

Report to Cabinet

1 September 2021

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

1 Recommendations

1.1 That the Cabinet, in its capacity as the body that is responsible and accountable for the discharge of the relevant children's social care services functions:

- a) formally receives the Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2020/21
- b) notes the progress made to date by Sandwell Children's Trust in delivering services as set out in the Contract between the Council and the Trust, as set out in the Annual Review 2020/21;
- c) formally receives the updated Improvement Plan 2021/24;
- d) notes the feedback from the Department for Education following its recent 6-month review of Sandwell Children's Trust;



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

2 Reasons for Recommendations

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

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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



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

4 Context and Key Issues

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



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

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



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

5 Alternative Options

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



6 Implications

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



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

Sandwell Children’s Trust Annual Review 2020/21

Sandwell Children’s Trust Improvement Plan 2021/24

8. Background Papers

Cabinet Meeting 19 October 2016

Cabinet Meeting 19 September 2018

Ofsted Inspection Report Published 29 January 2018

