

Report to Cabinet

17 January 2024

Subject:	Child Friendly Sandwell
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education Councillor Simon Hackett
Director:	Director of Children Services' and Education Michael Jarrett
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Sally Giles – Assistant Director – Children's Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement Samantha Harman - Holiday Activities and Food Programme Manager Sarah Sprung – Senior Lead Officer – Policy and Strategy Jack Whitehouse – Lead Officer – Policy and Strategy

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet approves the preparation and submission of an expression of interest and application for Sandwell to become a UNICEF Child Friendly Borough.
- 1.2 That a Member Working Group is established comprising of members of the Cabinet, scrutiny and the opposition, to oversee both the submission and each of the phases within the application process of the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities programme.



1.3 That lead officers from the following service areas be appointed to sit on the Child Friendly Sandwell Officer Steering Group, to manage both the expression of interest and the application processes for a Child Friendly Sandwell:-

- Communications
- Community Partnerships
- Finance
- Legal and Governance
- Housing
- Regeneration
- Public Health
- Borough Economy
- Strategic Partnership Business Managers

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 Delivering on the Sandwell Labour Manifesto Pledge, “We will create a child friendly Sandwell”

2.2 A child friendly city is a city that respects and promotes the rights of children and young people and provides them with opportunities to participate in its social, cultural, political and economic life. Developing a child friendly city involves engaging with children and young people as active citizens, ensuring their safety and well-being, and creating inclusive and accessible spaces and services for them. A child friendly city is not only beneficial for children and young people, but also for the whole community, as it fosters social cohesion, diversity, sustainability, and innovation.







2.3 The guiding principles of building a child friendly city mirror the overarching principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The initiative requires adoption of the following principles for good governance:-

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



- 2.4 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. It will also represent the Council living its values, being ambitious, inclusive, customer focused and accountable.
- 2.5 From the results of the boroughwide representative Budget Consultation run in 2023, we know that the most important area of Council business to residents are the services delivered to Children and Young People.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Working towards and achieving Child Friendly status would impact positively on all strategic objectives and unify the council in the delivery of the Corporate Plan and the wider five board partnership priorities.
	
	
	
	
	

4 Context and Key Issues

Background

- 4.1 A child friendly city is a city, town, community or any system of local governance committed to improving the lives of children within their jurisdiction by realising their rights as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and has helped transform children’s lives.



- 4.2 The challenges for children and young people post-pandemic are greater now than ever. Adopting a child friendly framework puts children centre stage and encourages a conversation about what the future for children and young people living in Sandwell should look like. This requires a commitment to ensuring that every child has the best possible childhood, regardless of where they live, how much their parents earn, their cultural heritage or their complex needs.
- 4.3 Placing children and young people at the heart of the shared public realm is a moral, economic and public health imperative. Only by engaging consistently with children and young people, considering the evidence and highlighting what works, can we begin to influence policy to give these issues the priority they deserve. By doing this we can then take the steps necessary to create genuinely child friendly communities, towns and neighbourhoods, which will deliver benefits felt by the community as a whole. Examples where the child friendly approach has impacted on children's lives include Child Friendly Cov successfully partnering with two major utilities companies to price cap utility bills for care leavers transitioning to independent living and Child Friendly Leeds roll out the Safe Space programme in conjunction with their business ambassadors, training over 200 staff members and creating a network of safe spaces across the city.
- 4.4 Whilst Sandwell does not have child friendly status, we have much to be proud of. Current areas of good practice, some of which have been in place for 10 years, that support Child Friendly status include:-

- SHAPE FORUM
- Children and Young People Engagement Strategy
- Sandwell Play Service – Go Play Sandwell
- Play Sufficiency
- Universal and targeted youth service offer
- Just Youth website
- Poverty Proofing in schools
- Young Peoples Version of the Corporate plan
- Corporate Parenting Programme
- Your Voice – Sandwell Children's Trust
- Rights Respecting Schools programme in some schools
- 21st Century Child programme
- Pilot school streets programme



Research and Development

- 4.5 An officer working group has completed research into a range of models that may be adopted to achieve a Child Friendly Sandwell. Essentially there are two options available: -
1. UNICEF Child Friendly Cities,
 2. Develop our own Sandwell Child Friendly Borough Programme.
- 4.6 Appendix A details the requirements for each of these approaches and the pros and cons for each, together with the financial implications.
- 4.7 Officers have engaged with peers from the London Borough of Lambeth, Cardiff Council and Southampton City Council, Lambeth and Southampton are on their journey to becoming a UNICEF Child Friendly City and Cardiff has recently gained the accreditation. These conversations have identified that the strengths of the UNICEF approach are: -
- the expectation that it is a top down, council-wide approach, which holds participating councils to account;
 - the model supports a cultural change in council's decision-making processes;
 - the model includes support, training and scrutiny from UNICEF;
 - UNICEF UK recognition, once achieved, would have a positive impact on a council's reputation and can act as a positive catalyst to leaver in additional income from external sources.
- 4.8 Officers have also engaged with peers from Leeds and Coventry Councils who are implementing their own child friendly approaches. From those conversations it has been determined that: -
- a bespoke framework often but not always delivers a 'bottom up' approach and has limited impact at a boroughwide strategic level;
 - an accountability partner would need to be procured to build in scrutiny to the process, the cost of which would be similar to the cost associated with the UNICEF programme;
 - there would be more flexibility with this option both in terms of the framework and timescales.



Consultation Process and Preferred Option

- 4.9 Following the research phase of the work the two options were taken to Leadership Team on 26 September and then to a Leaders meeting on 11 October 2023.
- 4.10 Due consideration was given to the pros and cons for both approaches, together with the resource requirements to deliver. Consideration was also given as to whether it was the right time for Sandwell to embark on a journey towards being a child friendly borough.
- 4.11 Given that the cost of both approaches was similar, members felt that it would be better to progress with the UNICEF framework for the following reasons: -
- Internationally recognised – has more meaning than a locally designed framework.
 - The training and support offered through UNICEF would have a positive impact on the cultural changes required to deliver a child friendly borough.
- 4.12 Officers attended a meeting of the SHAPE Youth Forum on 30 November to determine whether progressing towards a child friendly borough was something that young people living in Sandwell would support.
- 4.13 Young people present at the SHAPE Youth Forum made the following comments: -
- Lots of officers come to SHAPE to ask our views, with the exception of the Corporate Plan, we never hear back from them.
 - We often feel that adults try to make children act in a more adult way, rather than making the environment more suitable for children.
 - We want to be able to prioritise areas for improvement.
 - Over the last 10 years of the SHAPE survey there have consistently been the same issues and priorities coming forward from children and young people across Sandwell, it feels like nothing has changed. If becoming a Child Friendly Borough would help address this, it is a positive.



4.14 A Vision 2030 event was held with partners from the Sandwell Business Ambassadors and the five statutory partnership boards (Safeguarding Children's Partnership, Safeguarding Adults Board, Safer Sandwell Police and Crime Board, Health and Wellbeing Board and the Corporate Parenting Board) on 30 November 2023. Whilst the main discussion focused on the refresh of the Vision there was reference to the need to retain a focus on children and young people. Partners particularly saw the long-term benefits of focusing and investing in our children and young people.

4.15 The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board also considered the proposals at its meeting on 8 January 2024. The Board wholeheartedly supported the proposals and will be monitoring progress and supporting the Council on the journey to becoming a child friendly borough.

Next Steps: UNICEF – Child Friendly Cities and Communities Expression of Interest

4.16 The expression of interest requires the council to evidence:

- Motivation and readiness – Is this the right time for us?
- Vision – Do we have a clear vision of what we want to achieve?
- Commitment to child centred practice – Can we build on existing commitments to child's rights and child centred practice?
- A meaningful commitment to children and young people's participation- Are we committed to children's ongoing, meaningful participation and involvement in decision making?
- Commitment to reflective practice and learning – Are we committed to reflective practice, experimentation and ongoing data collection and monitoring?
- Commitment at all levels and cross-council buy in - Do we have political commitment to the programme, and can we ensure commitment across the wider council?
- Governance and coordination – Will there be robust, transparent local governance structures in place?
- Place based approach. Can we take an inclusive, community-wide approach to our delivery of the programme?
- Costs and resourcing – Can we commit to paying the direct programme fees and ensure adequate resources are available locally for a minimum of three years?



- Commitment to improving local standards and outcomes – Can we detail how the programme will help improve standards and outcomes and identify key performance indicators to help us achieve this?

4.17 To oversee both the expression of interest and subsequent application process it is suggested that this would be best managed through the establishment of a Member Working Group with Cabinet, Scrutiny and Opposition representation. The Group would also be responsible for determining the post accreditation approach so that we maintain and continue to build on best practice.

4.18 We would expect to be able to submit our expression of interest in February 2024. Following which we will be able to identify the key milestones in our journey to becoming a Child Friendly Borough.

Finance, Resourcing and Governance

4.19 The financial cost of progressing with the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities programme is £35,000 per annum. We know from speaking to other local authorities that it will take between three and five years from expression of interest to assessment and award of the status. This would mean the Council would incur maximum costs of £175,000.

4.20 In year 1 – 2024/25 the required £35,000 will be met by redirecting Covid recovery funding. In future years we will seek corporate sponsorship and any additional funding required will be met from the base budget.

4.21 Embarking upon the child friendly borough journey will require commitment and staff resource from all areas of the Council. It is a cultural change model that will benefit the Council as a whole and our wider community, putting children and young people at the heart of all council services, functions and decisions.

4.22 Whilst some co-ordination and project management resource have been identified within Children’s Services and the Assistant Chief Executive’s area there is a need for long term commitment of staff resources across the Council including (but not limited to): -

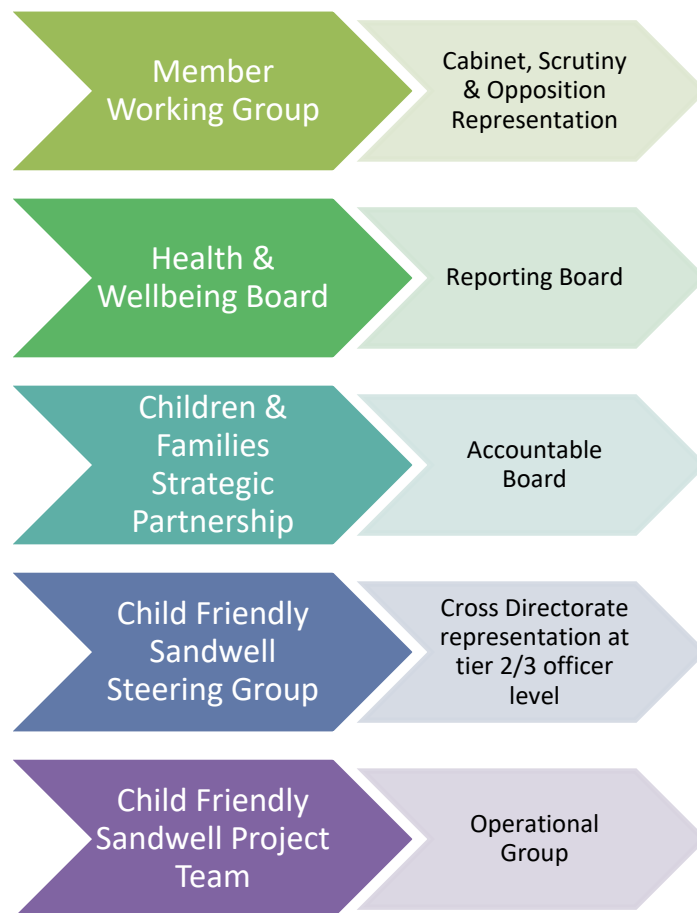
- Communications
- Community Partnerships
- Finance
- Legal and Governance
- Housing



- Regeneration
- Public Health
- Borough Economy
- Strategic Partnership Business Managers

4.23 Council wide commitment will ensure that we can progress with this agenda as one council and equally realise the benefits of working in a child friendly way.

4.24 Whilst the Member Working Group and Officer Steering Group will be paramount to driving the project forward, wider governance is also required to draw in the expertise, intelligence and support from partners. The diagram below sets out the proposed governance arrangements: -



4.25 The Council has recently been successful in its bid to secure Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) funds which will: -

- Enable the Council to become more research active.



- Support evidence-informed decision making to improve wider determinants of health.
- Establish place-based partnerships involving local authority, higher education institutions, voluntary and community sector, NHS and wider health partners.

4.26 The Child Friendly Borough programme will be able to benefit from HDRC activity by means of consultation, engagement, analysis and evaluation.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 Appendix A sets out the alternative option which would be to create a bespoke model by developing a homegrown Sandwell Child Friendly Borough framework. Given that developing and implementing our own model would incur similar costs to the UNICEF framework, without any of the training and mentoring support offered by UNICEF, it is felt that the UNICEF route would be better value for money.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>The cost to the Council for each year of undertaking the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities programme would be £35,000. Funding has been identified for 2024/25 from redirect of Covid recovery fund in future years it will be sought from corporate sponsorship and any additional built into the base budget as detailed in 4.20.</p> <p>The assignment of a lead officer from each directorate to represent on the Child Friendly Sandwell Officer Working Group, to manage both the EOI, application processes and any subsequent related CFS work programmes moving forward.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>There are no direct legal implications arising from these recommendations. Robust, transparent governance arrangements will be built into the process.</p>
Risk:	<p>A full risk assessment will be undertaken by the Officer working group as part of the application phase of the activity and be monitored by the Officer's</p>



	<p>working group and reviewed regularly through the Member Working Group.</p> <p>Child Friendly Sandwell is a Labour Manifesto Pledge, not progressing this could have an adverse reputational impact.</p>
Equality:	Progressing towards child friendly status would have a positive impact on equality across the borough. As part of the expression of interest phase of activity a full Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the process maximises opportunity to address inequality across the borough.
Health and Wellbeing:	Children’s capability to generate well-being is shaped through relationships they have with other people and the spatial conditions of their everyday life adopting a child friendly way of working can improve health and wellbeing not only for our younger population but also wider communities and residents.
Social Value:	Sandwell Business Ambassadors were engaged in the consultation as part of the Vision 2030 event. Embarking upon a child friendly journey aligns well with their priority around raising aspirations. CFS will provide opportunities for children and young people to influence procurement processes, policies and cultural change across the Council and wider partners.
Climate Change:	Adopting a child friendly approach requires the council to analyse the impact decisions have on the lived experiences of children and young people in Sandwell which includes the commitment to our climate change targets.
Corporate Parenting:	Embarking upon a journey to being a child friendly borough will require extensive consultation and engagement with children and young people across the borough. This will include our care experienced children and young people.

7 Appendices

Appendix A – Option appraisal for becoming a child friendly borough.



8 Background Papers

[The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
[UNICEF Child Friendly Initiative Guidance Note](#)
[UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Handbook](#)

