

Report to CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

23 August 2021

Subject:	Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2020/201 and Improvement Plan
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger
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1 Recommendations


- 1.1 Scrutiny Board considers and comments on Sandwell Children's Trust Annual Review 2020/21 and Improvement Plan

2 Reasons for Recommendations

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



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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

- 4.1 The contract with SCT has a comprehensive programme of governance arrangements. The contract requires that the 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 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.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 The plan is based on 4 key themes, underpinned by outcomes to be achieved. The key themes are: People, Practice, Partnership and Prevention.
- 4.8 The delivery of the improvement plan will continue to be overseen by the Improvement Board, independently chair by Mark Gurrey, and progress monitored as part of the Council's contractual monitoring processes.

5 Alternative Options

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



6 Implications

Resources:	<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>
Legal and Governance:	<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>
Risk:	<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>
Equality:	<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>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver</p>



	improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.
Social Value	SCT supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. SCT supports care leavers to access education, employment and training. Having strong governance and oversight supports SCT to achieve service improvement and better support children and families in Sandwell.

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

