

# Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

## 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021

Pandemic response and impact on children –  
consolidated (April 2020-August 2021)



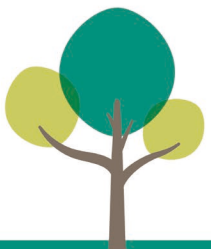
# Overview

- Excellent engagement between early years providers, schools/academies, Sandwell College and the local authority regarding:  
Risk assessments, PPE provision, information and advice, self-isolation, remote learning arrangements, attendance, funding, staff wellbeing, managing CEV, Xmas closure dates, Free School Meal arrangements during school holidays, INSET arrangements, Lateral Flow Testing and contact tracing requirements, information for parents, liaison with unions.
- Services have continued to operate throughout the pandemic including social care services, education psychologists, inclusive learning services, admissions and appeals, school improvement, virtual school, Connexions, children's centres, and a daily detached youth work programme in each town. All services continued to be very busy. Many staff volunteered to assist other response functions including the daily early morning schools' support helpline. Absence has been low; staff who were self-isolating generally continuing to work.
- Additional resources have been put in place for services to support emotional health and wellbeing, domestic abuse, internet safety training for parents and school staff, family support, Supporting Families Against Youth Crime programme, Free School Meals provision during school holidays and 1800+ IT devices for vulnerable children who haven't accessed DfE devices.
- The council has enabled Sandwell Children's Trust to access its various Covid grants to support increased costs and has fast-tracked agile IT for social workers.



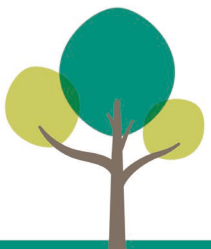
# Overview

- Many services have been innovated during this period and have continued to improve performance, for example, virtual admissions appeals, the school attendance team has developed a Return to School Support Strategy, focusing on welfare and also encouragement to parents/carers that may not be sending vulnerable children to early years provision or school, and Vulnerable Children's Group established.
- Sandwell Council was the winner of the Innovation in Children's Services Award 2020 from the MJ, and finalists for the CYP Now Children in Care Award 2020. The SAFL inspection in October and individual school inspections have recognised successful channel shifts to remote learning. A member of staff won the national NSPCC Award, recognising outstanding practice in the implementation of the Graded Care Profile 2 (Neglect programme), and another member of staff received the MBE in recognition of work in school inclusion for children with SEND.
- Our Corporate Parenting Board has continued to ensure that children in care and care leavers have been effectively supported during the pandemic, and direct engagement with young people has continued via virtual platforms.



# Early Years and families

- Financial support provided to early learning and childcare providers to ensure the sustainability of their businesses where they continued to be operational for key worker children and vulnerable children, or where occupancy had reduced significantly due to Covid19.
- Children's Centre programmes continued to support families virtually, and then resumed on a 121 basis after the first lockdown.
- More than 7000 households with children accessed the Winter Support Grant which helped with the cost of utilities, food and other essentials.
- Ofsted visits to settings continued.



# School Years

## STEPS

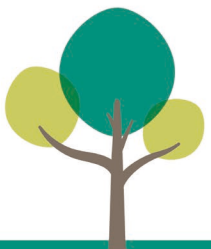
- 160 home learning packs delivered to International New Arrival children; 950 wellbeing follow-up calls made to check progress and resolve issue (split families, families sofa-surfing, financial and safeguarding)
- Centre opened fully on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## EHE

- 557 end of January half-term;
- EHE Advisory Teacher and team and half-termly newsletters;
- Food (FSM) and supplies.

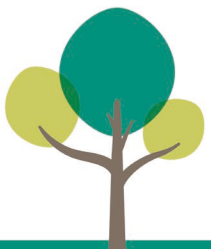
## SCHOOLS

- Schools have remained open in challenging circumstances; Daily letter from director to Easter and then weekly;
- Ofsted visits to schools



# Vulnerable Children

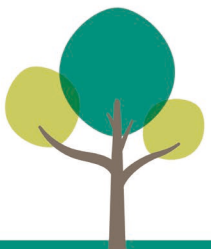
- Average of 254 contacts per week since start of pandemic (includes telephone calls, visits and e-mails)
- Average of 357 meals delivered per week
- 1334 Learning Resource Packs delivered
- 751 Newsletters delivered for EHE/CME
- 86 children living in hostels supported with Learning Resource packs & food parcels
- Supported AP Providers to monitor 200 pupils
- Delivery of laptops
- Support for “return to school strategies” September 2020 and March 2021 (see planned surveys / data collection and letters plus [www.sandwell.gov.uk/backtoschool.](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/backtoschool.))



# Children in Care

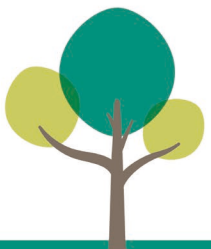
## LACES

- Closing the gap in recent years, and the rate of progress greater than national – three year upward trend in RWM – specific programmes of intervention
- Guidance issued to social workers and head teachers in March 2020 to establish lines of responsibility/accountability
- RAG rated children to ensure the most vulnerable were clearly in sight
- Attendance monitoring and wellbeing calls
- Work with pre-school children and additional support in Reception
- Analysis of PEPs to identify gaps in learning and develop targeted responses, plus materials to support learning
- Recovery planning for transition Yr6 to Yr7
- Continued close work with head teachers
- Virtual training sessions for professionals and foster carers
- Virtual events and activities, including half-term for children and carers



# Vulnerable children - impact

- Free School Meals eligibility increased by over 27%;
- Significant increase in domestic abuse;
- Impact on children's emotional wellbeing and mental health;
- Impact on learning and achievement;
- Digital exclusion;
- Impact on young people's jobs;
- Increase in demand for education, health and care assessments;
- Increase in significant safeguarding incidents.
- pressures emerging eg SEND assessments





# All children - impact

- Disrupted formal education
- Home learning in strained environments
- Exams and qualifications
- Jobs and training shortages
- Lack of safe space and trusted support
- Loneliness and isolation – fears about the future
- Online pressure and risk
- Risk of harmful behaviours
- Disrupted family services and psychological support
- Challenging family relationships
- Increase in domestic abuse
- Low personal risk of direct Covid but high long-term social and economic exposure
- Increase in FSM of 17.5% and rising (now 29% of pupils)



## COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

- Sitrep (including Sandwell Children's Trust), Reset and Recovery Board, Vulnerable Children's Group meetings, SIMT, Vulnerable People Cell meetings
- With partners (education providers, safeguarding partnership)
- Several times weekly with DfE and Ofsted and meetings with Ministers
- Regional and national meetings and actions
- Voices of children, young people and families
- Staff meetings and other support, including staff conferences
- Brexit planning (School admissions, QTS status, Food suppliers, Medicines for children, Planning school trips to the EU, Data protection, Employing staff from the EU, Families in EU Settlement scheme, Children in care and care leavers' status, Cross-border child protection arrangements)



## FOCUS FOR NEXT 12 MONTHS

- Catch-up/recovery in education and child development
- Social care recovery
- Continued planning for surge response
- Delivery of emotional health and wellbeing support
- Managing increased demand for education, health and care assessments
- Transition to BAU
- Supporting staff welfare

