

Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Monday 14 February 2022

Subject:	Update on the Performance of Sandwell Children's Trust
Director:	Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett
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1 Recommendations


- 1.1 Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board considers and comments on Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) 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>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 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, 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 as 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 On behalf of the Council, the Sandwell Childrens Trust developed an improvement plan in response to the Ofsted inspection findings published in January 2018. The plan was presented to Cabinet in September 2018 and covered a 3-year period and was refreshed in September 2021.
- 4.5 The delivery of the improvement plan continues to be overseen by an Improvement Board, independently chaired by a DfE appointed consultant, and progress monitored as part of the Council’s contractual monitoring processes.
- 4.6 Since April 2018 the Trust has received several monitoring visits from Ofsted as well as two assurance visits, the most recent of which was in November 2021.

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 began operating on 1 April 2018. The Service Delivery Agreement includes a contractual requirement to attend Children and Education Services Scrutiny Panel twice yearly. Any alternative to the current arrangement must be agreed by both the Council and the Trust and go through a formal contract variation process.

6 Implications

Resources:	Sandwell Children’s Trust will receive approx. £68m in 2021/22 to deliver the Council’s statutory responsibilities for children’s social care, and to provide targeted early help services. The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.
Legal and Governance:	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 one 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.
Risk:	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.
Equality:	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.
Health and Wellbeing:	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.
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

None

8. Background Papers

[Ofsted Monitoring Visit Report Published 14 January 2022](#)

[Ofsted Inspection Report – Fostering Service Published 8 Sept 2021](#)

