line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. Local authorities are required to work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up Early Help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. This requires all practitioners, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment.

As is mandated, SCSP have a published threshold document that was devised following consultation with all local agencies/organisations. This guidance sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible and easily understood. It includes:

- the process for Early Help, multi-agency Early Help and assessment and the type and level of Early Help services to be provided
- the criteria, including the level of need, for when a concern should be referred to Sandwell Children's Trust for assessment, statutory support and intervention.

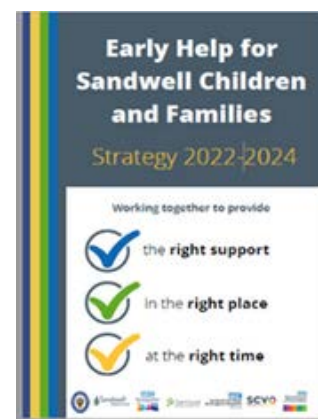
Sandwell have an established Early Help Partnership (EHP) which is overseen by the SCVO and chaired by the Chief Executive of a local voluntary sector organisation. The governance of this group aligns to the portfolio of the Children and Families Strategic Partnership within the local authority.

In response to the challenge posed by partners, the SCSP formally sought evidence of the impact of the work being undertaken by the EHP to strengthen the Early Help Offer, as well as the understanding and application of the threshold guidance to prevent inappropriate referrals and escalations for statutory social care services.

A review of the Early Help Offer started in 2021 and a new improvement plan was developed followed by the launch of a new Early Help Strategy and Implementation plan in 2022

The SCSP are well sighted on Early Help via quarterly data to the QPPA subgroup who uses data and intelligence to assess the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families, including Early Help.

Throughout 22/23 the activities undertaken to improve Early Help in Sandwell have intensified, with weekly events undertaken to take forward Early Help as a priority, with some of the work and the evidence base behind the activities and interventions presented below.



#### Key Activities & Achievements during 22/23

- Promotion of Sandwell refreshed early help strategy in partnership meetings
- Devised an action plan to deliver early help driven forward by the Early Help Partnership
- Launch of the Targeted Early Help website to help practitioner look for local services, intervention and support. Refresh of the early help training offer in line with the new strategy
- Re-launch/refresh of Early Help Assessment (EHA) October 2022
- 4 on-line workshops in October 2022 to understand the barriers to evidencing multi agency early help
- 5 briefings on new EHA attended by 235 practitioners/managers.
- Develop an early help data dash board
- Refresh of the early help training offer in line with the new strategy
- Complete a survey to better understand why the BAME community are more reluctant to take up early help support.
- Imbedding of the Multi Agency Solution Panel (MASP), to consider threshold and ensure all early help intervention and support, have been exhausted prior to escalation to CSC

#### Have there been any resulting improvements from activities

- Since the launch of the strategy there has been a 25% increase in the amount of multi-agency early help and a decline in the amount of children on CIN and Child Protection plan. Although the amount of families being supported via multi-agency early help has increased, we have not yet seen this reflect in the variety of professionals undertaking the Lead Professional role in the same way.
- The Strengthening Families Service, within SCT, and the Family Hubs practitioners continue to hold the majority of the Lead Professional role. It is encouraging to report that West Midlands Police have employed Early Help Police Officers as they see the value of ensuring children receive the right support at the right time and have undertaken the Lead Professional role within the last 12 months.
- The Early Help Partnership is inclusive of all partners and aims to achieve the action plan through collaboration. This level of ownership and accountability is required to ensure the Early help action plan is fully realised

#### Impact of activities on children, families and professionals

- Children and families are encouraged and supported to take intervention and support as the earliest opportunity from services they know and trust, to prevent needs escalating and inappropriate and intrusive involvement of CSC. Since the launch of the strategy there has been a 25% increase in the amount of multi-agency early help and a decline in the amount of children on CIN and Child Protection plan. The Early Help Partnerships vision is to build strong resilient communities who identify when support is required and have the relationships within the community to secure help and support from family, peers and community and voluntary organisations and services

#### What role has children and families' had in your planning and activities

- The Early Help practitioner actively promote children and family feedback to help shape and develop the action plan and activities. This includes gathering feedback from individuals service, views from child and family's as part of practice reviews and involvement of formal forums such as S HAPE, the Care Leavers forum and Sandwell Parent of Disabled children. More work is now required to ensure coproduction.

#### Where there has been little progress or things have not gone well, what lessons have been learnt.

- The change in culture has been slower than anticipated, however having spoken to other LAs who are further in their early help journey than Sandwell, this is typical.
- The Early Help partnership have held events to a diverse group of practitioners and managers from across the partnership to share key messages from Early help, this is to increase awareness of early help but also to encourage partnership accountability. This approach was useful but now more deep dive service conversations are required to support partners to deliver their early help responsibilities.
- The use of a shared partnership system remains an area to strengthen. The Early Help Module (EHM) in Sandwell has over a 1,000 users from across the partnership. Greater use of the system to evidence all support offer through a multi-agency approach is now required.

Throughout the coming year and beyond, the SCSP remain committed to monitoring the pace and progress of the improvement work being undertaken by the EHP and will continue to seek assurance that there are:

- Clear pathways so that thresholds are understood, consistently applied and that there is effective multi-agency working in responding to early identified needs
- Evidence of closing the gaps between Early Help and the MASH, establishing broad and consistent knowledge of what support is available to families at every stage of their journey
- There is a shared understanding of Early Help in Sandwell and the responsibility of every professional to support early, understand thresholds and work in partnership with families.
- Evidence of effective contributions to the multi-agency response, including early decision-making across Early Help, Child in Need and Child Protection.

Ultimately, SCSP need to be assured that all staff working with children and families in Sandwell are skilled to identify and respond to all parents/carers, including those who may have additional needs, to enable them to participate fully in any assessment process. Families should be offered early help services when issues affecting their parenting capacity are identified particularly in line with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel publication: The Myth of Invisible Men.

## Community Safeguarding

One of the SCSP's statutory functions is to communicate to persons and bodies in Sandwell the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, raising their awareness of how this can best be done and encouraging them to do so.

The Voluntary and Community Sector services and organisations are named as 'relevant partners' within the SCSP structure and are represented at each meeting by a nominated lead from the umbrella organisation for Sandwell's Community Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

Safeguarding communication to the sector is coordinated via the SCVO Safeguarding Reference group, however following a review in 2021 of the safeguarding needs and required support across the sector, it was evident that the quantity and quality of the sector was unknown. The report from SCVO to the SCSP prompted the recruitment of a dedicated post on a fixed-term basis to support the SCVO to better understand the size of the sector and, in doing so, to raise the profile of the SCSP, build sustainable links between the sector and the work of the partnership and respond to their Section 11 duties and responsibilities.

During the report period, 4 VCS Safeguarding Reference group meetings have taken place as planned just before the meetings of the SCSP to ensure information from the sector is reported in a timely manner. Equally, discussions and communications relevant for the sector, including safeguarding training, is circulated to community and faith-based organisations via email.

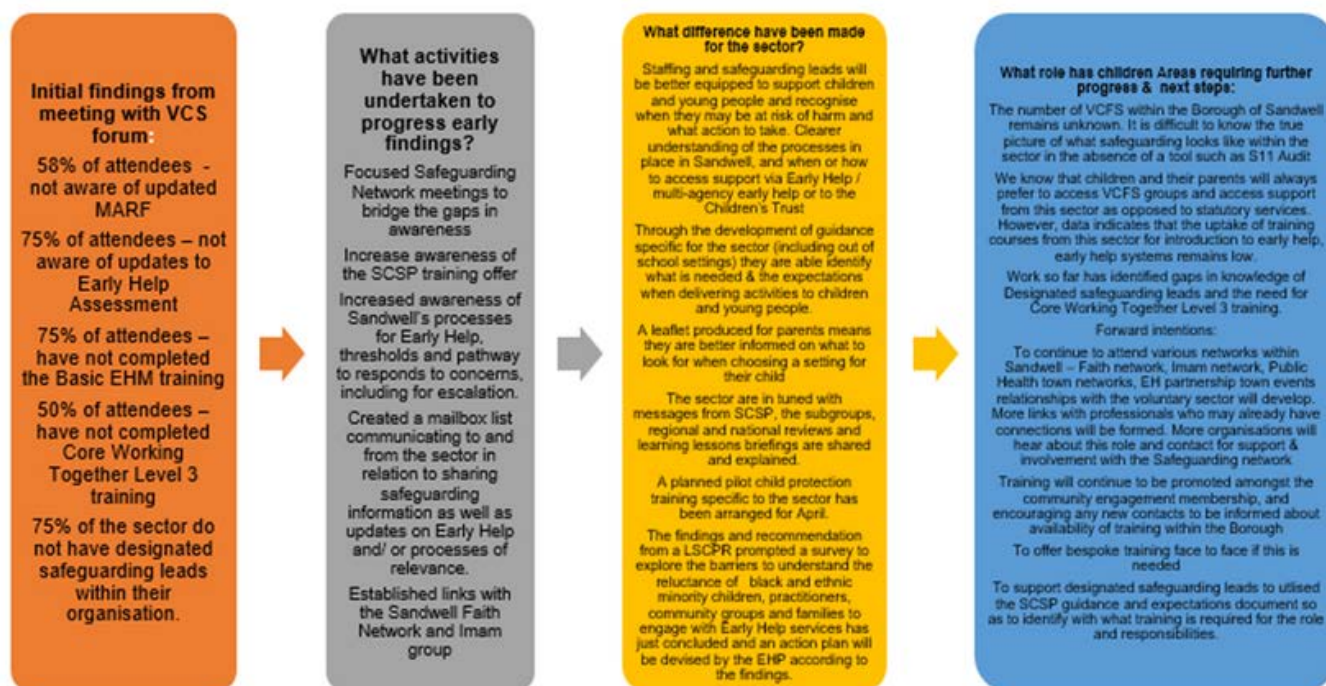
Hear more about the SCVO reference group and the work of the Safeguarding Community Engagement role here: <https://youtu.be/ucJEnvknmE>, from Jon Grant who represents Sandwell's Community Sector and faith-based organisations.

To uplift the activities and improve the links to the VCS, the role of SCSP Community Engagement Safeguarding Officer commenced in August 2022 with a clear remit being to support SCVO in building better links and engagement with voluntary, community and faith-based organisations.

### Major Achievements Between Aug 22 to March 23

Linking agencies within the voluntary sector with the Early Help Partnership meetings to increase the knowledge on processes for Early Help and social care support.
Linking agencies with the multi-agency learning and development offer via Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership.
Raise the profile of the Children's Safeguarding Partnership and the MASA
Open the line of communication with all groups, including faith-based organisations, who have sought support from this role.
Connecting the community and voluntary sector with each other, building networks for sustained partnership working.
Formed a 'Sandwell Safeguarding Network' group in January 23, with membership represented from faith and voluntary sector organisations across the Borough. The meetings are held on a monthly basis. Membership has increased each month from 11 in January 23 up to 33 in March 23.

## What does this mean to the target groups?



## When we really know we are making a difference

*"Thank you so much for the guidance with the policy. We have adapted and updated the policies based on your input and advice. The information was really helpful as well as the additional safeguarding map you have also provided. I can't thank you enough for taking the time out to support us with our policies. We are really grateful".*

*"I would just like to say that the Sandwell Safeguarding Network (SSN) that you have created is informative and opens other doors to working with different organisations and learning from each other. Well DONE YOU, great job for giving everyone round the table these opportunities to develop this forum".*

## Sandwell Safeguarding Health Partnership

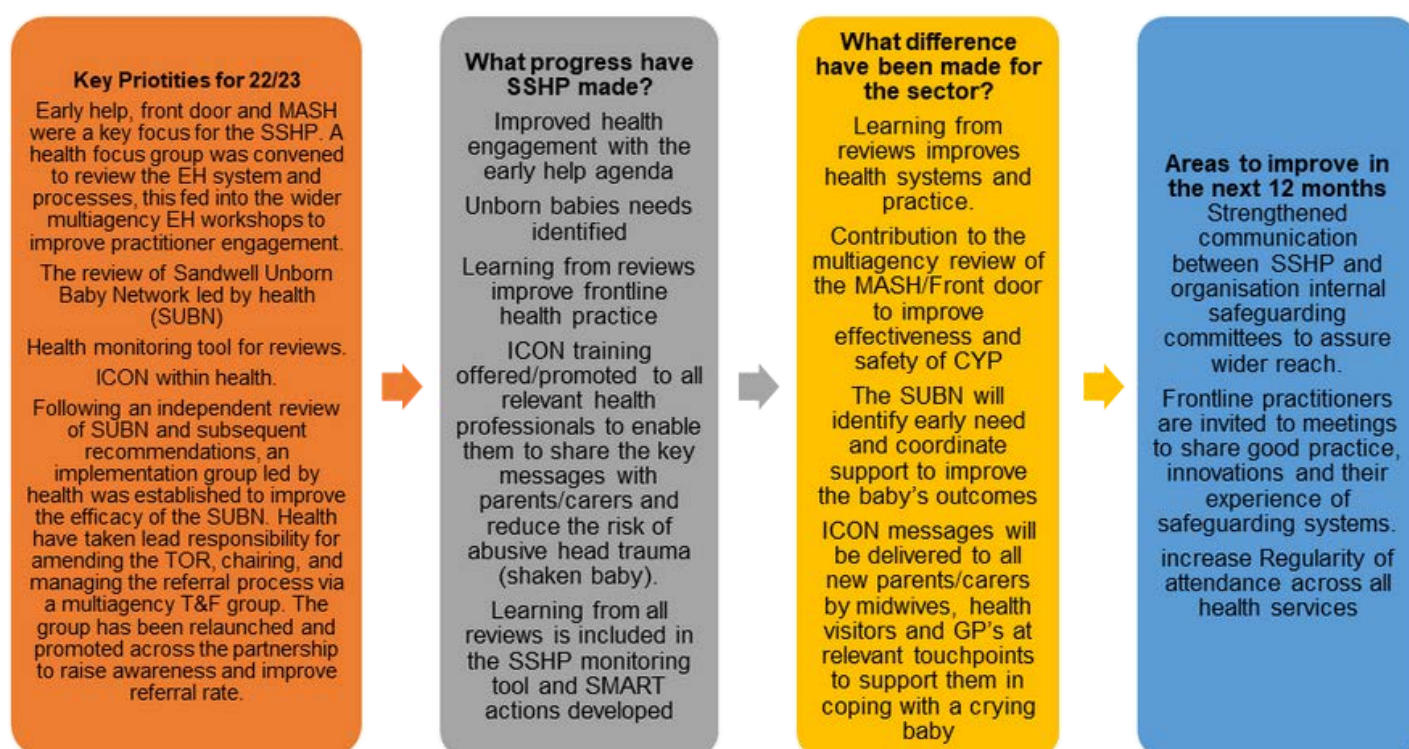
Health is one of the 4 Statutory Partners with leading legislative responsibilities for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare in Sandwell. The Associate Director for Safeguarding and Partnerships NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) represents the health economy who, along with the Designated Nurse, have delegated authority to:

- speak with authority on behalf of the wider health providers and commissioners
- take decisions on behalf of the representing organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters
- hold their own and representing agencies to account on how effectively they deliver their safeguarding functions, participate and implement the MASA.

Sandwell Safeguarding Health Partnership (SSHP) is chaired by the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding within the ICB and has the structures in place that bring the varying disciplines together on a bi-monthly basis to discuss and review safeguarding governance arrangements, monitor compliance and effectiveness of the safeguarding policies, processes and system. It includes consideration of new or revised statutory guidance, safeguarding risks and emerging themes or concerns, supports the assessment of need, risk and vulnerability and embeds learning from safeguarding reviews or inquiries in frontline practice.

The SSHP has representation from across the health economy including WMAS and is the conduit between the partnership and health services, providing a vehicle to escalate strategic issues.

### Strategic Priorities and Focus of activities during 22/ 23



SCRUTINY - CHALLENGE - REVIEW - EVALUATE

I have attended the SCSP meetings and another meeting called Chairs Consultation Forum (CCF): this is because I chair the QPPA sub group

One of the key insights was that neglect does not generate the same level of professional concern or response as other forms of abuse. The key findings and areas to be progressed by the partnership were identified as:

Use of evidence based assessment tools and frameworks (e.g. GCP2, hoarding tool, chronologies or their equivalent, cycle of change, motivational interviewing) – this will aid evidencing persistent neglect

- Develop awareness about harmful consequences of neglect including that neglect can kill
- Maximise the pivotal role of supervision across the system
- Progress to embed and establish role of Lead Professional
- Involvement of Housing providers in MASH decision making.

I have participated directly in 2 Rapid Reviews and also provided feedback on the findings and process of a Rapid Review that I was not invited to attend.

**Areas where scrutiny work has identified learning:**

In respect of leadership, I have identified the need for regular performance reporting to SCSP (this challenge was informed by the findings of an inspection undertaken in another West Midlands area.

In respect of practice I have identified the need to address the additional vulnerabilities of children with disabilities in the local response to neglect. Further I have reported to SCSP on SUBN and attended a meeting of partners on 11/5/22 to support and challenge the development of a plan to implement the findings of independent review of SUBN completed in June 21.

I have not completed any distinct pieces of scrutiny work other than the spotlight review that would have had recommendations in during the report year

**IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES:**

Improvement work in respect of the multi agency front door and a domestic abuse pilot were influenced by scrutiny work I completed the previous year

Another example is the ongoing work to improve the Sandwell Unborn Baby Network

CRITICAL FRIEND - IMPROVEMENT GURU -

There is a clear link between leadership and quality of practice and the Ofsted inspection (2022) provides evidence of progress that has been made over the years in Sandwell to improve safeguarding of children in the Borough

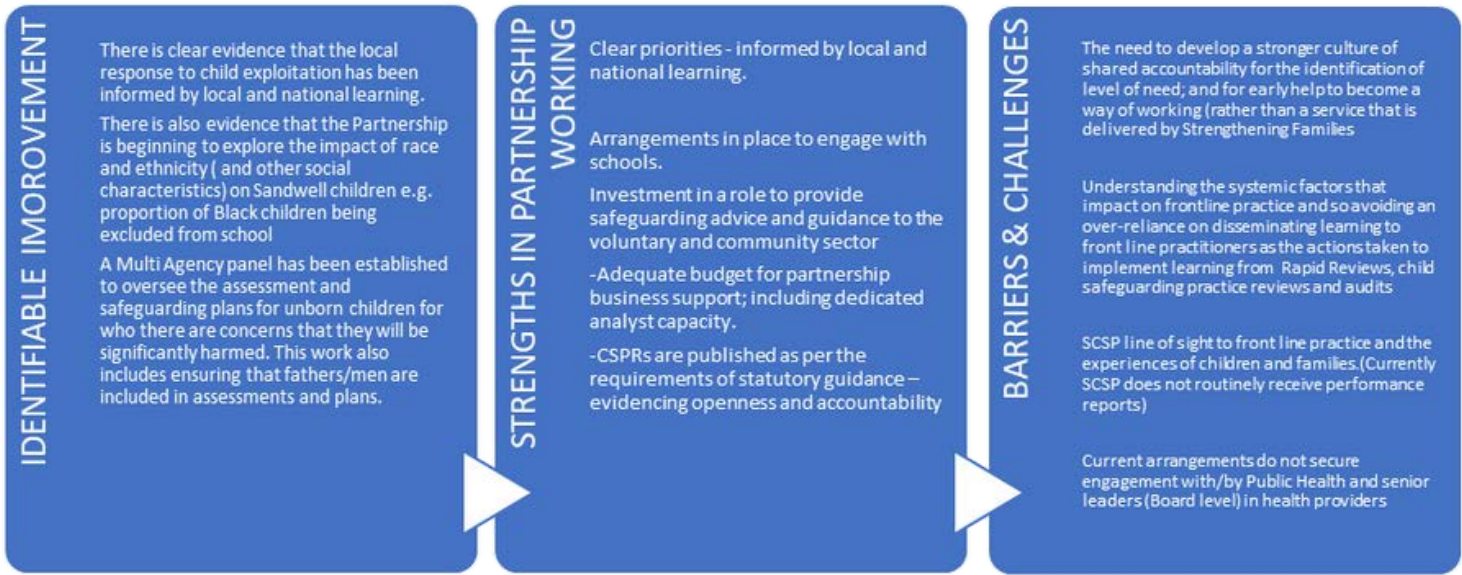
The inspection also identifies that there is a need for the partnership to focus its attention on children receiving the right help at the right time. This was reflected in the work I completed last year in respect of the front door which found that partners were over-reliant on MASH to determine the level of need for a child and a need to develop the culture of shared ownership for delivering interventions to improve the lives of children at early help level of need. My critical friend question to statutory partners would be for them to reflect on the extent they have and are promoting the cultural change required.

I provided challenge regarding the content of a CSPP (SD). The final report had not sufficiently addressed the key practice/system issue that emerged during the Rapid review that I attended which was the response provided to a young person who was involved in criminal activity and had a positive National Referral Mechanism status meaning it had been recognised that he was a victim of exploitation

I have also challenged the delay in notifying a serious child safeguarding incident ( case GN) and the need for Rapid Reviews to clearly set out the actions that need to be taken to address single and multi agency learning ( action plan). As a result of this challenge, RRs now routinely set out the actions to be taken and by whom.

There is a piece of work in progress regarding a national child safeguarding practice review ( which focused on safeguarding babies from physically abuse). This is remains work in progress. I am less clear how SCSP has used the learning from the national child safeguarding practice review on babies who die unexpectedly (SUDI)

The national review recommends a targeted approach rather than general safe sleep campaigns



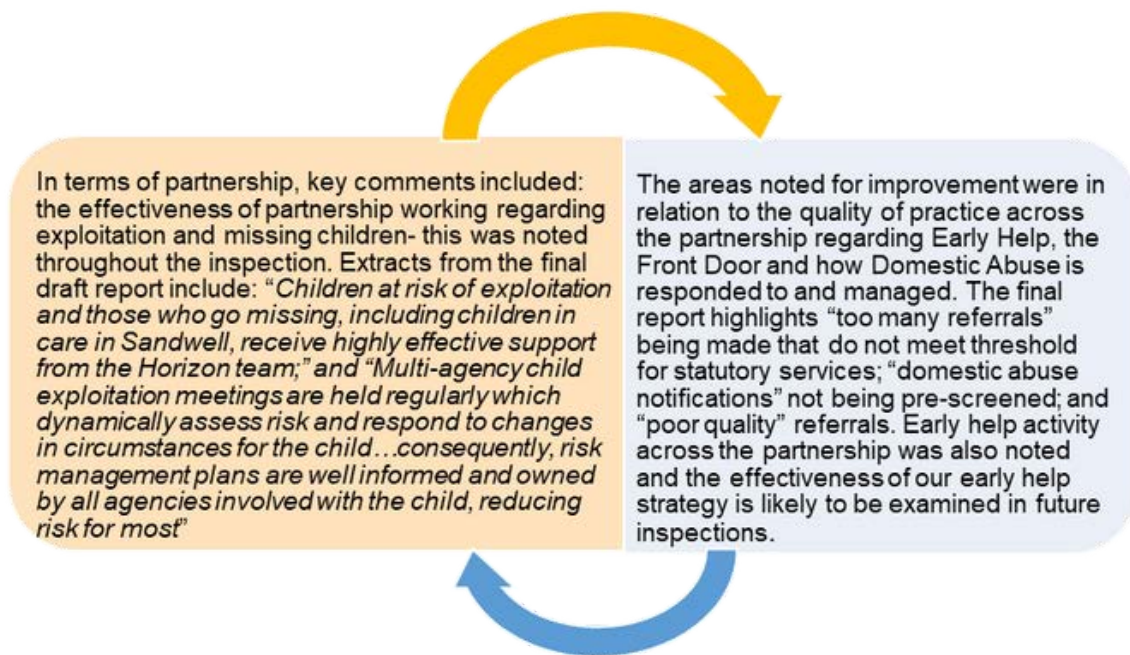
**Scrutineer's Top 3 Improvements areas for SCSP during 23/24**

1. Clarifying the distinct role and responsibilities of the SCSP statutory partners/meeting versus CCF (to enable a stronger focus on leadership and governance)
2. Enhanced arrangements to collectively agree the responses required to act on Rapid Review and Child Safeguarding Practice Review learning, plus monitoring of the actions taken.
3. Making the delivery of Early Help a whole system/all agency/every practitioner responsibility (whole family approach)

This year's annual report author has identified two areas termed as 'significant moments' and have deemed these to be highly relevant and 'a must' to be included in this report. These choices are based on the involvement, influences and impact on partnership working and safeguarding, and will be influential in shaping some of the activities of SCSP in the coming year.

### Ofsted Inspection May 2022

The first was the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care services delivered via Sandwell Children's Trust and the feedback which evaluated the quality and impact of services on children and families in Sandwell, as per the inspection framework. The inspection included all parts of the continuum of need- Early Help, Children in Need, Child Protection, Children in Care and Care Leavers. Leadership - both operational and strategic - across SCT, the council and wider partnership was also examined and graded.



Overall, and in the context of its history, the outcome of the inspection undertaken in May 2022 was positive for Sandwell's children and families with the judgement and grade awarded being 'Requires Improvement to be Good.' This came on the backend of having received 'inadequate' Ofsted grades from full Ofsted Inspections for over a decade prior to this visit.

The Chief Executive of Sandwell Children's Trust, Emma Taylor, is the 4th Statutory Partner leading the MASA as well as providing feedback to SCSP from the Ofsted Inspection of 2022 and monitoring the work arising from the Inspection for partnership improvements. <https://youtu.be/fiYr4Q17HZg>, Here Emma speaks to a group of young people about her role as a member of the SCSP.

### SHAPE Takeover October 2022

The second memorable and influential event of 22/23 is taken from the presence of young people during their takeover of the SCSP meeting in October 2022. The young people in attendance are members of Sandwell SHAPE, a programme attended by young people designed to listen to children and young people in Sandwell.

The SHAPE Programme organises events, opportunities and consults with young people across Sandwell throughout the year to ensure children and young people are listened to and able to engage in positive activities.

To manage the session, the young people delegated a Chair from their group who facilitated the conversations and focused the meeting on three distinct areas which were of most concern to them with a 'strong message' to members of the SCSP across the selected themes.

Young people defined "A trusted adult is someone, we can go to, who knows us personally, who has been through all the different stages of our lives."

Sharing experiences, of having been through the care system, having lots of different social workers, NHS workers and midwives, managers, directors and lots of different corporate parents. young people asked - "how a young person is expected to build a relationship when professionals are constantly changing job roles and leaving Sandwell".

one young person shared not trusting anyone. having been in and out of the CAMHS service, with different people coming and going from their life constantly, seeing CAMHS for a couple of months, then they would assume them being better and be discharged from the service even though they were still struggling on a daily basis.

Another young person raised the issue of the waiting period to be allocated with a supposedly Trusted Adult, claiming that firstly it takes ages to get referred, then you are given just one hour per week for a 5-week period in total, which isn't simply long enough.

Another talk to members about the impact in having had 9 different social workers in an 8-year period whilst he was in care, while for another young person there were concerns about not being able to make contact with the Trusted Adult, and would often not hear from them for weeks at a time

The young chairperson summarised as "it takes a lot for a young person to open up and confide in a Trusted Adult. Young People just want consistency and do not want to keep on repeating their stories".

...ha queried if the passion is there, for the professional and are they making a difference?

The second topic was around "Bullying in Schools".

The young people queried what support is out there for young people that have experienced bullying at school? Also, what training do teachers get so that they can offer the support to YP's via their own experiences, training was not up to standard and only offered empty promises.

The young people highlighted that one of Sandwell's values is "Respect, Recognise and Respond to differences, and they questioned if the workforce were adhering to that value, because from their view, they are not.

Each young person shared snippets of their experiences of bullying, saying there isn't enough support for young people to combat bullying, and asked members "What is being done about bullying?"

Young people were shocked that members were unaware about the things that were going on, but felt that in schools nothing was being done, nothing has changed and bullying is becoming normal

Young People queried with members if school's policy's are strong enough to make the necessary changes

Young People went as far as linking bullying as leading to young people committing suicide because they are scared to speak up because nothing is being done.

the young people talked about the anti-bullying programme and work covered including the anti-bullying roadshow. The feedback received from the 13 schools had been phenomenal, but the other schools sent their apologies and stated that bullying wasn't seen as a priority for their school.

members of the SCSP each made pledges to

Third theme was covered by 'Children in Care' and 'Care Leavers', who open the subject with, "what support is out there for young people that want to go to University or into Further Education?"

Each sharing their future aspirations, including wanting to go to University, the struggles being experienced which forces them to financially support themselves.

they posed a question to members 'as "corporate parents" what support are they offering to care leavers

response from SCSP included:

there is a "Care Leavers" offer, which should be the best that it can be. The offer also needs to provide other options, whether that be university, college or apprenticeships. This was followed up with a recommendation to raise the issues at the next Corporate Parenting Group, which already have a good foundation in place within to be built upon.

From the takeover event, the young people received pledges from each member of the SCSP of things to happen /change as a result of their 'takeover'.

This starts with an action plan created to be approved and monitored by the young people.



This year's report for 22/23 covers the activities undertaken by SCSP because of the arrangements, including in relation to child safeguarding practice reviews. The report demonstrates a high volume of work covered over the period, with areas of particular strengths and features of effective partnership working. However, there are areas where there have been little or no progress made despite increased attention, resources and commitment of partners.

The 'themed' areas elevated for improved focus from the previous year's report for 21/22 and the activities undertaken to take forward the 'key themes' have been commented on throughout this report and are covered in some detail by the Independent Chair in section 4 of this report.

There is some evidence to demonstrate the impact of the work undertaken by the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including impact of training on practice for improved outcomes for children and families from Early Help to Children in Care and Care Leavers. However, it could be argued that on the balance of the volume of work referenced throughout this report, the evidence of impact is somewhat marginal.

In compiling this report using the areas noted from the guidance produced by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel to craft and guide the contents, there are examples and accounts in some areas that would clearly evidence effective safeguarding interactions through the impact of our work in some sections.

There is now a line of sight in receiving data on school exclusions and from West Midlands Police about the local response to the stop and search of children since the publication of the SC LCSPR. However, we do not currently request data on strip searches which was suggested to be an area of increased concern after the publication of the Child Q LSCPR (City and Hackney, London).

A number of key guidance documents have been reviewed, including the threshold guidance which has been strengthened and updated, as well as other key documents to inform practice such as the Early Help Strategy (via the Early Help Partnership) and the Child Exploitation Strategy to name a few. Equally relevant to ensure and maintain clear focus on agreed subgroup deliverables, terms of reference for all sub and reference groups have been reviewed and updated during this reporting period.

The Multi-Agency Request Form (MARF) was reviewed and strengthened after a series of consultation events with leaders and practitioners. This was released directly to strategic leads by the Independent Chair with reinforced messages to ensure the practice expectations by which a request for statutory social care response will be met is articulated, understood and adhered to at all tiers of the workforce and across all safeguarding partners.

The scrutiny activity during the period included a review of the response to referrals received in MASH from non-professionals: this demonstrated and concluded that responses to referral from relatives/public etc are appropriately triaged. This was added to the scrutiny programme following the tragic murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

In terms of the challenge made to partners in 2021 regarding the responsibilities for Early Help, though this theme has received huge investment and commitment from partners, there doesn't appear to be any tangible or sustainable improvements made. The feedback from scrutiny activities, the outcome of Rapid Reviews undertaken and feedback from the latest full Ofsted Inspection have all unravelled the same issues, with Ofsted citing 'inappropriate referrals, and little evidence of early help interventions.' This is by far the most urgent area for practice improvement for the SCSP to focus on going forward. Within the section that captures the work of all sub and reference groups, all have alluded to 'Early Help' as an area for improvement. With this, partners will need to consider what needs to be done differently to make the required improvements in the year ahead.

The Independent Scrutineer has made reference to feedback provided to safeguarding partners in 2021 that was also uncovered some 12 months later during the Ofsted Inspection in 2022, which raises a question as to how the SCSP responds to systems, performance and practice messages and recommendations for improvements. This does steer towards a need for leaders to review the existing structures and strategic arrangements to respond to recommendations, including a seamless line of sight to monitor progress and act in a timely manner.

Reference has already been made to the volume of activities undertaken during the reporting year versus the impact on practice, however this again does feature within the feedback received from the Scrutineer who cites the need for leaders to understand the systemic factors that impact on frontline practice and not rely solely on disseminating learning to front line practitioners as the action taken to implement learning from all types of reviews and audits. There is a need for leaders to develop a stronger culture of shared accountability and collectively 'own' their improvement activities via enhanced arrangements that place them at the forefront for driving the MASA. This will include revisiting and strengthening the existing structures and reaffirming the distinct roles and responsibilities of the SCSP statutory partners to enable a strong and responsive leadership.

Going forward into 23/24, the areas of focus remain unchanged from what was agreed in the previous year's (21/22) report. This is not due to making no traction, but more about allowing ample time for changes to be embedded to take effect to be able to evidence meaningful impact that can be attributed to the changes made.

- Early Help and Prevention - interventions through a range of cohesive and coordinated universal and specialist services at the earliest opportunity to ensure that needs are met. This has to go hand in hand with increasing the understanding and application of the threshold, gaining consent, information sharing and the role of the lead professional.
- Focus on the Front Door and MASH arrangements.
- Neglect – on every level from understanding to responding. This includes a review of the GCP2 standardised tool and agreed approach to support all practitioners in their responses to neglect. This is under-utilised and there is no evidence that this tool has improved or aided practitioners to tackle neglect in Sandwell since it was introduced in 2018. The GCP2 will need to be reviewed for its' suitability.
- Exploitation – a focus on early identification and implementation of tools and strategies to prevent escalation to statutory services and/or the risk of further harm
- Strengthen the connectivity from strategic leads to the frontline by developing a communication strategy to ensure there are effective engagement channels to reach entire workforces who, in their line of work, are in contact with children and families to ensure that safeguarding systems are robust and effective
- The voice and lived experiences of children and families accessing services needs to be strengthened. This extends to progressing the areas of most concern to young people in Sandwell and feedback received in the 'takeover' event referenced in this report
- A review of the leadership and governance structures which oversees and underpins the MASA. The SCSP needs to have a clearer line of sight and be better positioned to steer the MASA to be effective.

#### **Themed areas**

- Increase the profile and purpose of Sandwell Unborn Baby Network (SUBN) to assist in identifying concerns 'early' and applying appropriate preventative support
- The SC LCSPR sought to understand whether black and other ethnic groups are given equal/timely access to services, including and particularly Early Help support, for the purposes of reducing risks to and intervention for statutory interventions
- A focus on timely implementation of actions arising from reviews, including from MACFAs, Rapid Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Continue to build sustainable relationships with voluntary, community and faith-based organisations.

- **A&E** - Accident and Emergency
- **BC CDOP** – Black Country Child Death Overview Panel
- **CAMHS** – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- **CCF** – Chairs Consultation Forum
- **CCG** – Clinical Commissioning Group
- **CEB** – Child Exploitation Board
- **CIN** – Child in Need
- **CSPR** – Child Safeguarding Practice Review
- **DA** – Domestic Abuse
- **DASP** – Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership
- **EH** – Early Help
- **EHCP** – Education, Health and Care Plan
- **EHP** – Early Help Partnership
- **GCP2** – Graded Care Profile
- **GP** – General Practitioner
- **ICB** – NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board
- **ICON** – Infant Crying is OK – Never shake the baby
- **ICPC** – Initial Child Protection Conference
- **IoD** - Indices of Deprivation
- **JAR** – Joint Agency Response
- **JTAI** – Joint Target Area Inspection
- **L&D** – Learning and Development
- **LADO** – Local Authority Designated Officer
- **LCSP** – Local Children’s Safeguarding Partnership
- **LCSPR** – Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review
- **MACFA**- Multi Agency Case File Audit
- **MARF** – Multi Agency Request Form (previously Multi Agency Referral Form)
- **MASA** – Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements
- **MASH** – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
- **NAI** – Non-Accidental Injury
- **NCSPRP** – National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- **OFSTED** – Office for Standards in Education, Childrens Services and Skills
- **PEP**- Personal Education Plan
- **QAF**- Quality Assurance Framework
- **QPPA** – Quality of Practice, Performance and Assurance
- **SCR** – Serious Case Review
- **SCSP** – Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership
- **SCT** – Sandwell Children’s Trust
- **SCVO** - Sandwell Community and Voluntary Organisations
- **SHAPE** – Children in Sandwell want to be: Safe, Healthy, to Achieve, and have Positive Experiences
- **SLPR** – Sandwell Learning from Practice Reviews
- **SSHP** – Sandwell Safeguarding Health Partnership
- **SUBN** – Sandwell Unborn Baby Network
- **SWBNHS** – Sandwell West Birmingham NHS
- **TAF** – Team Around the Family
- **TED** – Tell, Explain, Describe
- **TN** – Tackling Neglect
- **VCS** – Voluntary Community Sector
- **WMP** – West Midlands Police
- **WMAS** – West Midlands Ambulance Service

Statutory guidance requires the four statutory safeguarding partners (which for the period covered by this report are Local Authority Chief Executive, Sandwell Children Trust Chief Executive, Chief Constable of the local Police Force and Accountable Officer, Clinical Commissioning Group superseded by Chief Nurse, Integrated Care Board (with effect from July 2022) or their delegated representative) to make arrangements for independent scrutiny of the yearly report they are required to publish.

In my roles as Chairperson of Quality of Practice, Performance and Assurance (QPPA) group and Independent Scrutineer, I have contributed to the content of SCSP Annual Report 2022-23. The activity undertaken in my independent scrutineer capacity, along with my reflections on the strengths and barriers and challenges of the safeguarding partnership arrangements, are detailed at Page 34. The reader will note that the activity I have undertaken includes direct involvement in the arrangements to learn from serious child safeguarding cases and front-line practice as required by statutory guidance.

Based on my involvement in the safeguarding partnership arrangements, I consider that the report is an accurate representation of the work undertaken by partner agencies and associated accomplishments. Furthermore, I consider the safeguarding partnership to be self-aware and to use data and local and national learning to determine its priorities. The report details the 'stubborn' challenges that partner agencies have identified as adversely impacting upon the provision of help and support and/or the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Sandwell.

The extent of these challenges is more understood than at the start of the reporting period; learning from the National Panel endorses the important role that leaders play in creating the conditions for good safeguarding practice and outcomes to flourish. The recognition of the need to do more to improve the effectiveness and evidence the impact of the work of the safeguarding partnership should be considered a reflection of the commitment of statutory partners to provide strong leadership.

The ambition of the safeguarding partnership is to create a strength based, preventive whole system approach to delivering help and support to children and families and the report concludes by setting out the direction of travel for 23-24. There is an emerging understanding of the experiences and outcomes for children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and the differential experiences they have compared to their white counterparts. This data, along with other socio-economic data, will need to inform the work of the safeguarding partnership to tackle disadvantage and disparity that children and families experience in Sandwell.

The safeguarding partners recognise that to deliver their ambition there is a need to drive cultural and practice changes. The planned review of the structural arrangements of the safeguarding partnership will support this work. The forthcoming revisions to statutory guidance along with the Government response to the independent Review of Children's Social Care, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's inquiry into the murders Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and the Competition and markets Authority's study of the children's social care market will also serve as enablers. The greatest enabler will of course be a shared and relentless focus on doing the very best for every child in the borough.

A final, but very important comment from me; in whatever role you have played, thank you for your contribution to safeguarding children and young people during 2022-23.

Very best wishes

Liz Murphy

Independent Scrutineer, Sandwell Children Safeguarding Partnership

This page is intentionally left blank

## Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

25 March 2024

<b>Subject:</b>	Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations
<b>Director:</b>	Assistant Chief Executive James McLaughlin
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Connor Robinson Democratic Services Officer <a href="mailto:Connor1_robinson@sandwell.gov.uk">Connor1_robinson@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### 1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That the Board notes the responses to the recommendations since the Board’s last meeting.
- 1.2 That the Board notes the progress on implementation of those recommendations.
- 1.3 That the Board determines what action it wishes to take where progress is unsatisfactory.
- 1.4 That the Board determines which actions/recommendations no longer require monitoring.

### 2 Reasons for Recommendations

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



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

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

### 4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The attached Appendix details the responses to actions identified and/or recommendations made by the scrutiny function and progress on the implementation of those previously approved.





## 5 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>Any resources implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.</p> <p>Any specific resource implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p>
<p><b>Legal and Governance:</b></p>	<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> <p>NHS service commissioners and providers have a duty to respond in writing to a report or recommendation where health scrutiny requests this, within 28 days of the request. This applies to requests from individual health scrutiny committees or sub-committees, from local authorities and from joint health scrutiny committees or sub-committees.</p>
<p><b>Risk:</b></p>	<p>Any risk implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.</p> <p>Any specific risk implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p>
<p><b>Equality:</b></p>	<p>Any equality implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.</p> <p>Any specific equality implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.</p>



<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Any health and wellbeing implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.  Any specific health and wellbeing implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Any social value implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.  Any specific social value implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	Any climate change implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.  Any specific climate change implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	Any corporate parenting implications arising from scrutiny activity are considered as required by the appropriate director or cabinet member/cabinet.  Any specific corporate parenting implications for the Board’s attention are detailed in the Appendix.

## 6 Appendices

Appendix – Tracking and Monitoring Table

## 7. Background Papers

None.



Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board				
22 Feb 2023	Scrutiny Engagement with Youth Services SHAPE Board	Following feedback from the SHAPE Survey and Youth Summit. Further consideration would be given to future engagement with children and young people. All scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs to consider possible future workshops with young people.	Democratic Services	All scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs have been asked to consider a workshop.
20 March 2023	SEND Post-16 Provision	“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 the Council and its contractors”	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education	Report considered in November 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	Report coming to the January 2024 meeting.
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	That representatives of the SEND Strategic Board/SEND Operational Board report to the Board on the services and support provided to SEND	Democratic Services	Report scheduled for January 2024 meeting.
	Impact of Lockdown on	That the Chair of the Children’s Services and Education Board writes to the Chair of the	Democratic Services	Report to be coming to the March 2024 meeting.

	Children and Families	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.		A workshop had been arranged with young people to hear challenges and successes.
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	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	The council submitted an application for a Free School earlier this year but the application was unsuccessful. The bid window for subsequent rounds is yet to be published but will form the basis of the SEND Transformation Programme.
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	that the Council joins the Department for Education's 1-2-1 attendance mentoring pilot to monitor issues in schools across the Borough.	Director of Children and Education	Regular meetings in place with the DfE Attendance Advisor Training for staff to be showcased with other Councils as exemplar practice
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	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	Sandwell is part of the Government's Priority Education Investment Area along with 23 other priority LAs. The programme submission has been approved by the Minister and the interventions with schools commences in the spring term 2024. At the end of the programme, July 2025, the partnership board expects an increase in educational attainment levels to at least national levels if not above.
	Impact of Lockdown on	that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for	Cabinet Member for Children,	The DCS will work with the Cabinet Member to confirm a letter to the government.

	Children and Families	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.	Young People and Education	
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	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;	Director of Children and Education	The DfE have provided a range of guidance and interventions aimed at closing the attainment gap as a result of the pandemic. The DCS has shared all these resources across the sector and school improvement colleagues are working with schools to implement interventions as appropriate.
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	that the Director of Children and Education reviews the Council's partnership working with education providers and the Sandwell Children's Trust to ensure that actions, outcomes and best practice work are shared to ensure we are working cohesively together.	Director of Children and Education	The DCS sits on the Joint Executive Group for education providers across Sandwell and has senior leadership representation on all other education governance provision. Partnership working is integral to these partnerships and the Children's Trust provides reports and updates to JEG as required.
	Impact of Lockdown on	That the Cabinet Member for Children and Education investigates ways to connect with	Cabinet Member for Children,	A) Created a role within Youth Service to develop leadership and mentoring

	Children and Families	<p>young people and offer extra support, mentoring and encouragement including, but not limited to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) establishing a peer mentoring programme;</li> <li>b) encouraging social youth work, sports, drama, and outdoor activities;</li> <li>c) engaging with local businesses to improve the number of available apprenticeships;</li> <li>d) supporting a holistic youth services experience which accompanies physical and digital offer;</li> <li>e) supporting and championing the new Eco Bus with young people's involvement.</li> </ul>	Young People and Education	<p>opportunities for young people for next 12 months.</p> <p>B) Reviewed and refreshed the youth offer to provide young people with opportunities to engage in a wide range of activities through both our core offer and external funding opportunities including Holiday Activities &amp; Food, Violence Reduction Partnership, Adventures Away from Home, West Midlands PCC funding and Safer Streets Fund.</p> <p>C) The Employment and Skills team continue to work with local employers to increase the numbers of apprenticeships available in the borough and are delivering a range of engagement activities such as Accelerate to encourage young people to apply</p> <p>D) Continue to work in partnership with a range of partners, including the voluntary, community sector, Youth Organisations in Uniform West Midlands and Council departments to promote and deliver a holistic youth offer.</p> <p>E) Young people have been engaged in developing the specification for 2 x new youth buses, including developing a brief for the exterior design and fit out for the interior, including equipment and activities. A wider group of young people will be given the opportunity to vote for the final exterior design.</p>
	Impact of Lockdown on	that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for	Cabinet Member for Children,	Letter has been drafted and will sent in due course.

	Children and Families	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;	Young People and Education	
	Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families	That, the Director of Children and Education works with multi-agency partners to support, engage and monitor the stability within the early years settings;	Director of Children and Education	The Lead Early Years Manager for Sandwell has taken this action forward and works with all early years provision. The annual sufficiency assessment is used to identify and address capacity challenges and to focus on funding requirements across the sector.

This page is intentionally left blank