



Sandwell
Children's Trust

Contract Review

April 2018 - March 2022



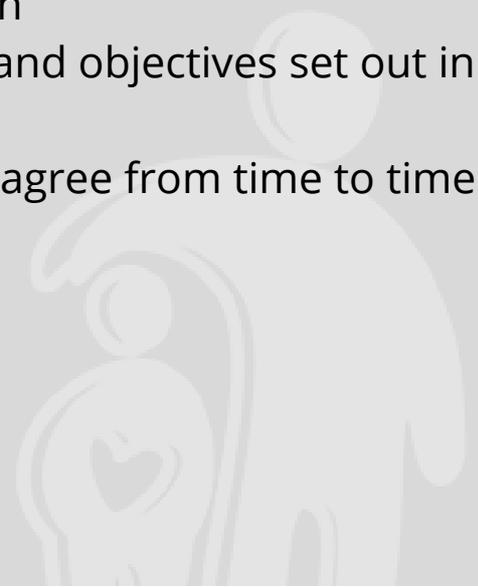
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Foreword

Sandwell Children's Trust was created in 2018 with the clear purpose to improve the lives of children and young people. This is an ambition that continues to be shared by the Sandwell partnership, in particular our strategic partners Sandwell Council with whom the Trust has a contract to deliver social care services to children, young people and families.

The last four years have been both challenging and rewarding, staff and leaders have worked hard to deliver widescale improvements in all areas of the Trust against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and national pressures affecting the social work sector.

Our regulators have recognised the progress that we have made; our 2022 ILACS Inspection judged the Trust overall to be requires improvement to be good, OFSTED also rated our Fostering Service as good and HMI Probation rated our Youth Justice Service as good. This represents significant progress after years of inadequacy and has created a solid foundation on which we can continue to strengthen and improve the service we provide to the most vulnerable people in our community.



We have embarked on a comprehensive and aspirational transformation programme that will underpin the next phase of our improvement, and with our staff have co-developed a clear ethos that sets out how we are going to realise this ambition. As OFSTED have told us, we know ourselves well and will be relentless in pursuing the very best outcomes for our children and families.

Foreword continued

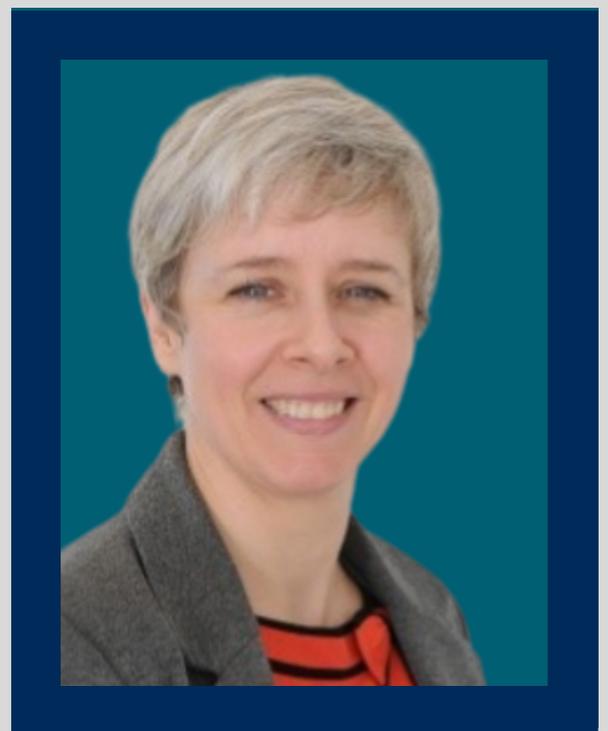
In addition to our regulators, The Department for Education (DfE) have also acknowledged our progress and have confirmed that Sandwell's Children's Services will now enter a period of transition from intervention whilst maintaining the Statutory Direction at this time. We welcome this news as an endorsement of our progress and a testimony to the resilience and commitment of the Sandwell family.

This contract review document sets out the steps we have taken to deliver these improvements as well as the Trust's performance against a series of key performance indicators. It is a necessarily detailed document which should be considered alongside the performance data that forms the appendices.

We would like to thank staff, leaders and partners from across Sandwell for their contribution to the progress that has been made since Sandwell Children's Trust was created in 2018, and look forward to working together to further improve our services.



Rt Hon Jacqui Smith
Chair



Emma Taylor
Chief Executive

Contract Review Process

The requirements of the Contract Review are outlined in Schedule 3 – Annual Review/Contract Review, of the Service Delivery Contract and are summarised below.

Beginning in April 2022, during the Initial Contract Review Period, Sandwell Children's Trust (the Trust) and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) shall:

- Review the operation and performance of the Trust
- Submit an agreed draft written report summarising the conclusions of the Contract Review (the "Draft Contract Review Report")

The review will consider:

1. The Trust's performance against budgets in the first four (4) Contract Years;
2. Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the first four (4) Contract Years;
3. The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the first four (4) Contract Years;
4. The Trust's proposals for the future operation and performance of the Services;
5. Whether the Trust has achieved the standard 'Good' as set out in the Ofsted guidance within four (4) years of the Services Commencement Date as evidenced by the Annual Self Evaluation and/or any external inspection;
6. Whether the Trust is achieving the aims and objectives set out in Clause 2 of this Agreement (Aims); and
7. Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.

Following consideration and revision of the Draft Contract Review Report at Operational Partnership Board (OPB), The Strategic Partnership Board (SPB) will meet as the SPB Contract Review Meeting to agree the Final Contract Review Report. The contract requires that a Senior Civil Servant (or their nominee) be invited to attend the SPB Contract Review Meeting.

Within five (5) Working Days of the SPB Contract Review Meeting, the Trust and the Council shall:

- (a) amend the Revised Draft Contract Review Report to incorporate the changes agreed at the SPB Contract Review Meeting (such revised report being the "Final Contract Review Report"); and
- (b) submit to the Secretary of State the Final Contract Review Report which shall either contain:

- (i) where the Strategic Partnership Board has agreed a joint recommendation pursuant to Paragraph 2.5(b), a joint recommendation as to whether a Break Notice should be served by the Council on the Trust pursuant to Clause 3.3 of this Agreement; or
- (ii) where the Strategic Partnership Board has failed to agree a joint recommendation pursuant to Paragraph 2.5(b), each Party's recommendation as to whether a Break Notice should be served by the Council on the Trust pursuant to Clause 3.3 of this Agreement

Creation of the Trust

The Trust was created following the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996), in 2016, to set up a new arrangement in the form of a Children's Trust to deliver children's social care services. The statutory direction was issued in response to a long period of inadequate provision of children's social care services delivered by the Council. The Statutory Direction set out the requirement to establish a new and distinct legal entity to provide children's social care services in Sandwell on behalf of the Council. The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services and is managed by a board of non-executive and executive directors. The Council commissions the Trust to deliver statutory children's social care and targeted services, as specified in the Service Delivery Contract.

The Trust commenced operations on the 1 April 2018 with day to day operational management overseen by the Executive Management Team, who are accountable to the Trust Board.

The Trust Board

Chaired by the Right Honourable Jacqui Smith, the Trust Board is both supportive and challenging. The Board is complemented by 3 committees; Finance & Infrastructure, Workforce and Audit & Risk, each focussing on key matters that impact on the day to day running of the Trust. There is a strong sense of the ambition for children amongst all members; and there is good oversight of Trust activity, with regular, detailed reports that cover all aspects of the Trust, e.g. workforce, practice and performance, finance. The Chair is well sighted on strategic and relevant operational matters and key decisions are made swiftly after thorough scrutiny. The Chair of the Board was originally appointed by the Department for Education and regularly provides written reports, to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Children, on the Trust's performance and progress adding a further element of scrutiny and challenge

Governance

A comprehensive programme of governance arrangements has been established. The Trust and Council officers meet at least monthly at the Operational Partnership Board (OPB), to consider performance and operational matters.

The OPB is chaired by the Trust Chief Executive. On a quarterly basis, the Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust and the Trust Chief Executive meets with the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services at a Strategic Partnership Board (SPB). The SPB is chaired by SMBC Chief Executive.

Living our purpose and ethos

To complement the Trust's purpose of *improving the lives of children and young people*, staff from across the Trust have collaborated to articulate and embed our ethos which sets out the ways in which we achieve this, with specific focus on our children & families and ourselves & partners.

Our ethos



Our children & families

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
- We keep families safe, keeping them together where possible
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand
- We celebrate our children and enable them to smile, laugh, play and succeed

Our ethos



Ourselves & our partners

- We support and look after each other
- We make meaningful connections and collaborate effectively with the wider Sandwell family
- We share a common understanding of our responsibilities
- We encourage each other to learn, develop & reflect
- We embrace diversity and celebrate each other's differences
- We promote the positives – we are advocates for the Trust



Children and Young People Receiving Support from Sandwell Children's Trust

Sandwell is an urban area lying in the centre of the West Midlands conurbation, made up of six small urban towns. It is a deprived area, ranking as the 12th most deprived authority in the country and this deprivation is spread across the borough (Rank of average score, Indices of Deprivation 2019).

Sandwell has a growing population because births and migration into the borough have exceeded deaths. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 49% of all children, compared with 26.2% in England (0-17 years). The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are of Indian origin (8,246) and Pakistani origin (5,917).



82,995 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Sandwell. This is 25.1% of the total population in the area. There have been big increases in the number of children and young people living in Sandwell. This has required 5,288 new primary school places and 3,405 secondary school places since 2011.

Many of Sandwell's children and young people experience poor outcomes. Approximately 25% of the children in Sandwell aged under 16 years are living in low-income families. Around 7 in 1,000 children die before their first birthday, levels of teenage pregnancy are higher than the national level and 28.2% of 11-year-olds are classified as obese.



The proportion of children entitled to free school meals in primary schools is 26.3% (the national average is 21.6%); in secondary schools is 27.6% (the national average is 18.9%). The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary schools is 32.4% (the national average is 20.9%); in secondary schools is 29.2% (the national average is 17.2%)



Contract Review Elements

i: The Trust's performance against budgets in the first four (4) Contract Years

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Trust has been able to demonstrate an improved financial performance in each financial year since 2019/20, reducing the deficit year on year, as a consequence of delivering more effective and efficiency savings through a comprehensive cost savings programme, including, better management of placement demand and cost and reduced expenditure on overheads. This has culminated in the Trust being able to achieve a balanced budget in 2021/22. The Trust continues to forecast improved performance for the life of the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) with a cumulative breakeven position being forecast for 2023/24.

Prior to 2019/20 the Trust faced an unprecedented surge in demand for services and a large increase in children coming into care, moving from a budget assumption of 767 at the time that the initial Trust budget for 2018/19 was developed to a high point of 936 in July 2019.

A summary of the year on year financial performance of the Trust including the MTFP forecast is included in table 1 below:

SCT Annual Income and Expenditure £'000	Pre-trust budget Forecast	2018/19 Actual	2019/20 Actual	2020/21 Actual	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Forecast	2023/24 Forecast	2024/5 Forecast
Revenue								
Contract Sum Revenue from SMBC	58,230	58,230	64,042	65,828	68,028	70,906	72,816	67,260
Other Revenue from SMBC	0	5,500	462	2,333	2,131	432	0	0
Revenue from DfE		125	2,035	2,069	1,089	500		
Revenue from Other Third Parties	3,878	6,655	6,189	5,104	6,385	5,090	5,083	5,091
Total Revenue	62,108	70,510	72,728	75,334	77,633	76,928	77,899	72,351
Expenditure								
Staffing	26,245	28,559	30,367	30,211	30,239	30,414	29,880	30,571
Placements (including Commissioned Services)	30,446	37,701	40,656	39,122	41,447	39,159	37,167	35,911
Overheads	5,917	5,818	5,951	7,868	5,284	5,737	5,781	5,826
Total Expenditure	62,608	72,078	76,974	77,201	76,970	75,310	72,828	72,308
Deficit / (Surplus)	(500)	(1,568)	(4,246)	(1,867)	663	1,618	5,071	43
Cum. deficit		(1,568)	(5,814)	(7,681)	(7,018)	(5,400)	(329)	(286)

Table 1: Summary of Sandwell Children's Trust Year on Year Financial Performance including MTFP Forecast

Despite challenging external factors such as a lockdown due to the pandemic and a national shortage of social workers the Trust now operates on a firm financial footing.

A collaborative and 'open-book' contract negotiation process has been established with the Council. The process has ensured that the Trust can plan its finances with certainty across the MTFP period. Intrinsicly aligned to the business planning process this has enabled the Trust to make realistic plans about service delivery and development in order to meet organisational objectives, within a realistic assessment of the resources available.

Financial management capacity and processes have been improved since the commencement of the Trust. Budgets are managed effectively by budget holders which are routinely and proactively monitored. Budget holders are also supported through monthly meetings with Finance colleagues to analyse expenditure and plan the use of resources to achieve service objectives.

The Trust now better understands the cohort of children in care and the impact of providing care to these children on the financial outturn of the Trust, for instance, it is known that 7% of children in care account for 35% of the placement cost base. When the annual review of the MTFP is being undertaken, finance will engage with the Operational and Commissioning teams in order to better understand the likely trajectory of both the volume of demand for placements by type and the average cost of these placements.



Actual performance information is fed back regularly into key executive information in order to help shape the strategic direction of the Trust in terms of demand management.

We are undertaking a strategic needs analysis to inform the commissioning and service development cycle over the forthcoming 2 years. The initial focus of the transformation programme is reviewing our Intervention services and Children with Disabilities to evaluate the impact of current service delivery on improved outcomes for children and supporting children to remain with their families. The strategic needs analysis will provide the intelligence to further shape our internal fostering recruitment strategy and influence our relationships with local providers of foster care and residential provision to inform local procurement arrangements.

ii: Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the first four (4) Contract Years

The national challenges regarding the shortage of qualified social workers are well known and the West Midlands region (and Sandwell Borough) is not immune to these difficulties. There is a national shortage of social workers with nearly 1,000 per week leaving the service in 2021 and the national vacancy figure is at a 5 year high. It is important to understand our service demand within this context.

Understanding demand within the Trust is complex and multi-faceted, with many variables and assumptions. We have set out our financial performance in the previous section, underpinned by a Medium Term Financial Strategy. The MTFP is based on evidence based analysis of demand.

Key elements are outlined below:

- How many referrals we receive from our partners, the public and children and families themselves
- How many children and families we are working with
- How many placements we need for children to live, both in the short term and in the long term

We have worked hard within the last four years to put ourselves in the position where we understand our demand in these three areas and are able to make realistic predictions for how these variables change so we are able to use our resources most efficiently, whilst providing the best service we can for children and families.

Progress Since 2018

Since March 2018, we have seen a reduction of 308 Children open to us. In relation to early intervention and targeted early help there has been an increase of 147 Children open to the Strengthening Families Service*, with Social Care statutory services seeing a reduction of 455 Children over the same period.

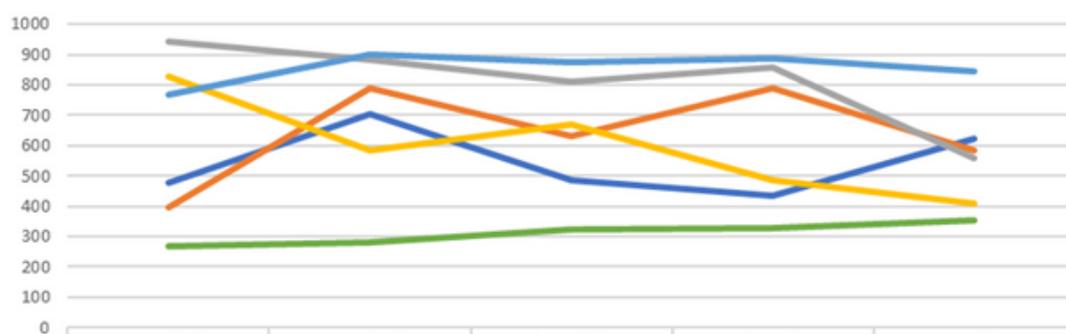
* Strengthening Families is a non statutory service providing support and advice to families in order to prevent the need for statutory intervention.

Although there are slightly more children in care than our comparators (approximately 60 more children), the Trust has reduced the number of children and young people open to Children's Social Care from a total of 3,203 (including Care Leavers) to 2,746, which is a reduction of 455. This is due to our continued focus on progressing children's plans where there has been historic drift; and ensuring that more children are appropriately in the social care system when they need to be.

Table 2: Summary of cases over service areas

Service	Mar 2018	Mar 2019	Mar 2022	Mar 2021	Mar 2022	Variance Mar 18 - Mar 22
Children open to Strengthening Families Service	477	702	486	436	624	147
Children undergoing an assessment	398	788	630	789	582	184
Children in Need with an active CIN Plan	941	883	810	856	558	-383
Children with an active CP Plan	829	584	671	485	409	-420
Children in Care	767	899	876	896	844	87
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355	87
Total	3680	4138	3797	3790	3372	-308

Children Open to Sandwell Childrens Trust



	Mar 2018	Mar 2019	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2022
Children open to Targeted Early Help teams	477	702	486	436	624
Children undergoing an assessment	398	788	630	789	582
Children in Need with an active CIN Plan	941	883	810	856	558
Children with an active CP Plan	829	584	671	485	409
Children in Care	767	901	874	888	844
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355

As of 31st March 2022, we had 558 children with a Child in Need Plan, 409 children with a Child Protection Plan and 844 Children in Care. We have fewer children on Child Protection Plans than our Statistical Neighbour comparators but as mentioned above our Statistical Neighbours in relation to Children in Care.

Table 3: Comparison with Statistical Neighbours

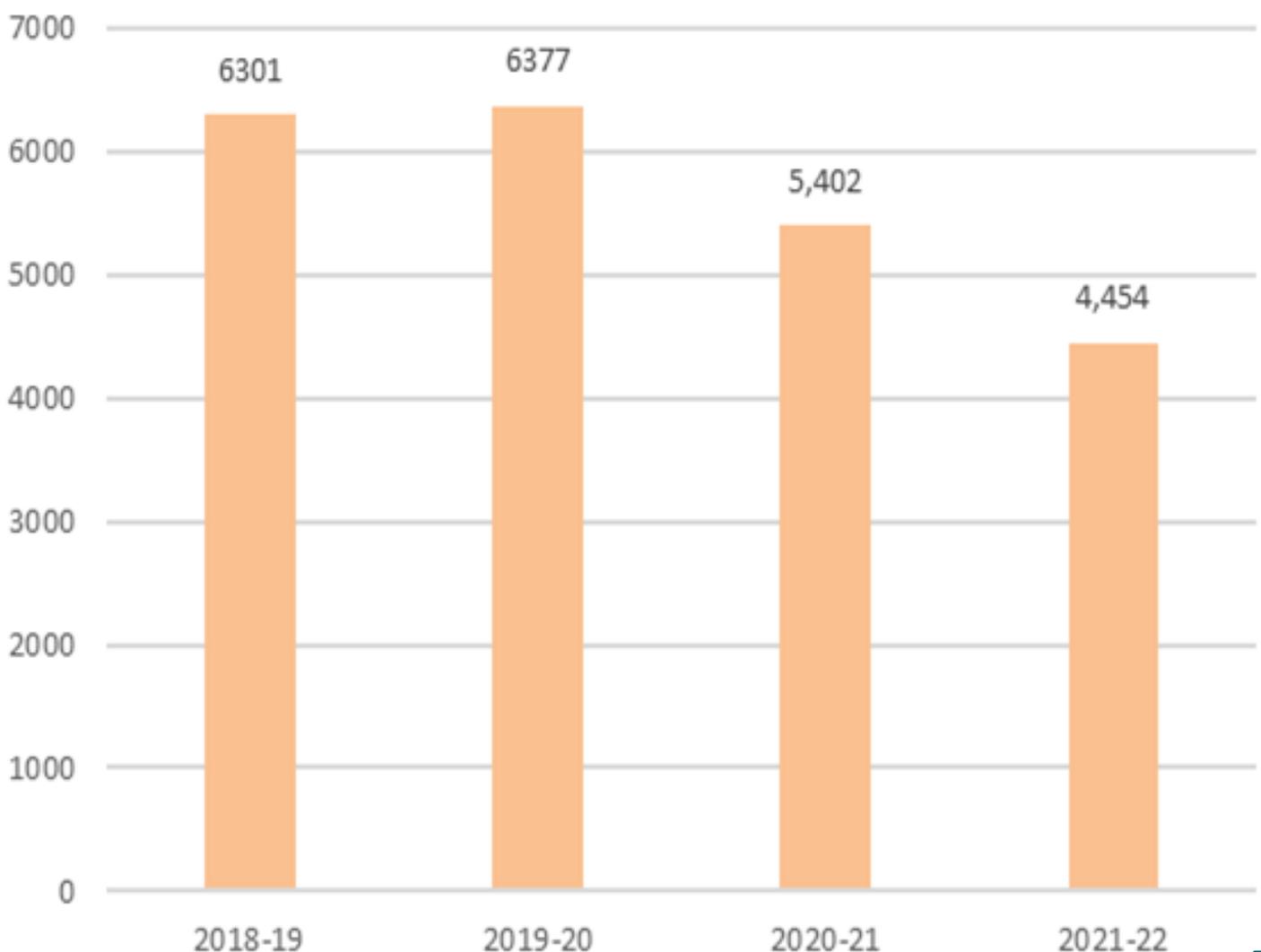
	Sandwell (31 March 2022)	Statistical Neighbour Average 2020/21	England Average 2020/21
Children with a Child Protection Plan	46.3 per 10,000	56.6 per 10,000	41.4 per10,000
Children in Care	101.7 per 10,000	94.8 per 10,0000	67 per 10,000

Table 4: Referrals, S47s and ICPCs

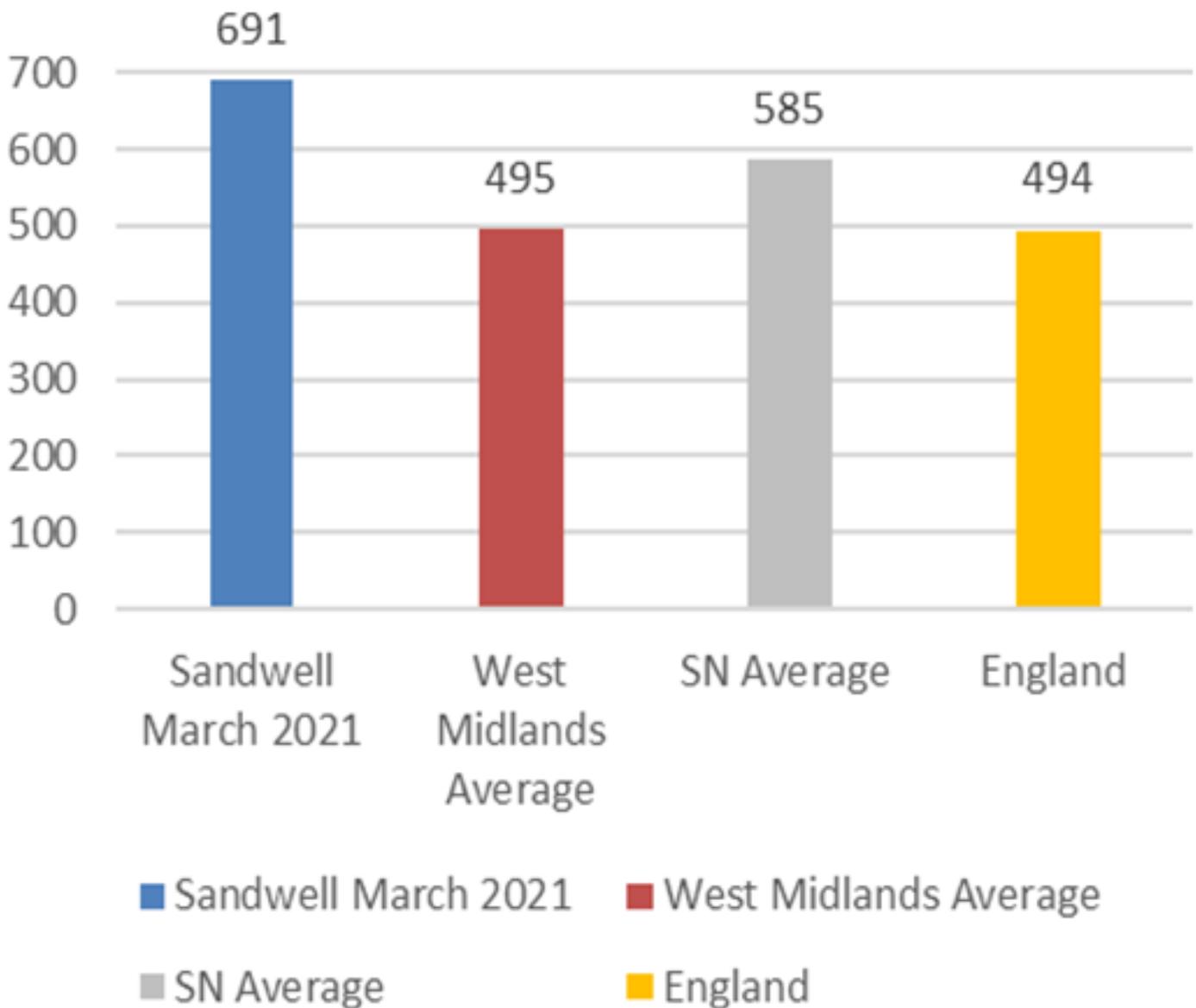
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	SN Av	Eng Av	WM Av
Referrals	6301	6377	5402	4454	N/A	N/A	N/A
Referral Rates per 10,000	759.2	768.4	650.9	536.6	585	494	495

- The increased **referral rate** to the Trust in 2018/19 (759 per 10,000 children) continued throughout the first two years increasing further to 768 at the end March 2020. The last two years has seen a downward trajectory to 537 per 10,000 as at the end March 2022 this is now below our Statistical Neighbour average of 585 per 10,000 and is in line with England and West Midlands Averages. The reduction is due to workers and partners better applying threshold criteria for statutory services and managing risk.
- We are also seeing more children stepping down to targeted family support in our Strengthening Families Service. There is still more work to do in relation to thresholds for referrals. Single Assessment outcomes of No Further Action (NFA) has reduced from 50% to 45% over the last 4 years.
- Around 25% of our assessments over the last 12 months are being stepped down to Strengthening Families or Universal Agencies and 30% are escalated onto a Child in Need, Child Protection or Child in Care Plan.

Referrals April 2018-March 2022



Referral Rates

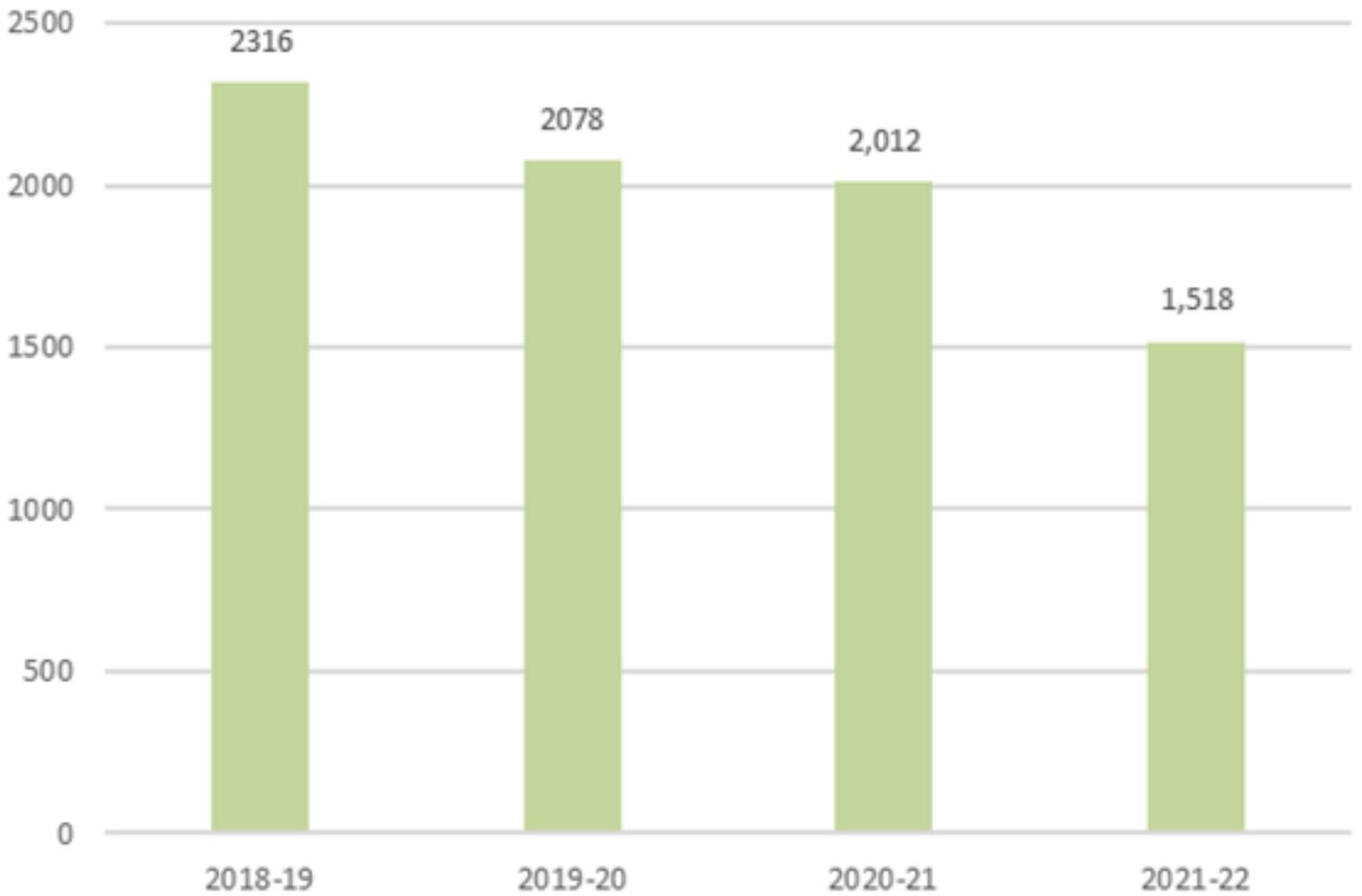


- The percentage of referrals that are re-referrals within the last 4 years has decreased over the course of the contract from 21.06% in April 2018, 24.1 in March 2019 (high point) reducing to 19.3% at end March 2022 which is 1.5% below our Statistical Neighbour average of 20.8%
- The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has reduced from a rate of 279 in March 2019 to 182.9 per 10,000 in March 2022, this is now lower than our Statistical Neighbours and more in line with England and West Midlands Averages. This shows that the Trust is more purposeful when we are faced with deciding whether to proceed with S47 enquiries. Decision making and application of thresholds are more robust in this area to ensure that risk is assessed and Children and Families have the right outcome.

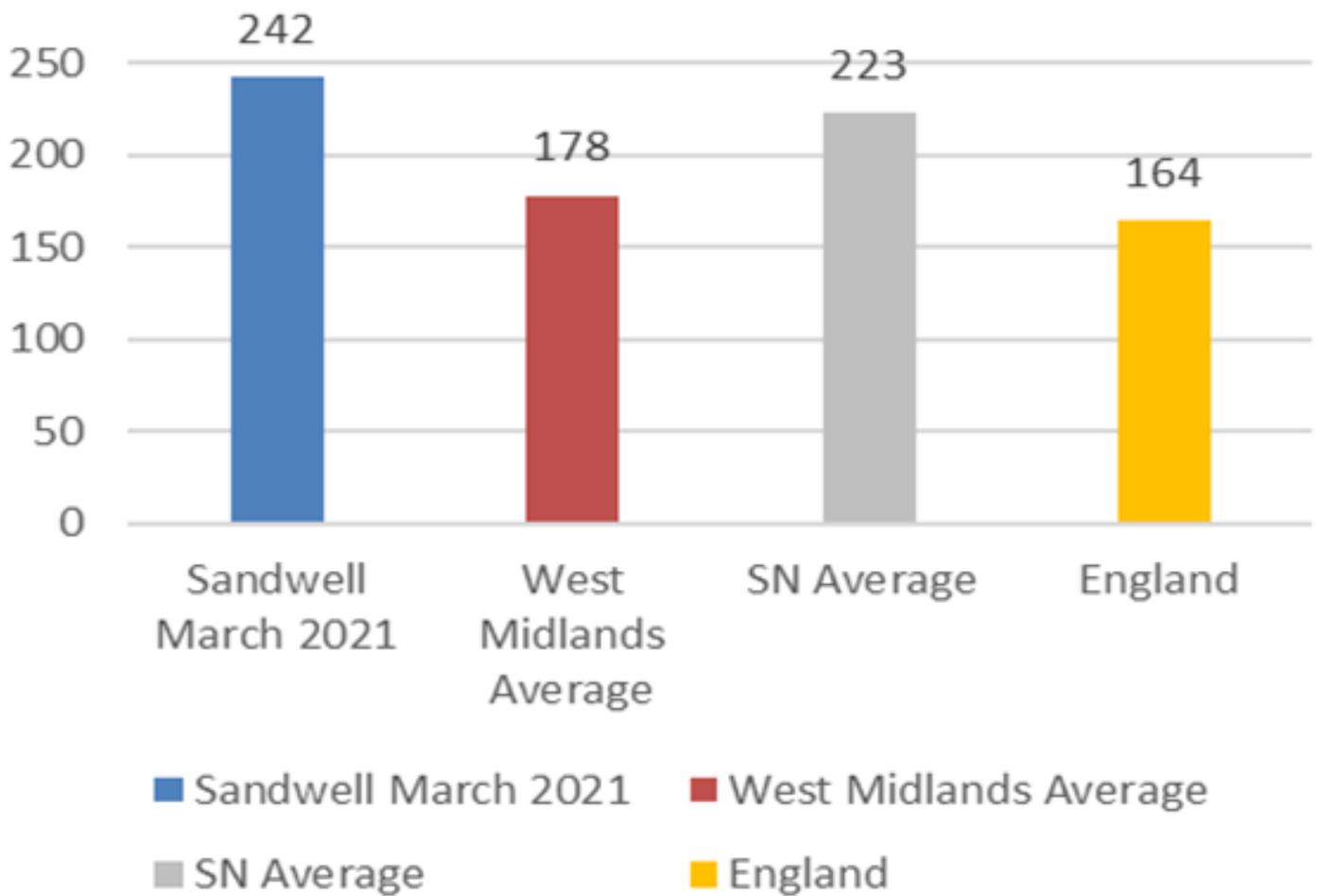
Table 5: Summary of S47 and S47 Rates per 10,000

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
S47s	2316	2078	1983	1518
S47 Rates per 10,000	279.1	250.4	283.9	182.9

S47s April 2018 to March 2022



S47 Rates

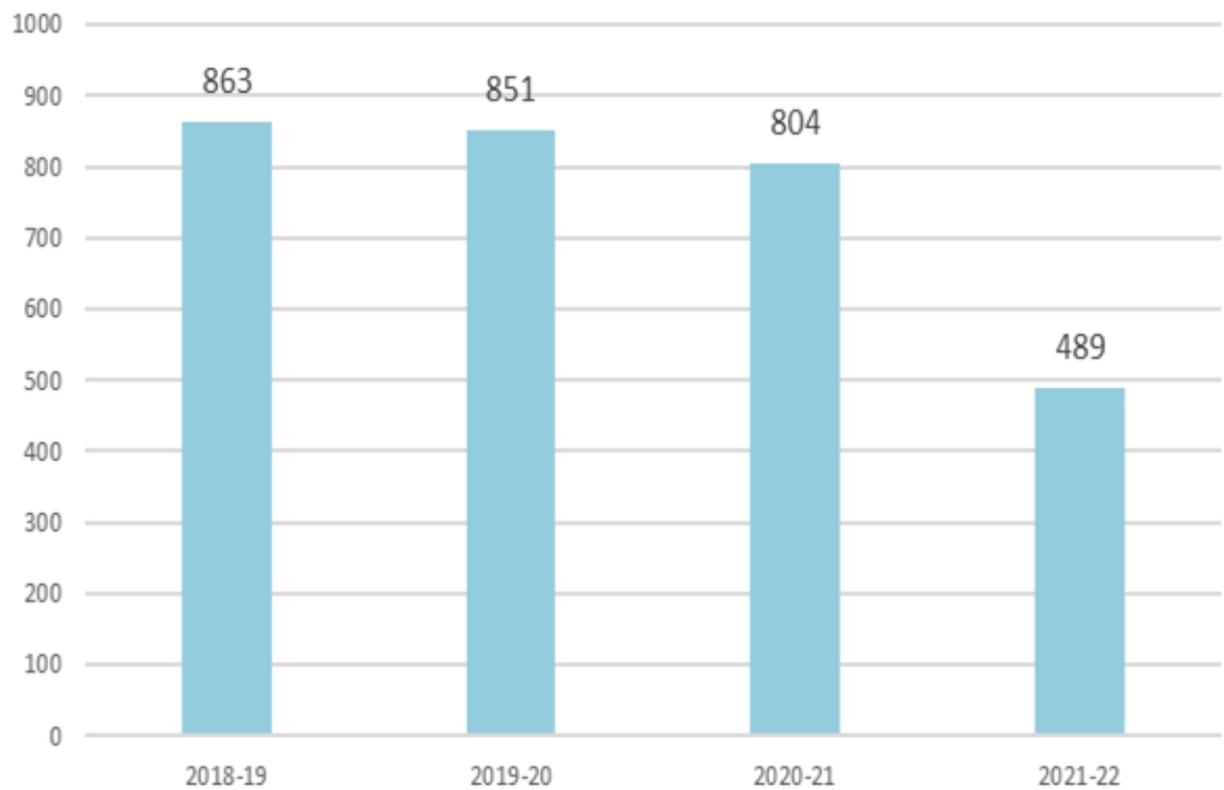


- The rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has also reduced from 103.98 in March 2019 to a rate of 58.9 per 10,000 in March 2022. Current ICPC rate is now below Statistical Neighbour, England and West Midlands Average. In addition, the latest conversion rate from ICPC to CP Plan is healthier and has improved to 86% over the last financial year in comparison to 68% in 2020. The threshold discussions between Conference Chairs and Social Workers are ensuring that the right Children are going into conference, this has helped support the reduction of Children on a Child Protection Plan.

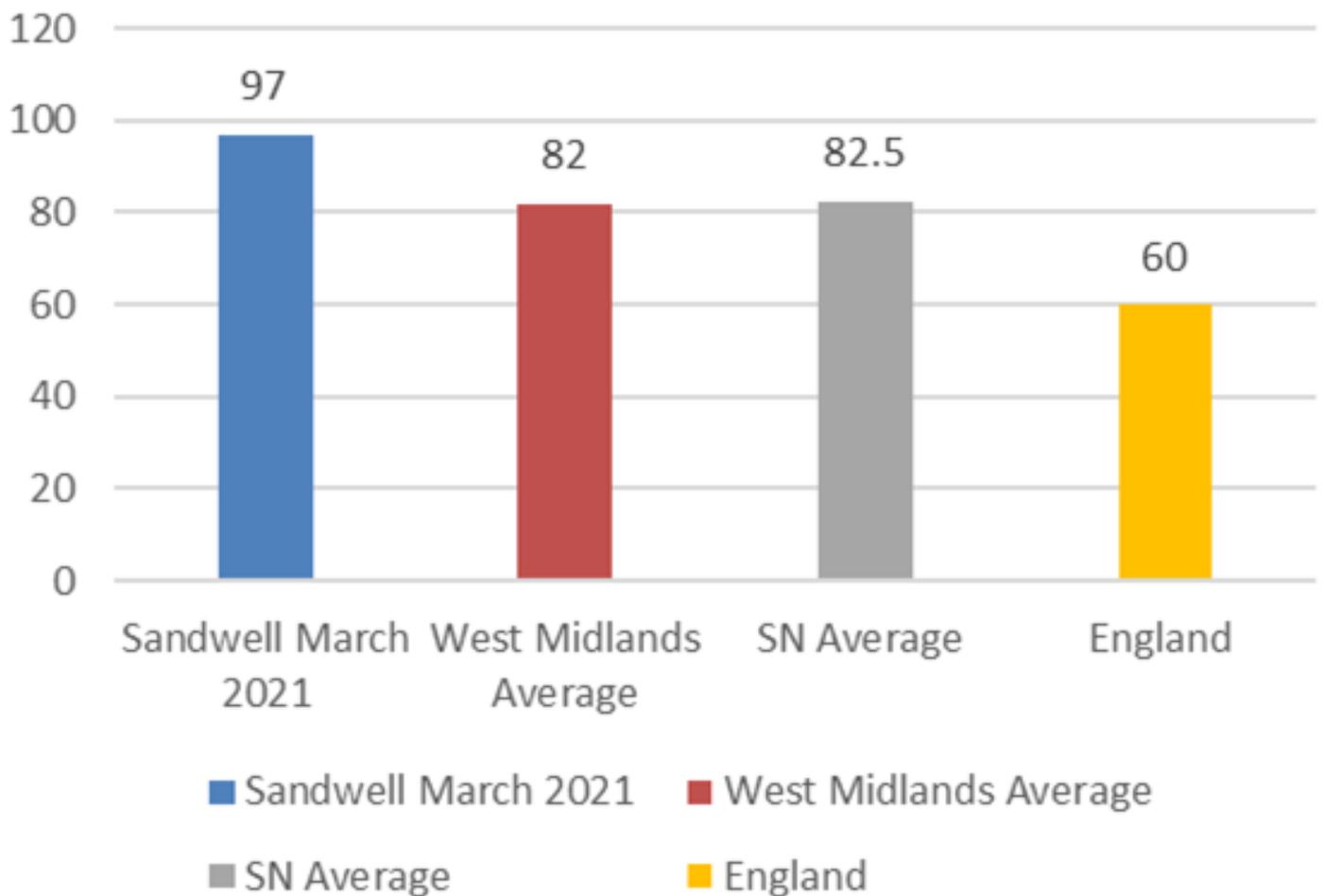
Table 6: Summary of ICPC and ICPC rates per 10,000

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	SN Av	Eng Av	WM Av
ICPCs	863	851	713	489	N/A	N/A	N/A
ICPC Rates per 10,000	104	102.5	86	59	82.5	60	82

ICPCs April 2018-March 2022



ICPC Rates per 10,000

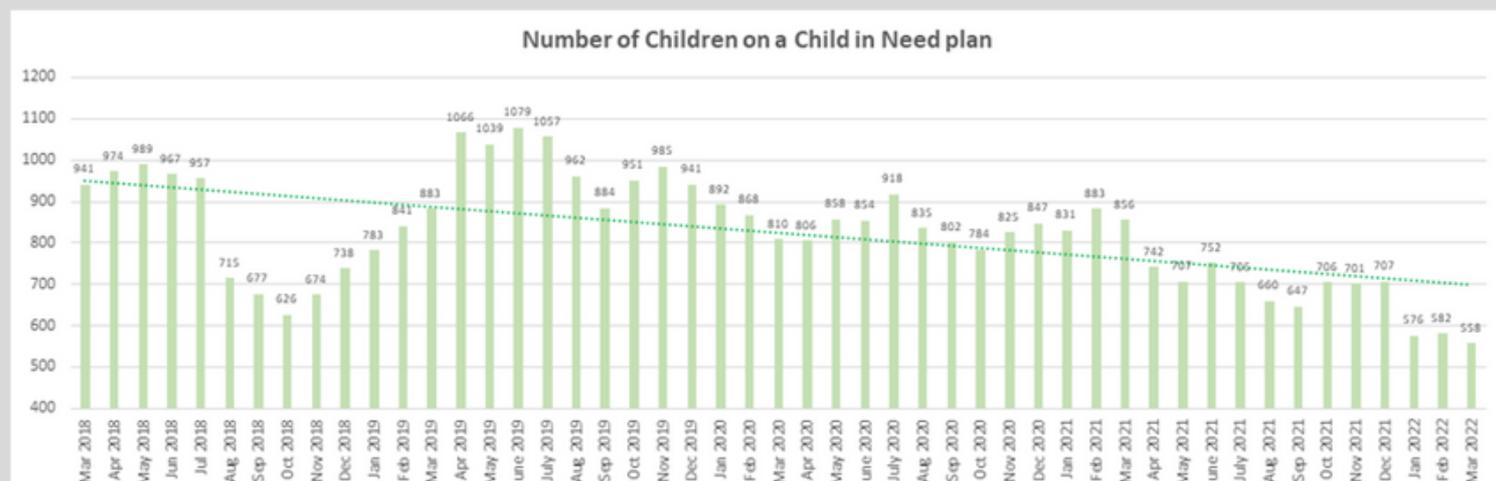


Overall, alongside the dip sampling of assessments, S47's and ICPC's the above measures provide clear evidence that we are acting more confidently and consistently when applying thresholds for our services and working in a more timely and consistent manner.

Children in Need

The graph below shows that we began the contract on 1 April 2018 with 941 children in need and quickly recognised that this was an area to better understand and reduce drift and delay in progressing children's plans. Following a short review of these children, between July 2018 and December 2018, it was clear that some of the children did not require a statutory service. As a consequence there was a clear focus on progressing case closures. Since December 2018 the service robustly monitors and reviews Children on Child in Need Plans at 9 months to ensure a safe step down to targeted early help or universal services, regular updating of assessments takes place and support to reduce drift and delay with better decision making for our Child in Need cohort.

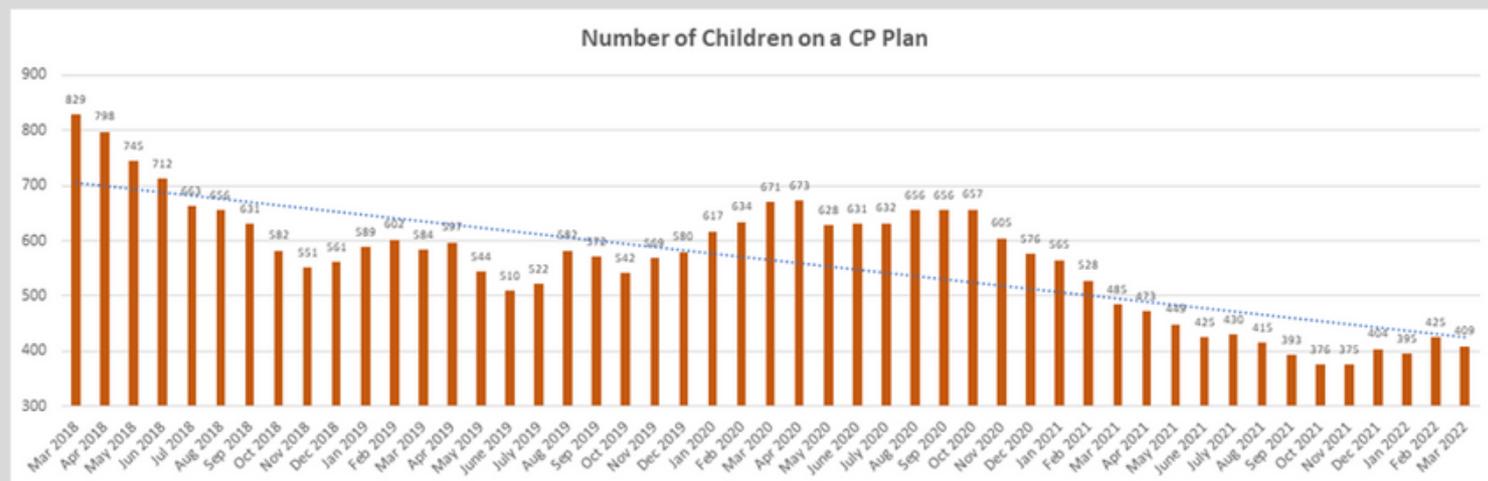
The graph below demonstrates a significant reduction of Children on Child in Need plans to 558 Children as end March 2022 (reduction of 383 Children over the period, this coincides with the increase of 147 children open to our Strengthening Families service, receiving targeted support). This is an area kept under constant review.



Children with a Child Protection Plan

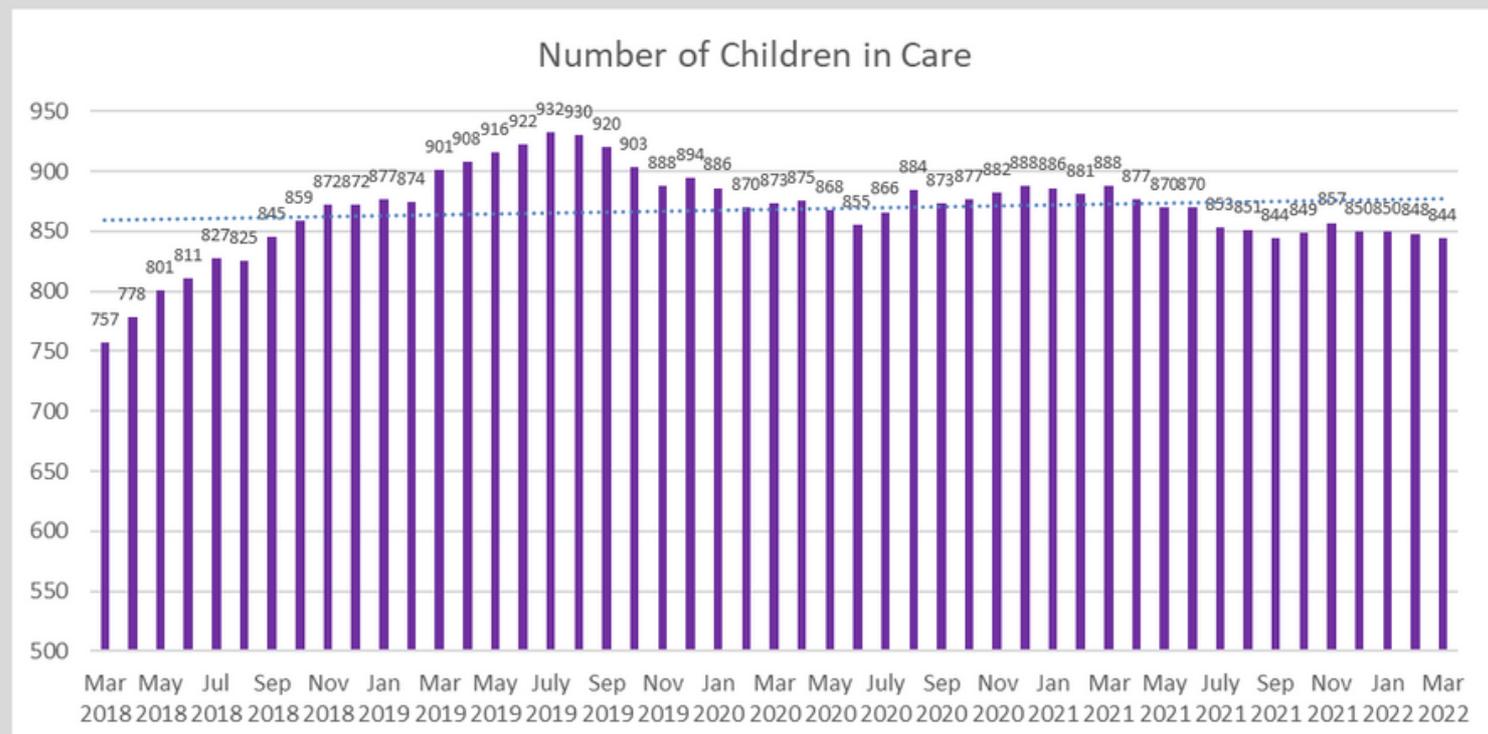
In April 2018, the Trust had 798 children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan, and across the course of the four years the number has reduced to 409. This was due to us quickly recognising that there was drift and delay in progressing children's plans. To address this, we held a panel to ensure these children's plans were being progressed.

This has led to children being either 'stepped down' to a Child in Need plan, or decisions made to secure their long-term welfare, this has increased our Children in Care numbers where Children were stepping up from Child Protection. The service is regularly reviewing Children on Child Protection Plans longer than 12 months to reduce the risk of drift and delay and to ensure Children's plans are progressed safely and robustly. The graph below demonstrates this reduction over the four-year period.



Children in Care

We began the financial year 2018/19 with 778 children in care and saw a sharp increase in the first 18 months up to 937 mid July 2019, which coincided with taking action for children with a Child Protection Plan. During this period, approximately 50% of all children entering care were directly from closure of Child Protection Plans.



Although March 2022 information is not published for all our Statistical Neighbour Group, five West Midlands regional authorities are in our Statistical Neighbour Group. Our March 2022 data can be compared in line with the following Local Authorities up to this date, as you can see we are in line with the average for these Local Authorities.

We are currently undergoing an exiting care programme which includes reviewing all Children in Care Placed with Parents, undergoing Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) assessments and undergoing court proceedings to ensure discharges are swift for Children in Care.

Table 7: Children in Care of west Midlands regional authorities

Local Authority	Rate Per 10,000 Children in Care
Birmingham – March 2022	73
Coventry – March 2022	90
Sandwell- March 2022	101.7
Stoke on Trent March 2022	174
Walsall March 2022	94
Wolverhampton March 2022	83
Five Regional Stat Neighbour Average	102.8

Children Entering and Ceasing Care

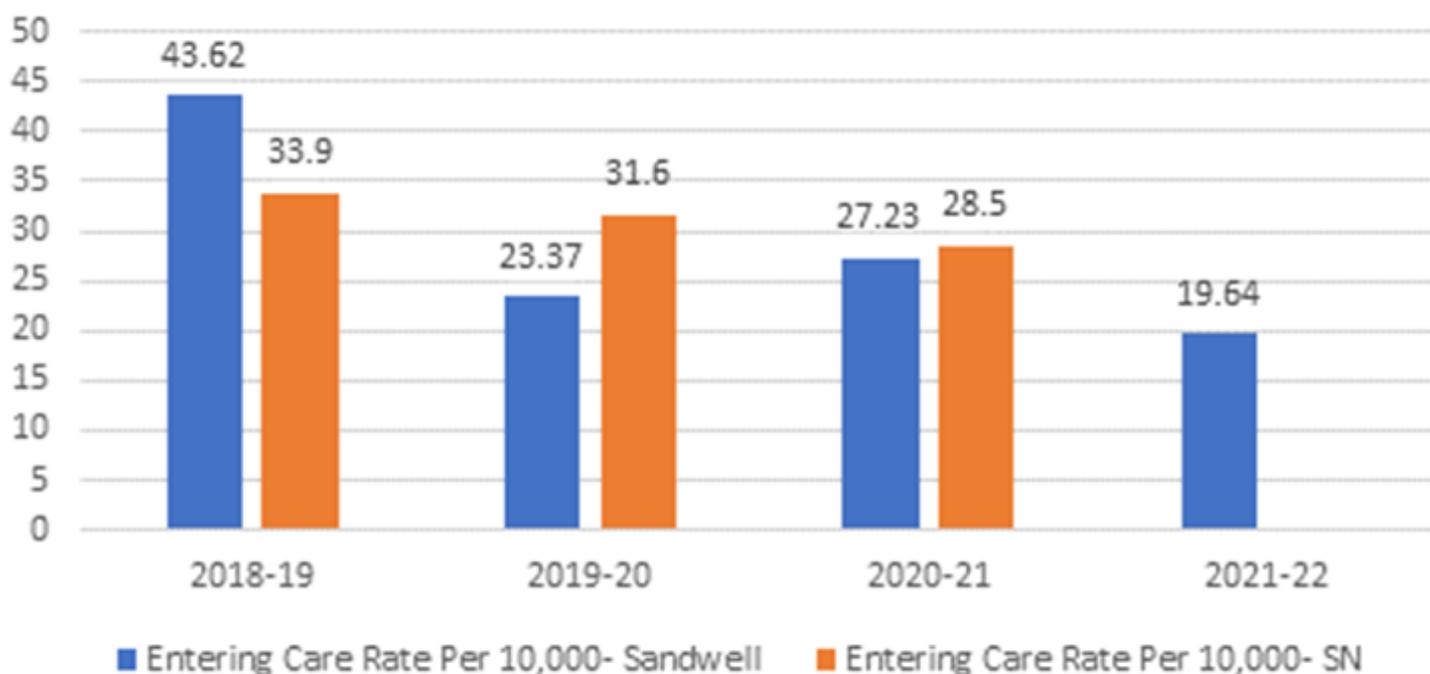
Between the 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022, the number of Children Entering Care was 945 with 856 Children Ceasing Care. These numbers reflect the fact that in the first year of the contract, children on Child Protection Plans reduced while 362 children entered care and 215 children left care.

The following three years (between April 2019-March 2022) there were 583 Children Entering Care and 661 Children Ceasing Care which highlights the impact of better management oversight and timely decision making.

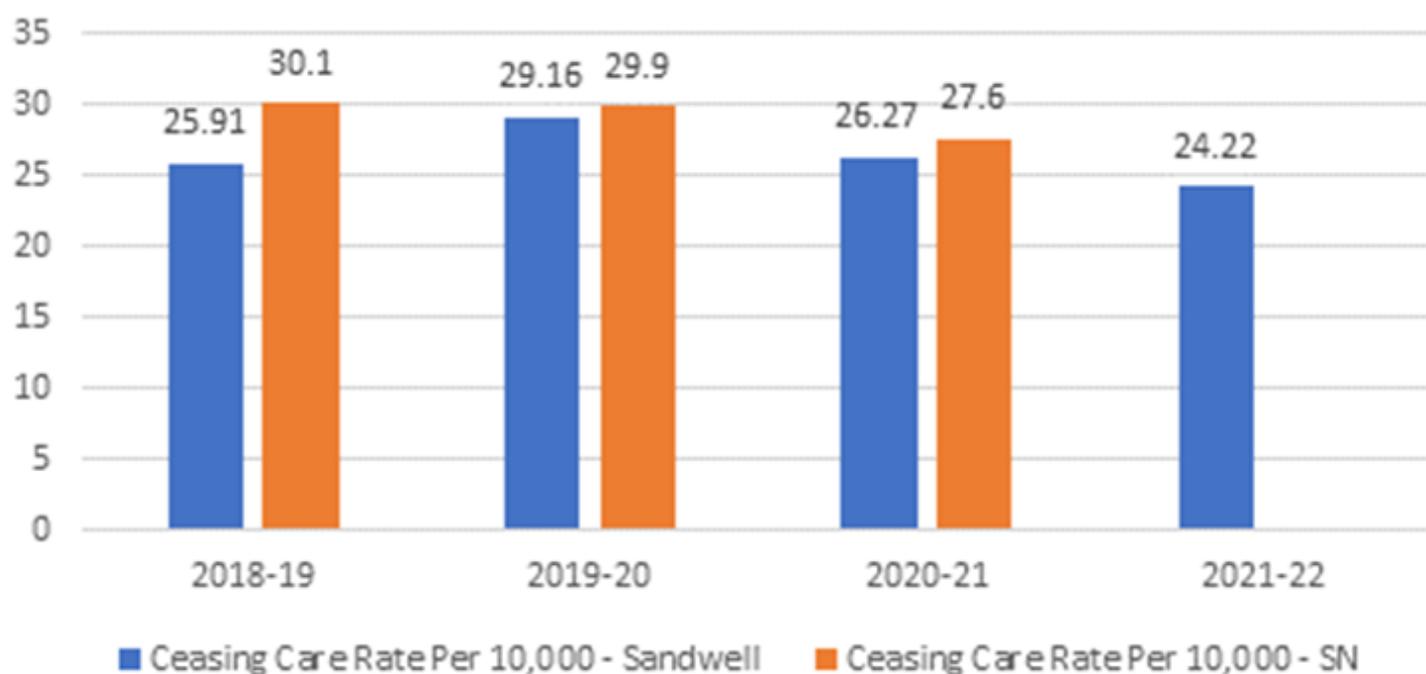
Table 8: Summary of Becoming Looked After (BLA) and Ceasing Care by year

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
BLA by Year	362	194	226	163
Ceasing Care by Year	215	242	218	201

Rate of Children Entering Care per 10,000 - Sandwell and Statistical Neighbour Average



Rate of Children Ceasing Care per 10,000 - Sandwell and Statistical Neighbour Average



The tables below compare our number of Children Entering and Ceasing Care against our Statistical Neighbour, West Midlands and England comparator data. Apart from April 2018-March 2019 you can see that the number of Children entering care is below our Statistical Neighbour comparators, this is also the case for Children exiting care apart from year April 2019 - March 2020. This suggests that lower numbers are exiting the Care system than should be. The reasons for this are multi faceted, and a short term project has commenced this year to accelerate children leaving care wherever it is safe to do so.

Table 9: Summary of Becoming Looked After and Rates per 10,000

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	SN Av	Eng Av	WM Av
BLA by Year	362	194	226	163	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rates per 10,000	43.62	23.37	27.23	19.64	28.5	24	25

Table 10: Summary of Ceasing Care and Rates per 10,000

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	SN Av	Eng Av	WM Av
Ceasing Care by Year	215	242	218	201	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rates per 10,000	25.91	29.16	26.27	24.22	27.6	23	21

Demand for Foster Placements for Children in Care (Internal and External)

The Fostering Service was inspected by Ofsted in August 2021 and assessed as providing a 'Good' Service, with all elements of the inspection individually rated as 'Good'. Improving the service from the previous rating of 'Requires Improvement'. Generally impressed with the service the inspectors judged that children are well matched, with good placement stability and foster carers build positive relationships with children developing a strong sense of belonging which helps children to settle well. Managers have a good focus on care planning and permanency for children, and were judged to be implementing significant changes to drive up standards and ensure that they have a good operational overview of the impact of outcomes for the children, the foster carers and staff.

Recruitment activity

Recruitment of Foster Carers continues to be a focus of the Trust making use of a range of media and marketing opportunities – see images below. Recent activity has meant that the number of new enquiries has now increased compared to pre-pandemic figures, with more than 260 new enquiries in 2021/22.

On the 31st March 2022 we had 98 mainstream foster carer households.





Care Leavers

Service	Mar 2018	Mar 2019	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2022	Variance Mar 18 - Mar 22
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355	87

Table 11: Care Leavers by year

Our Care Leavers service provides a service to children who are 16 or over who are still in care, with the expectation of a steady transition into Care Leavers 18+ service. This cohort has steadily increased over four years from 268 to 355 (an increase of 87 Care Leavers). From April 2018, a change in legislation meant that we have a statutory responsibility to support care leavers until they are 25 years of age which has resulted in a steady increase in the number of young people within this service area. Consequently, caseloads have increased from approximately 18 to 21 young people per worker.

The May 2022 Ofsted inspection observed that Care Leavers are well supported to find good-quality accommodation, that the Trust is focused on ensuring that Care Leavers receive the opportunities they are entitled to and that care leavers that become parents are well supported.

iii: The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the first four (4) Contract Years

The following section reports on the Trust's performance against the 15 Key Performance Indicators agreed in the terms of the service contract for the period April 2018 – March 2022. It is important, when reading this information, to take into account the wider context of national issues that have impacted on all children's services in this period.

COVID-19

A global pandemic and consequent national lockdown provided unprecedented barriers to delivering a service and keeping the children of Sandwell safe. With support from the Council the Trust moved swiftly to support staff to provide services differently and maintain contact with children and families. New technology and flexible working approaches were rolled out along with practical measures to ensure that staff were kept safe such as provision of PPE and early roll-out of vaccinations, complemented with comprehensive communication arrangements to ensure staff were supported and reassured.

The Ofsted Focused Visit, March 2021, commented how well the Trust responded to the pandemic in a borough where Covid exacerbated considerable deprivation issues. The report stated that "The Trust has managed to ensure that many of the most vulnerable children have been visited in their own homes, and, in partnership with schools, it has continued to identify and support those most in need."

Despite the effective response to the pandemic the situation inevitably impacted on service performance compared to the KPIs, particularly those that relate to direct contact with children and families.

National shortage of Social Workers

Nationally, children's services continue to struggle with a shortage of Social Workers. The numbers of Social Workers leaving the service (nearly 100 a week in 2021) and the total national vacancy figure are both at a 5 year high. This reflects the impact of the pandemic and the increasing challenges of social work roles.

As with all other services this has inevitably impacted on the Trust through increased 'churn' of Social Workers, greater reliance on agency staff and services competing to recruit from an ever-decreasing pool of qualified Social Workers.

Whilst the Trust has deployed a range of measures and approaches to mitigate both of these issues. The scale and nature of the issues mean that the actions taken by the Trust cannot fully address their impact and they have consequently impacted on performance against KPIs. The wider context that the Trust has operated in needs to be considered when reading the rest of this section of the contract review.

When the contract was put into place, the Trust and the Council agreed on a suite of 15 Key Performance Indicators. These indicators, which are measured monthly, are outlined below along with agreed targets and tolerances, these have been monitored for the 4-year cycle from April 2018 to March 2022. This was supported by the commitment to undertake 90 case file practice reviews a quarter.

Our overall approach to performance and quality assurance in the four years of operation has been to fully understand our performance in key areas and interrogate the data so that we are aware of our strengths and areas for improvement.



Ref	Performance Indicator
PI 1	The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours
PI 2	The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population
PI 3	The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary
PI 4	The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days
PI 5	The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days
PI 6	The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks
PI 7	The percentage of Children whose Child Protection Plan has been updated within the last six months
PI 8	Of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the percentage who have evidence of formal case supervision within the previous 4 weeks
PI 9	The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours
PI 10	The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks
PI 11	The percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements
PI 12	The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales
PI 13	The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers
PI 14	Average caseloads across the service
PI 15	The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better

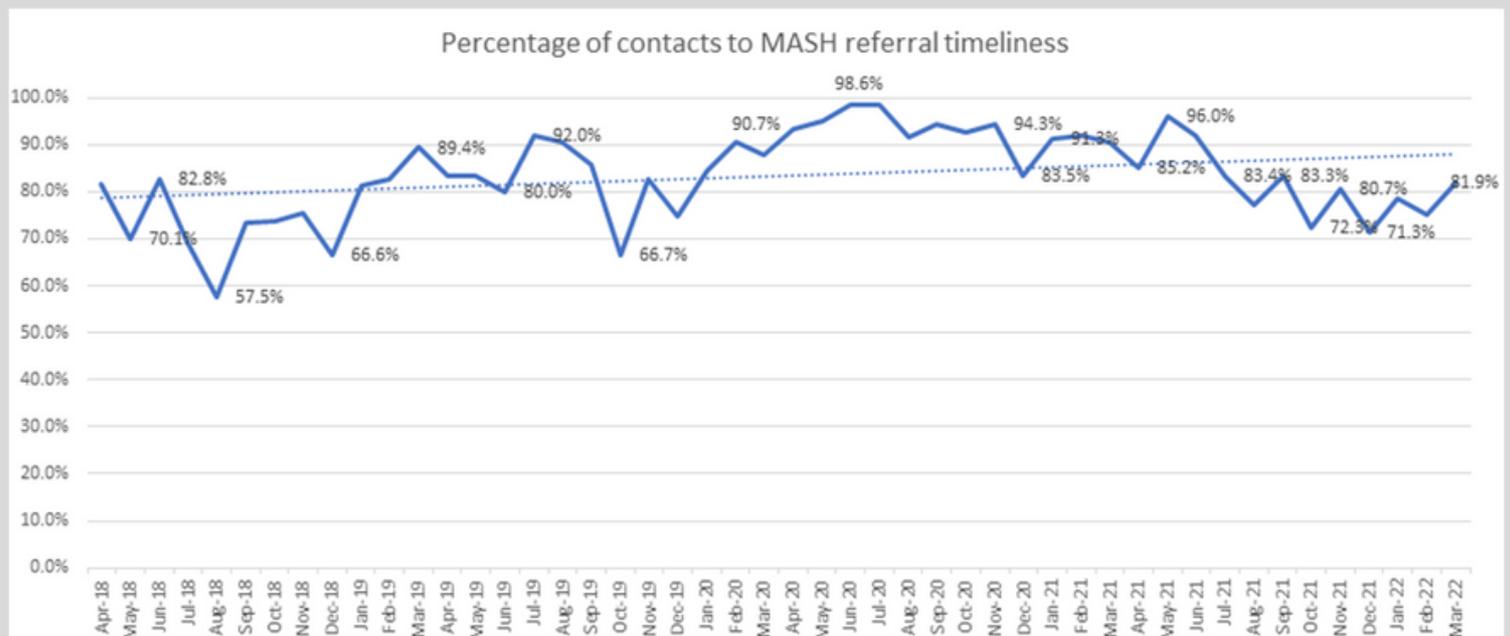
PI 1: The percentage of contacts accepted as a MASH referral within 24 hours

Target > 75%

Tolerance > 65%

Failure < 65%

This measure is important as it shows how efficiently our front door is operating and how quickly we are responding to referrals. The contacts that become a MASH referral are the more complex decisions that need to be made, in circumstances that are the least clear. Measuring this data shows how efficiently we are handling our complex referrals.



Over the first 12 months of the contract performance in relation to this measure was quite sporadic, there has been steady improvements in this measure since September 2018, which has been due to increased oversight. As part of the improvement in this area a contact “timestamp” was added to the liquid logic system enabling Management and Leadership to track contact from the starting point to completion, this has enabled a visual overview of timeliness and risk management. This contract measure has enabled us to assess the risk and the success rate of the front door.

Between April 2018 and March 2022, the average performance for this measure is at 83.3% which is above target position with low and high points during the contract at 57.5% and 98.6% over the four years.

PI 2: The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population

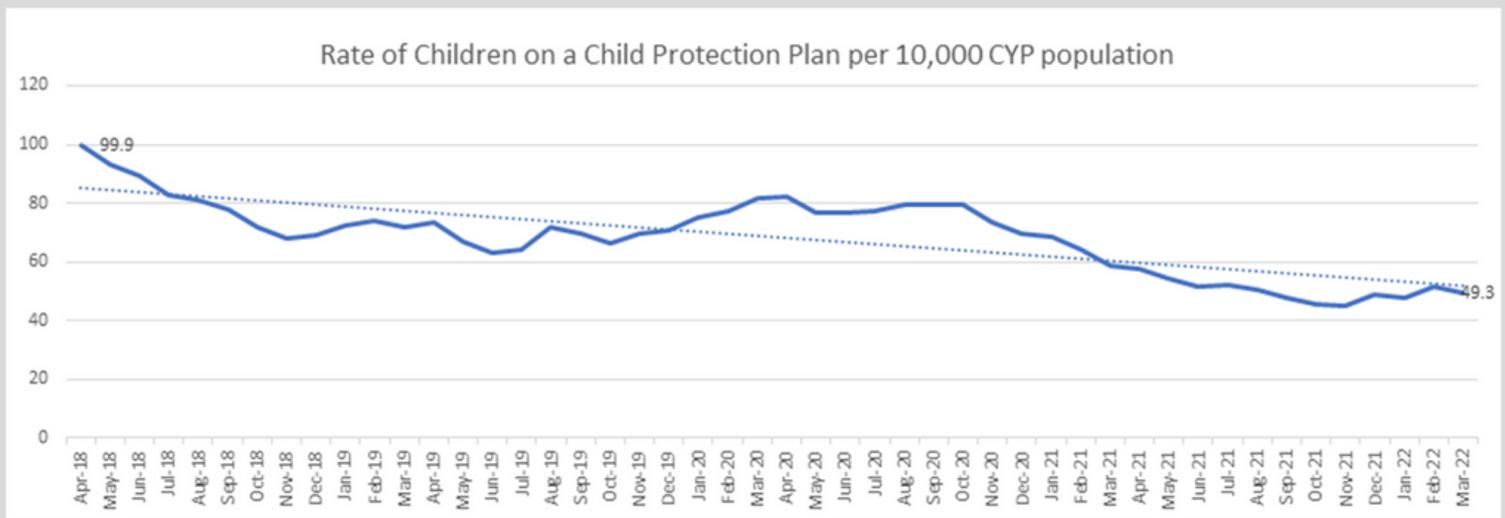
Target < 65 Children per 10,000

Tolerance < 80 children per 10,000

Failure > children per 10,000

This measure gives us a sense of our demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds in relation to Child Protection. Our Statistical Neighbour average is 56.6 and the England average is 41.4 (measured at the end of the financial year 2020-21, please note the rates for SN have decreased from 60 per 10,000 in 2017-18 and also England from 46.5). In the coming months, these comparator averages will be updated with 2021-22 information

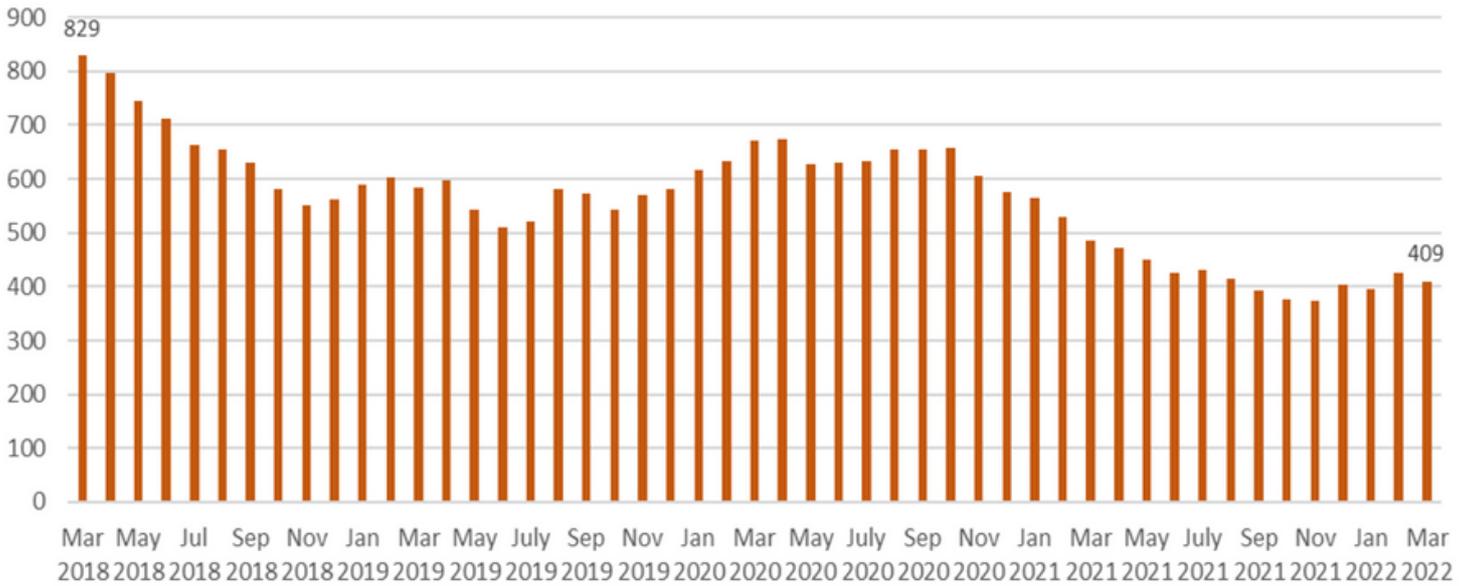
This measure has reduced over the 4 contractual years from 99.93 children per 10,000 of our population (798 children in total) to 49.3 (409 Children on a Child Protection Plan).



Since April 2018 there has been a reduction of 419 children on a Child Protection plan, which is a direct result of the work we have undertaken to ensure children's plans are being progressed swiftly most of those Children either stepped down to Child in Need or Targeted services, with just 17% of Children stepping up to CIC status following CP intervention.

Since February 2021 this measure has been consistently below target (better) and tolerance.

Number of Children on a CP Plan



PI 3: The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 enquiries were necessary.

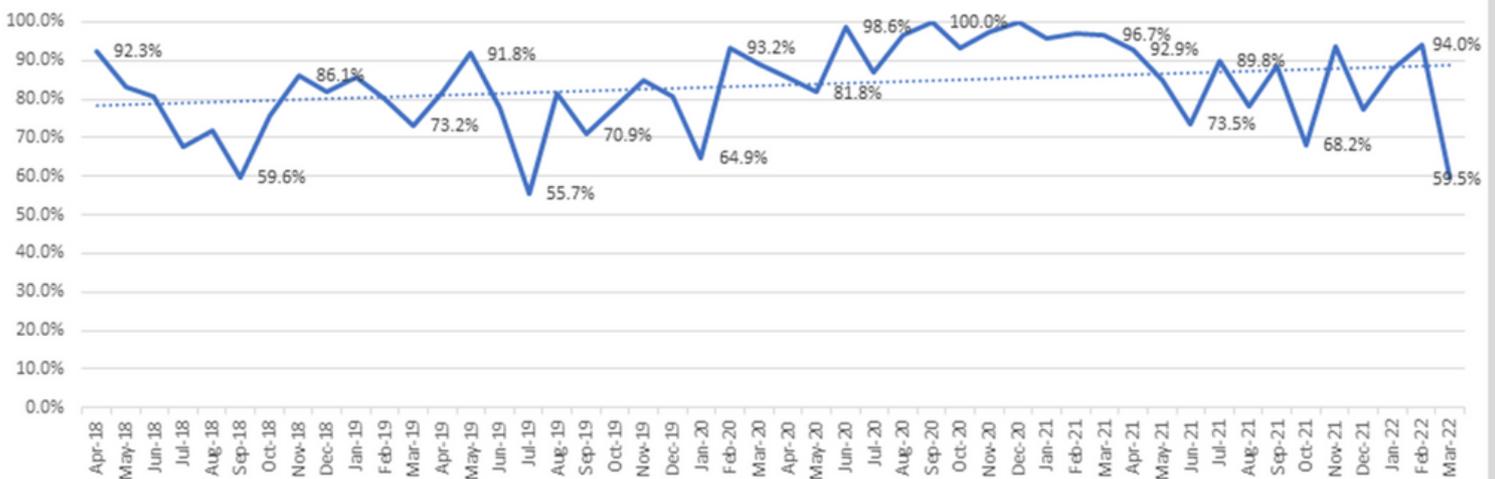
Target > 80%

Tolerance > 65%

Failure < 65%

This measure shows how efficiently we are completing S47 enquiries and organising Initial Child Protection Conferences. It gives us a sense of how we are managing demand in this area and how quickly we can bring together a group of professionals to make decisions for children who are potentially at risk of significant harm.

Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) in 15 working days



Performance to Initial Child Protection Conferences fluctuated over the 4-year period between 55.7% and 100%. Number of factors relating to deficits in a number of months were due to Social Worker Availability, late notification following S47 enquiry and parent's availability during Covid 19 pandemic.

Although performance has fluctuated over the 4 years the average performance for timeliness of ICPC within 15 working days is at 83.5% which is above the target set and compares well with 2020-21 DfE published information for;

- Statistical Neighbours – 80.5%
- England Average – 83%
- West Midlands Average – 81.5%

PI 4: The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days

Target > 85%

Tolerance > 75%

Failure < 75%

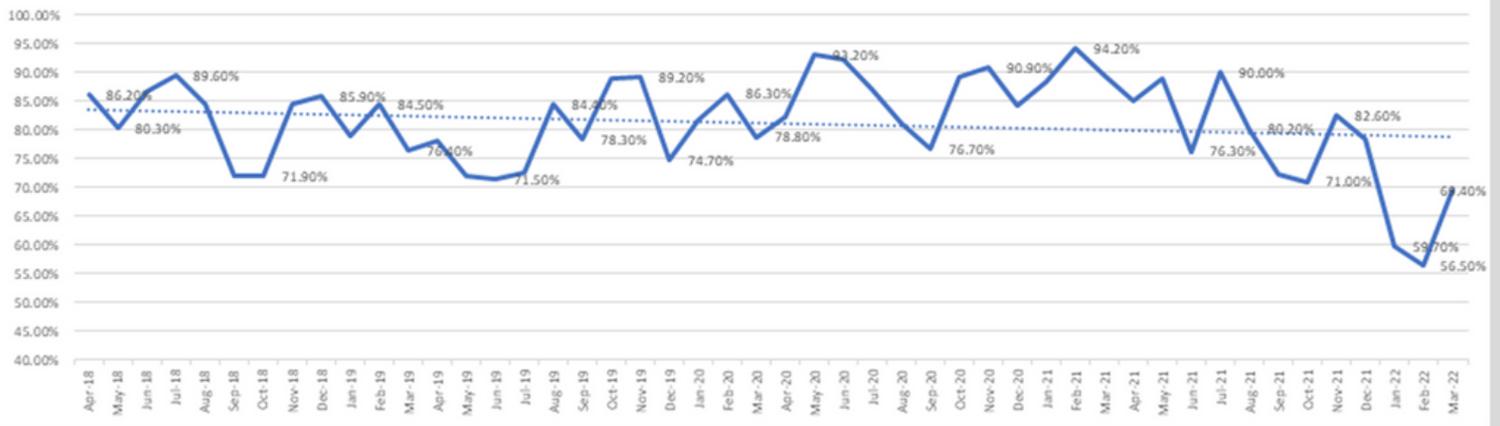
Upon the receipt of a referral to our service, an assessment of children's needs is undertaken by a Social Worker via a Single Assessment. Whenever we identify the need for longer term intervention in a family's life, we undertake 'review' assessments to determine the efficacy of these interventions and evidence changes in children and families lives. Similarly, we undertake assessment of children's needs when they are in our care, to ensure that we are doing all we can to meet their needs.

In line with our improvements in January 2019, the service began to review and update assessments for Children open to Child in Need, Child Protection and Children in Care Plans more formally and at regular intervals ensuring;

- Every Child in Care is visited at least every six weeks
- An updated assessment is undertaken prior to a child's review to inform the Child's focused plan
- The needs of Child and Family are met

As formally updating a child's assessment had not been routine up to January 2019, this now takes place within service areas to improve decision making and practice, as of end March 2022, 90% of our children and young people open to us had a 'review' assessment in the last 12 months.

Out of the total number of open Single Assessments, the percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days



The introduction of review assessments in January 2019 impacted on the performance of this measure overall, with a higher number of review assessments taking longer to complete, in comparison to new assessments coming through the front door. The overall performance in relation to Single Assessments over the four-year period is on average of 81.2% which is slightly below our comparators as of March 2021 (SN – 88.2%, England Average 87.6% West Midlands Average 86.4%), new assessments over this period at 85% and review assessments at 74% (since January 2019).

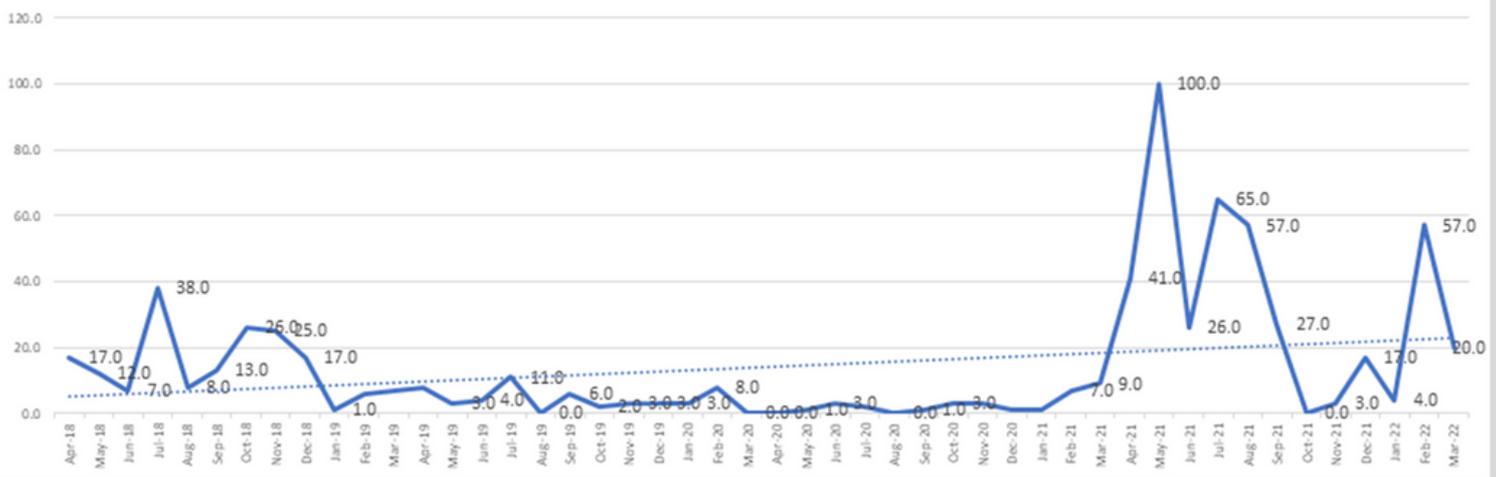
Performance was at the highest position in February 2021 (94.2%) and lowest in January 2022 (56.5%)

PI 5: The number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days

Target < 10
Tolerance < 30
Failure > 30

This measure helps to demonstrate how well we have oversight on every child’s situation, and how well we are handling throughput at the Front Door and other transfer points. Poor performance in this area would mean children do not have a social worker for lengthy periods of time, which could be a dangerous situation. There are circumstances where having children unallocated for a short period of time is reasonable, the Trust recognises that this should be kept to a minimum.

Number of Children in need, including LAC & Children on Child Protection plan who have been unallocated for longer than five working days



Over the four-year period an average of 16 children were unallocated for longer than five days, this has increased over the last 12 months to an average of 35 per month. Unallocated children are usually attributed to cases awaiting allocation by Localities from the Front Door and work unallocated due to workers who have left the service. Daily reporting on this measure has enabled the trust to have robust oversight of this measure, which the Heads of Service and Service Managers review daily to resolve issues with team managers.

Staffing issues have impacted on this measure over the past 12 months. The Trust applied the following actions to safely manage any period where there was a delay in allocation.

- We took a risk-based approach to manage children on an individual basis prior to allocation
- Management oversight from the Heads of service, Service managers and Team managers on a daily basis
- Individual children were subject to risk assessments and appropriate level of management oversight, including Director level
- Individual children were allocated on a priority basis in accordance with their assessed levels of needs/risk
- Daily updates were distributed to Senior leaders to ensure robust oversight of this measure
- A detailed analysis of assessments was maintained to ensure assessments were signed off and progressed to help reduce workloads
- Driving our recruitment and retention strategy to help maintain a stabilised workforce

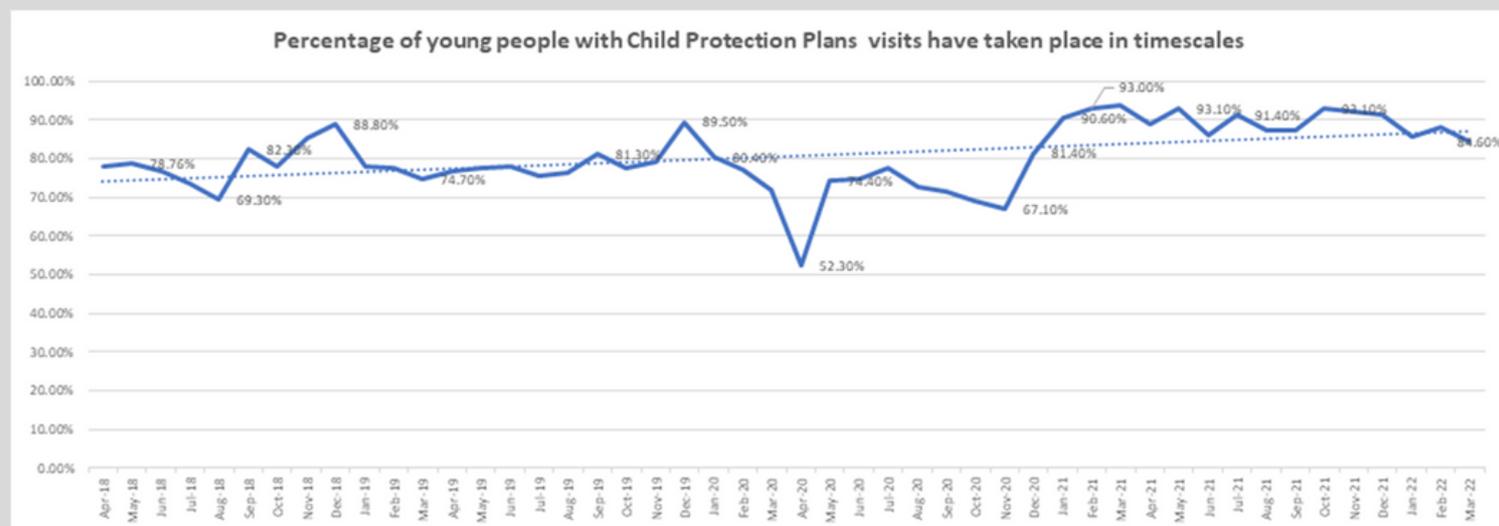
PI 6: The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 2 weeks

Target > 80%

Tolerance > 70%

Failure < 70%

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child Protection. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child Protection Plan at least every 4 weeks (this measure moved from monitoring every 2 weeks in September 2021). Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through practice reviews, management oversight and supervision. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention and safeguarding.



Performance to Child Protection Visits between the period of April 2018 and March 2022 has ranged from 52.3% in April 2020 (coinciding with Covid 19 pandemic) to a high point of 93.1% in May 2022.

Although performance dipped at specific points over the 4 years the average performance for timeliness of visiting Children on Child Protection Plans is at 80.1% which is in line with the target set. Dips in performance in this area has been as a direct result of a delay in recording on our case management system by specific teams and poorer performance in a few teams, caseloads pressures and vacancy rates which have also contributed to the dip in performance.

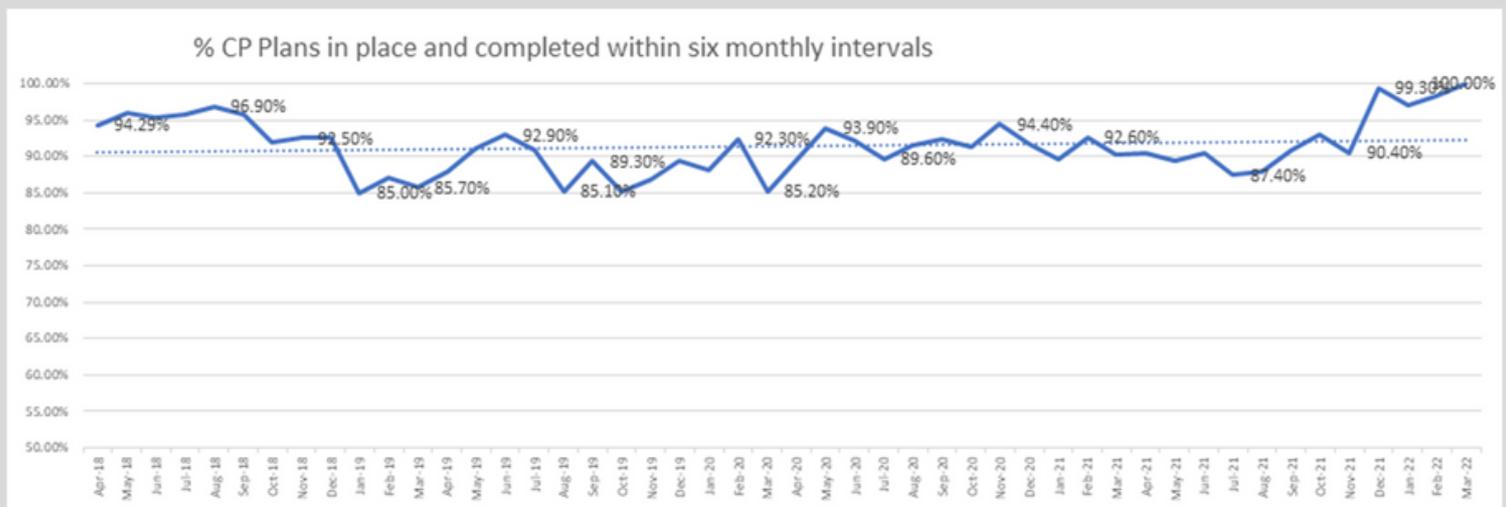
PI 7: The percentage of Children whose Child Protection Plan has been updated within the last six months

Target > 95%

Tolerance > 85%

Failure < 85%

This indicator shows how often we are reviewing children's plans and our interventions with families. Good performance in this area would show we are ensuring our interventions are having the desired impact and that we are progressing plans for both Children and Families and reducing delays in the system.



Performance has improved over the last 4 months following a three-year period within contract tolerance. The service expects the locality teams to update Child Protection Plans following core groups at 8 weekly intervals, a number of measures have been implemented to improve performance in this area including:

- Increased monitoring by Operations Managers and the use of team admin days to achieve better recording across the service
- Focus on daily performance dashboards by Team Managers to inform forward planning and to ensure plans which are due to be updated are robustly monitored across the service and to identify plans to be updated at earlier points in time
- Team managers are encouraged to utilise performance intelligence to ensure that any plans over 150 days are updated as a priority
- Outline plan is updated immediately following ICPC outcome if the child is going onto a CP Plan

Over the course of the four-year contract period performance has ranged between 85% in January 2019 to 100% in March 2022. With an average of 91.3% which is within tolerance for this measure over the period.

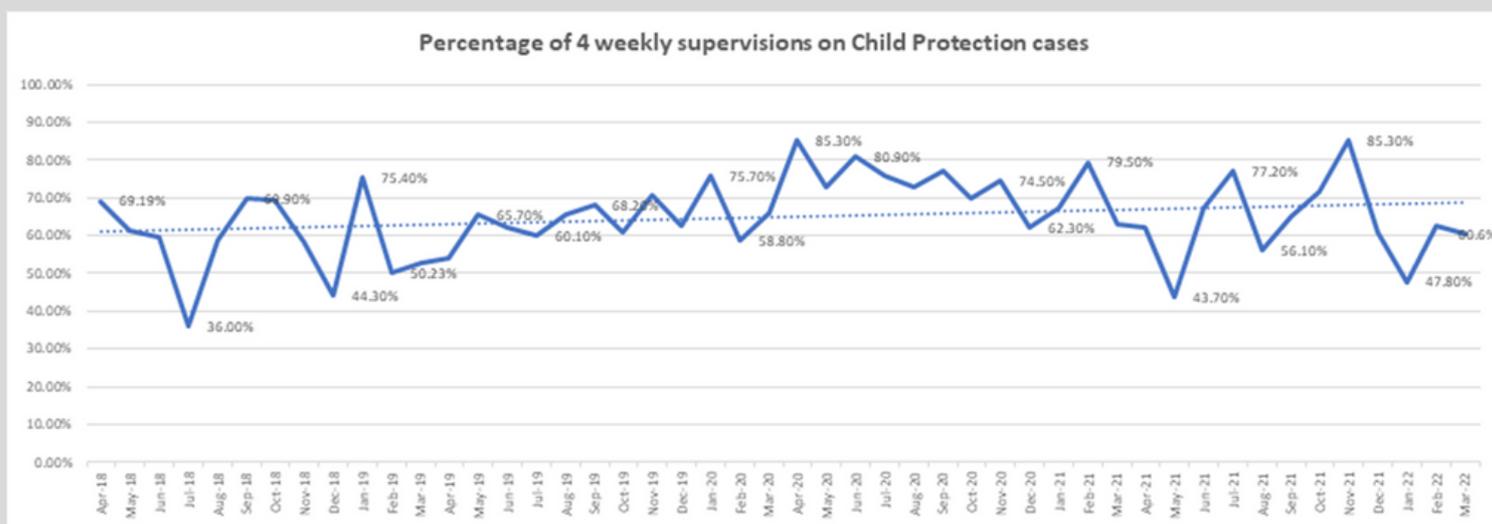
PI 8: Of all children subject of a Child Protection Plan, the percentage who have evidence of formal case supervision within the previous 4 weeks

Target > 65%

Tolerance > 50%

Failure < 50%

This measure helps to demonstrate formal management oversight for this cohort of children. Good performance in this area shows that Team Managers are regularly considering progress in these cases and providing social workers the opportunity for reflection on a case by case basis, ensuring robust decision making and reducing drift for children and families.



Performance across this measure has been the most variable of all the 15 KPIs, this is due to a number of contributing factors including recording of supervision on the internal Liquid Logic system, turnover of social workers, inconsistency of practice across Social Work teams and staffing issues over the contract period.

Low points throughout the contract were in July 2018, December 2018, May 2021 and January 2022 (lowest 36% in July 2018). We have seen some improved performance notably in May 2020, July 2020 and November 2021 (highest position 85.3%). As an average the performance is 65% over the 4 years, which is in line with our target of 65%.

Consistency of practice remains a priority to ensure efficient and timely improvements. Our new practice standards should help with this, in particular the introduction of management oversight at key points of the child's journey.

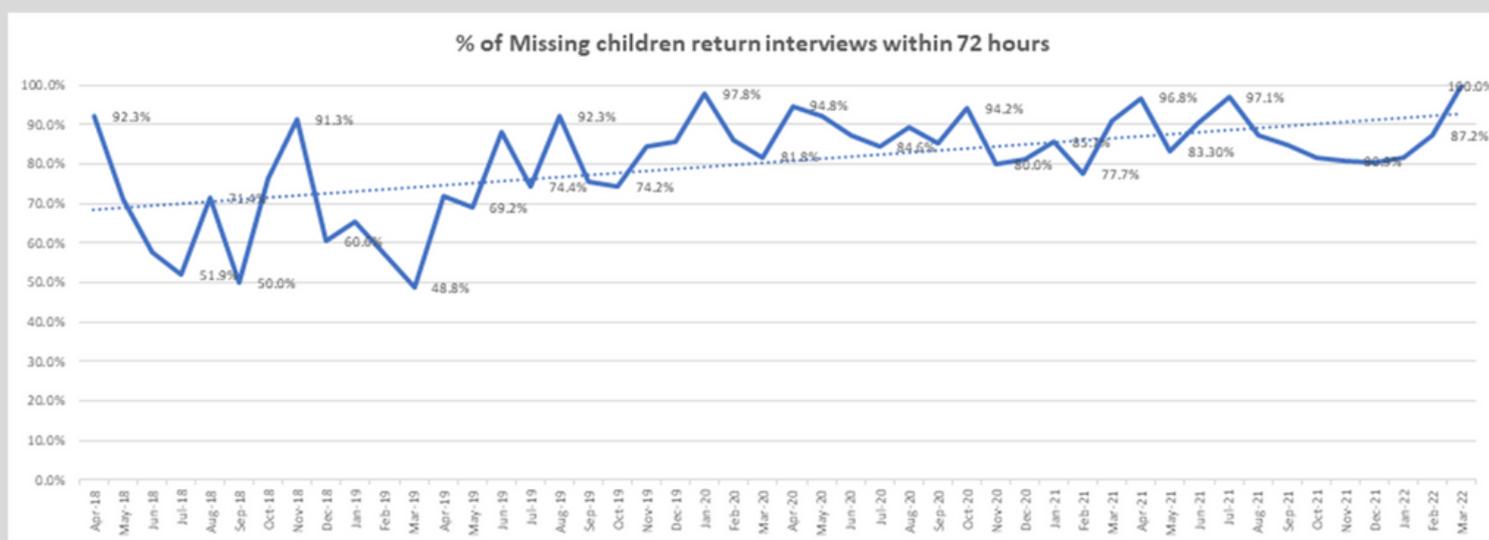
PI 9: The percentage of young people returning from a missing episode who have had a return interview within 72 hours

Target > 70%

Tolerance > 50%

Failure < 50%

This measure helps to understand how well we are responding to children at risk of exploitation after they return from being missing. Good performance would mean we are gathering information / intelligence from children at the earliest opportunity that would help us to safeguard them better in the future and build more accurate intelligence.



Whilst information shows a variable picture for the first 18 months of the contract, performance in this measure has significantly improved with the introduction of our internal Horizons team in October 2019 which undertake their own return interviews (this was previous outsourced).

Performance between April 2018 and September 2019 was an average of 70.3% in timescale, since October 2019 performance has improved to an average of 86.9% up to March 2022. Overall performance is this KPI has been 80.7% above target of 70%.

The main reasons for return interviews going out of timescale were due to the following:

- Late notification from Police
- Difficulty contacting Child/Young Person or placement
- Repeat missing episode

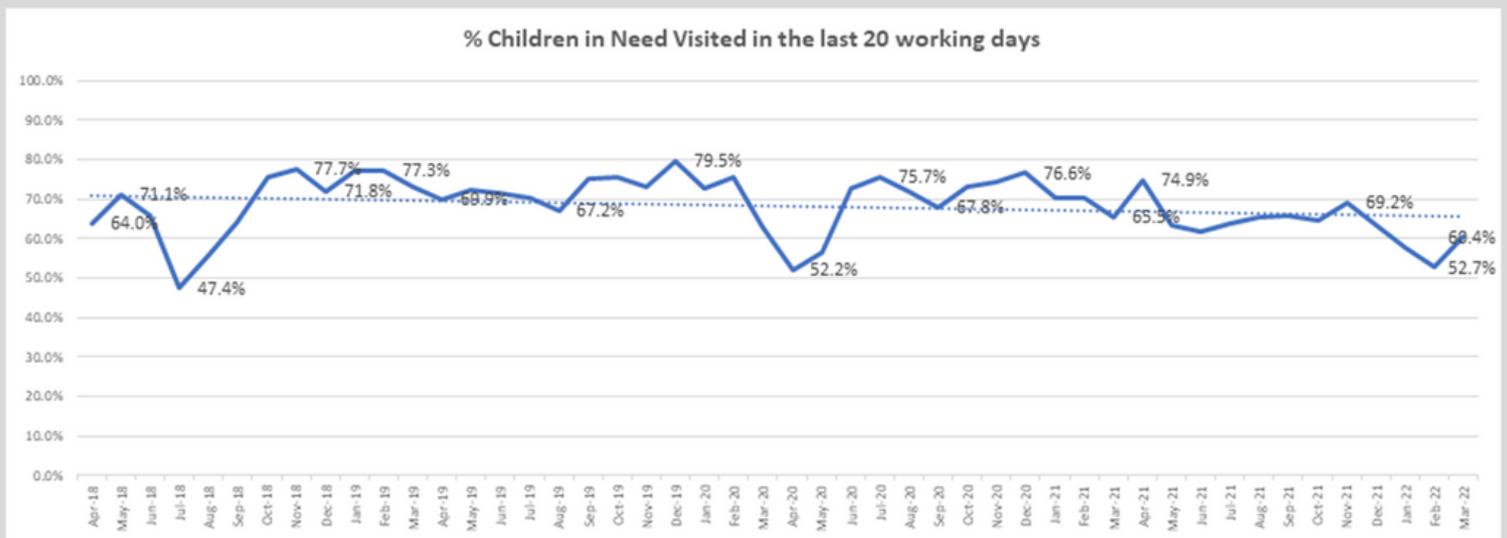
PI 10: The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks

Target > 73%

Tolerance > 58%

Failure < 58%

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child in Need. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined, in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject of a Child in Need Plan at least every 4 weeks. Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through practice reviews, supervision and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention, and prevention of the need for safeguarding.



- Performance in relation to Child in Need visits in last 20 working days has been between 47.4% to 79.5% over the last 4 years, the average performance is at 68.3% overall, performance has remained in tolerance for the majority of the contract period. This area of work is a priority for the Trust, as with all our key areas of performance, we hold individual Team Managers and Operations Managers to account in two weekly performance boards, Children's Management Team and Practice Improvement Board.

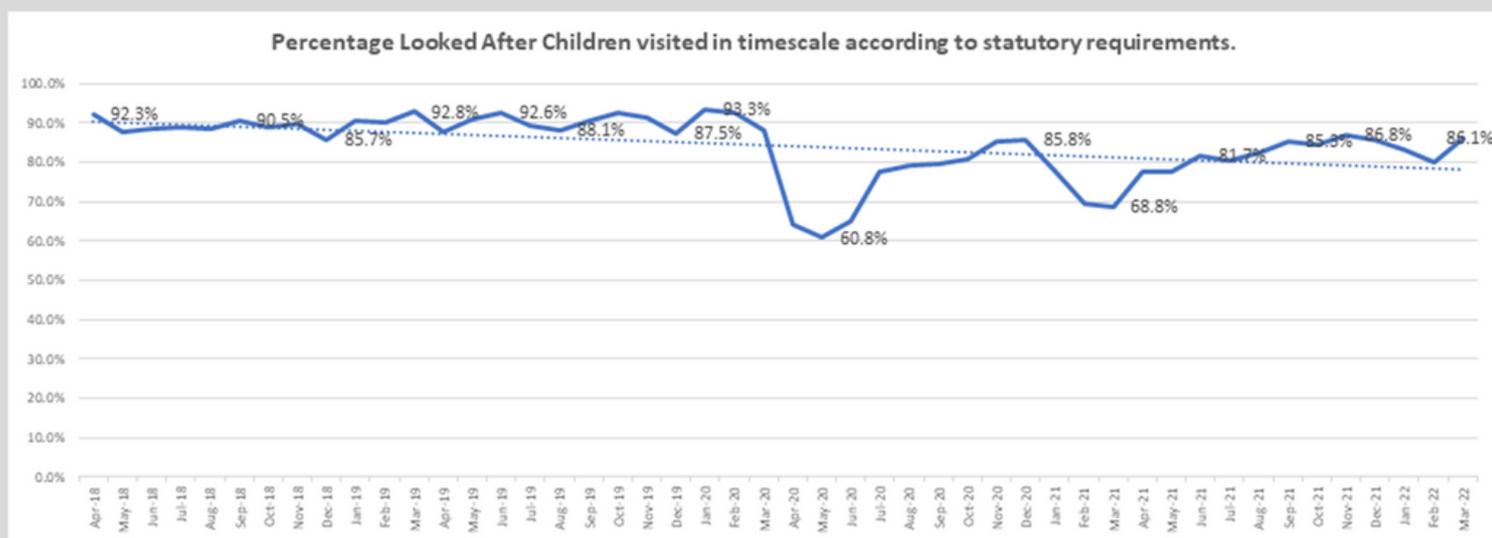
PI 11: The percentage of Looked After Children visited in accordance with statutory requirements

Target > 90%

Tolerance > 80%

Failure < 80%

This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with our Looked After Children. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is defined by statute. It is important to understand the quality of these interventions through auditing and management oversight. Good performance helps to show we have established relationships with our Looked After Children, know their needs and that we meet their needs.



Performance over the contract period has been strong, apart from 12 months between April 2020 and May 2021 during Covid 19 pandemic, with the lowest point in May 2020 at 60.6% (please note these figures exclude virtual visiting), highest position in January 2020 at 93.3%.

The Children in Care cohort sit between two service areas with 70% of CIC in our CIC service and 30% within our locality service areas. Performance in relation to visiting our Children in Care according to statutory timescales varies across both service areas with:

- Children in Care service at 89% over the period
- Care Management/Localities at 76%

Performance is higher within our Children in Care service primarily due to a stable workforce and strong performance oversight in their service area. Average performance between April 2018 and March 2022 is at 84.3% overall.

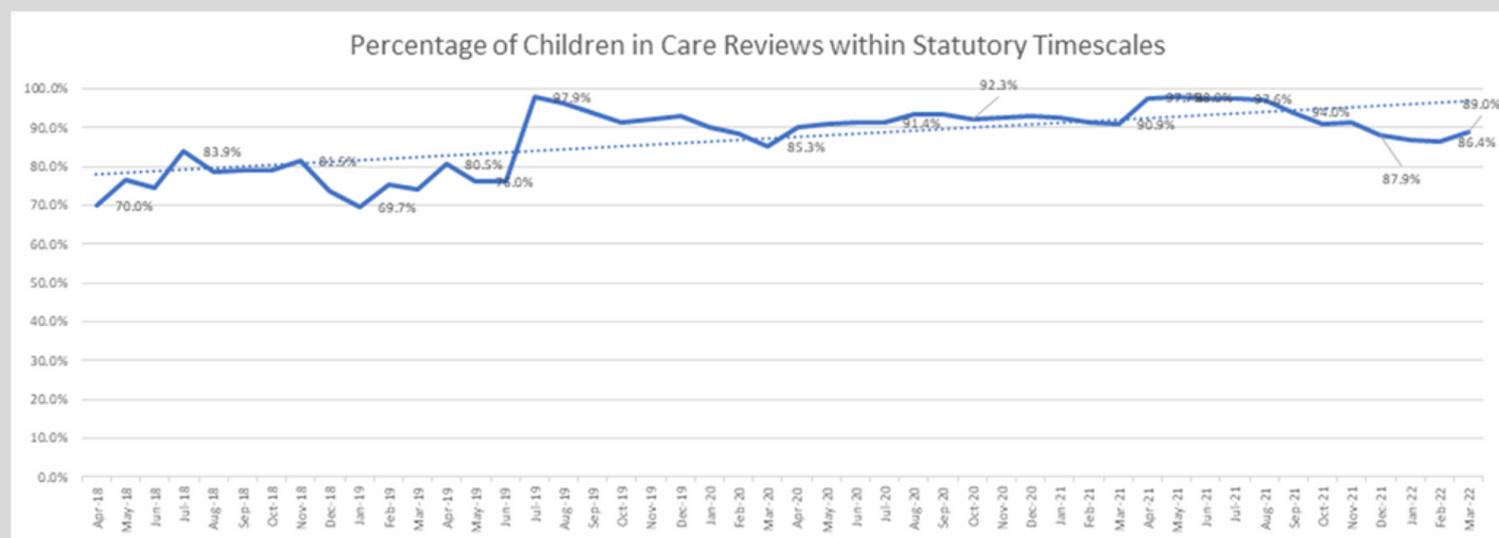
PI 12: The percentage of Looked After Children's Reviews held within statutory timescales

Target > 80%

Tolerance > 70%

Failure < 70%

This measure shows the timeliness of Looked After Children reviews which contributes to our understanding of how well we monitor the progress of Looked After Children's plans and ensure that we are doing what we say we will. Good performance in this area will show that we independently review children's plans on a regular basis and ensure plans are progressing for our Children in Care at least every 6 months.



Average performance across the 4 years is at 87.4% and been sustained above target since July 2019. There were fluctuations in the first year of the contract April 2018-June 2019, this was due to a dependency on Social Workers to finalise any open Care Plans before IRO's can record their LAC Reviews on the LCS system along with pre-meeting reports being completed by IROs. The issue was resolved in July 2019 and performance has been sustained above 85% since then (Performance is dependent upon the review meeting being recorded on the LCS system.)

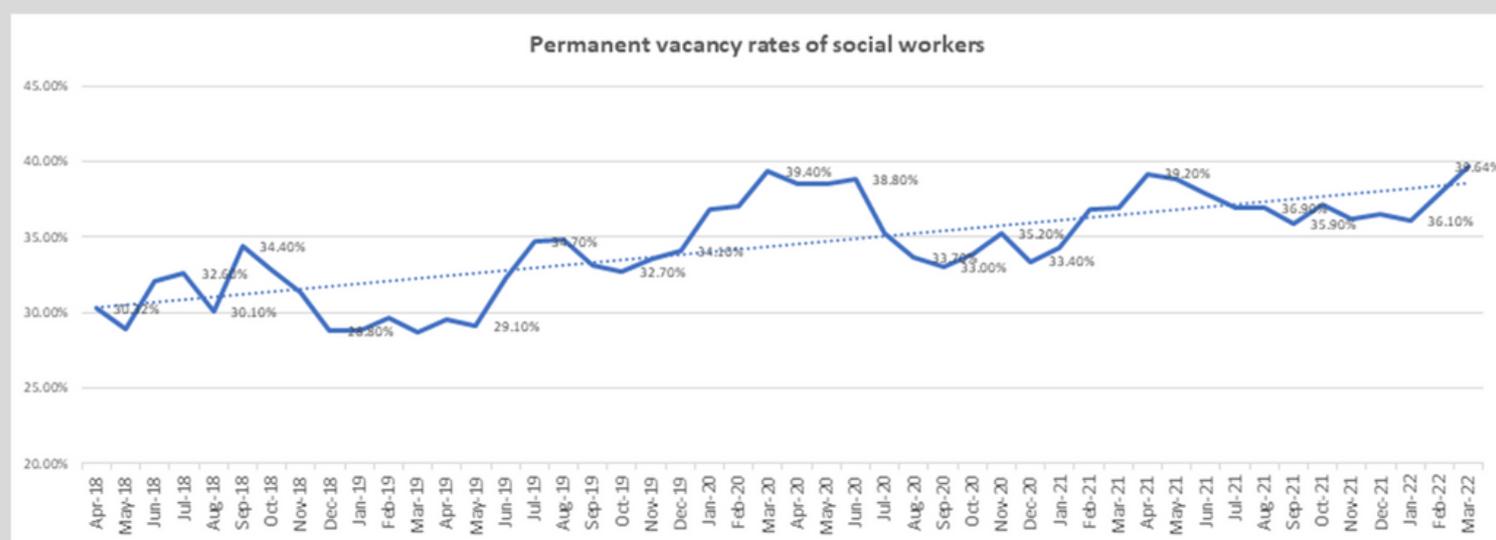
PI 13: The vacancy rate of permanent front line Social Workers

Target < 32%

Tolerance < 37%

Failure > 37%

This measure helps us to determine the stability of our case holding workforce. Whilst agency social workers are essential for an organisation to quickly meet fluctuations in demand, a stable, permanent workforce is also critical for long term improvements and stability for the Children and Families we support.



As can be seen there has been quite a fluctuation in this measure over the course of the contract, there has been a number of national issues in relation to recruitment and retention of permanent social workers over the last 12 months and impacting significantly on this measure. Our lowest permanent vacancy rate was in March 2019 at 28.8% and current highest position was in March 2022 at 39.6%, with an average vacancy rate of 34.5%.

Several measures have been put into place to improve permanent Social Worker recruitment and retention:

- The realignment of the operation directorate has been well received by our agency provider and we are in the process of developing Social Worker vacancy adverts that will help promote the change to a locality model
- Programme is underway to convert agency staff to permanent
- Workforce strategy has been updated and launched for 2022-2025 which retains the "12 reasons to work for Sandwell Children's Trust" as a foundation of our recruitment and retention strategy

- There has been a review of HR training programme for managers to be able to provide better employee support and retain our staff
- November 2021 concluded with our new 34 Newly Qualified Social Workers which support our grow your own philosophy and internal promotion/progression. A cohort of 36 are joining the programme this year (November 2022)
- Manage sickness absence consistently in line with procedures
- Maintain high level of support to Newly Qualified Social Workers
- We have increased our social media campaign and continue to review exit interviews

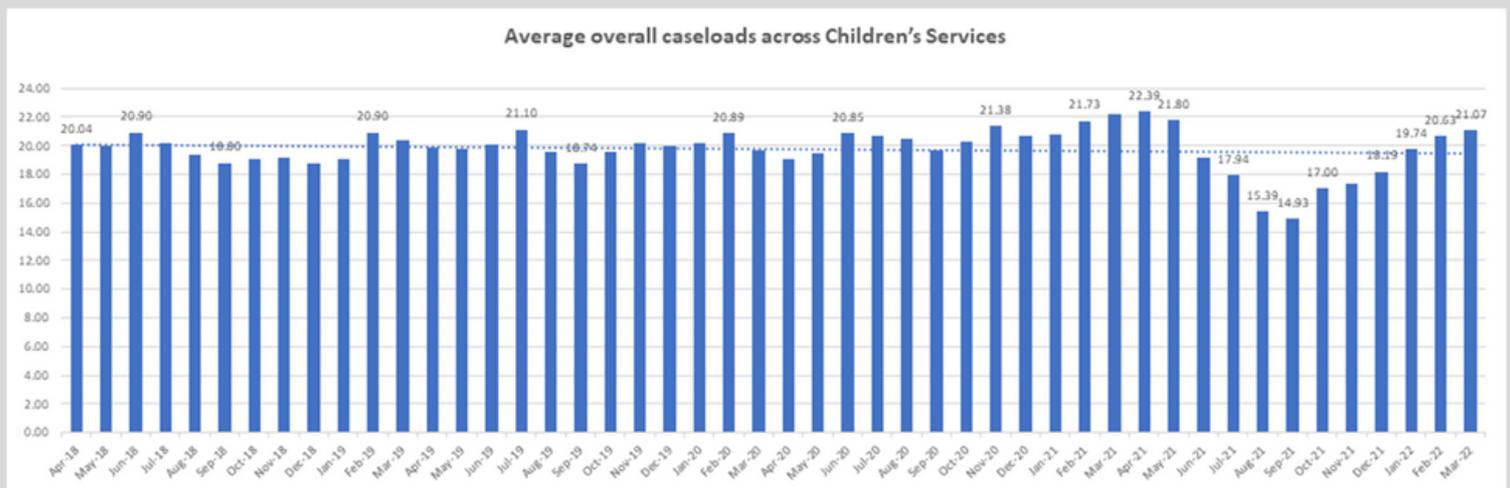
As of 31st March 2022, there are 158.83 Social Workers (122.53 permanent workers and 35.8 agency workers). The permanent social workers are broken down as follows:

- 37 Newly Qualified Social Workers
- 85.53 Social Workers

PI 14: Average caseloads across the service



This measure helps us to understand the changing demand within our organisation so that we can target our recruitment and retention activities, adjust our establishment, and ensure our case holding Social Workers have the right number of Children to drive improvements of the lives and of our Children and Families we support.



Our 4-year average on this measure 19.8 Children’s cases per worker, this has fluctuated between 14.93 in September 2021 and 22.39 in April 2022, the fluctuation in caseloads over the four years has related to a number of factors which include:

- Number of Open Children to Children Social Care at point of reporting
- Number of Social Workers in post case holding (excluding qualified Social Workers in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, Advanced Practitioners, Intervention Services who do not hold Children’s Cases)
- Personal Advisor workers staffing levels in Care Leavers service
- Number of workers on Long Term sickness and Maternity Leave.
- Number of ASYEs in post with capped caseloads during their first year of employment

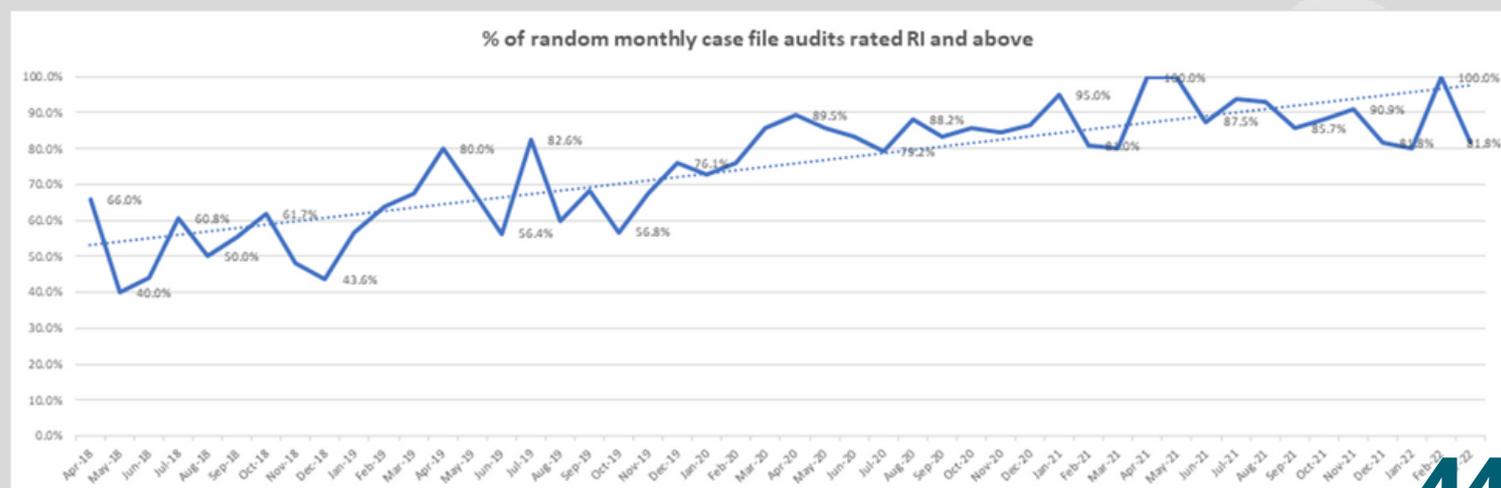
The average over the 4 years (19.8 cases per worker) is slightly above comparator information based on September 2021 workforce information from DfE

- Statistical Neighbour Average – 16.6 per worker
- England Average – 16.3 per worker

PI 15: The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better



This is a very important indicator as it shows the progress of practice improvement across audited case files. Good performance is an indication that our assessments, plans, oversight and interventions with children and families are improving. This measure also demonstrates that we know ourselves well in relation to our journey of improvement



There is a marked improvement in this measure throughout the contract at an average of 63% between April 2018 and March 2020 improving to 87% during period of April 2020 to March 2022, we have seen during the contract a substantive improvement in practice which can be evidenced in the OFSTED report published on 5th July 2022. Over the course of the contract the average case files rated Requires Improvement (RI) and above is 74.9%, which is near 20% above target.

Quality

Over the last few years the Quality Assurance (QA) framework has continually developed to strengthen our practice through learning identified from the variety of QA activities. Our approach recognises the need to have a range of QA activities aimed to measure and evaluate the quality of services delivered to children and families. The framework enables us to capture feedback from children, families and our staff which shapes and validates our practice and service delivery. Our practice and thematic reviews, dip sampling, external reviews enable the Trust to evaluate practice and identify areas that require further strengthening.

Through a robust closing the loop process and feedback mechanisms, the findings from all the QA activities are shared with all relevant practitioners, managers and executive management team to ensure actions are taken at both individual child but also at a more strategic level, if required.

This targeted approach not only assists managers to support individual practitioners to address any gaps in practice, but also provides evidence and informs further systems changes at a more strategic level.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Number of Audits Completed	557	527	383	309
Number Inadequate	242	160	63	43
Number Requires Improvement	273	318	294	242
Number Good	62	49	26	24
Number Outstanding	0	0	0	0
% Requires Improvement	60.1%	69.6%	83.6%	86.1%

Most of the indicators show that we are either meeting our targets or are within the agreed tolerance, and we have seen improvements over the last four years. However, in recent months the scale and pace has been impacted by the national workforce issues that we have faced.

Alongside understanding our performance better, our approach during the four years of the contract has been to establish a culture of hold managers and social workers to account through performance boards, performance surgeries, senior management meetings including Children's Management Team and the Practice Improvement Board. This approach has been successful for most teams and we have seen marked improvements. However, there are a minority of teams / practitioners where performance has not improved, we continue to manage the situation by providing targeted support and intervention for the underperforming teams and workers

We have streamlined our performance reporting to ensure Team Managers and Senior Management have the right performance information to drive improvements and so they are not overwhelmed with the volume of information they receive. Examples of this include daily locality dashboards which include key performance for each locality drilled down to a team level in one single report.

At the end of the first four years we know ourselves well, we recognise our challenges and we are determined to tackle 'head on' our areas of deficits within the service. This is the only way to achieve the improvements necessary, our 12-month action plan following our ILACS inspection in May 2022 will drive improvements further in 'weaker areas' and will contribute to sustaining our performance and practice in areas we have improved and sustained over the contract period.

iv: The Trust's proposals for the future operation and performance of the Services

The Trust is on an upward trajectory and the leadership team has a clear focus on what is required to continue improvement. With an over-arching Transformation Programme, based on the Trust's 6 Priorities: People; Practice; Partnerships; Prevention; Meeting Need and Measuring Progress; and Striving for Excellence. The Transformation Programme is gaining traction and driving key activities which include:

- Service redesigns for:
 - Front Door and MASH
 - Intervention Services
 - Children with Disabilities Team

- Continued development of Locality model with partners
- Continued embedding of the Early Help Strategy
- Embedding Permanency Strategy internally and with partners
- Implementation of the Workforce Development Strategy with an emphasis on recruitment and retention
- Roll-out of Sufficiency Needs Strategy and Plan
- Practice improvement governed through the Practice Improvement Board
- Implementation of the Liquidlogic Portal to transform communication and information exchange with young people, parents/carers and partners

The added rigour and accountability brought by the Transformation Programme will ensure that there are clear action plans, resource availability and focused activity to ensure that projects are delivered effectively and to plan.

Successful delivery of these activities in collaboration with partners will address the areas to improve identified in the OFSTED report, appropriately focus activity on prevention to minimise the number of children taken into care, address consistency of practice and availability of suitable placements when required.

Revised Performance Measures

The Trust and Council are currently discussing revised performance measures, and will agree a set of KPIs that will come into effect from April 2023.



V: Whether the Trust has achieved the standard 'Good' as set out in the OFSTED guidance within four (4) years of the Services Commencement Date as evidenced by the Annual Self Evaluation and/or any external inspection

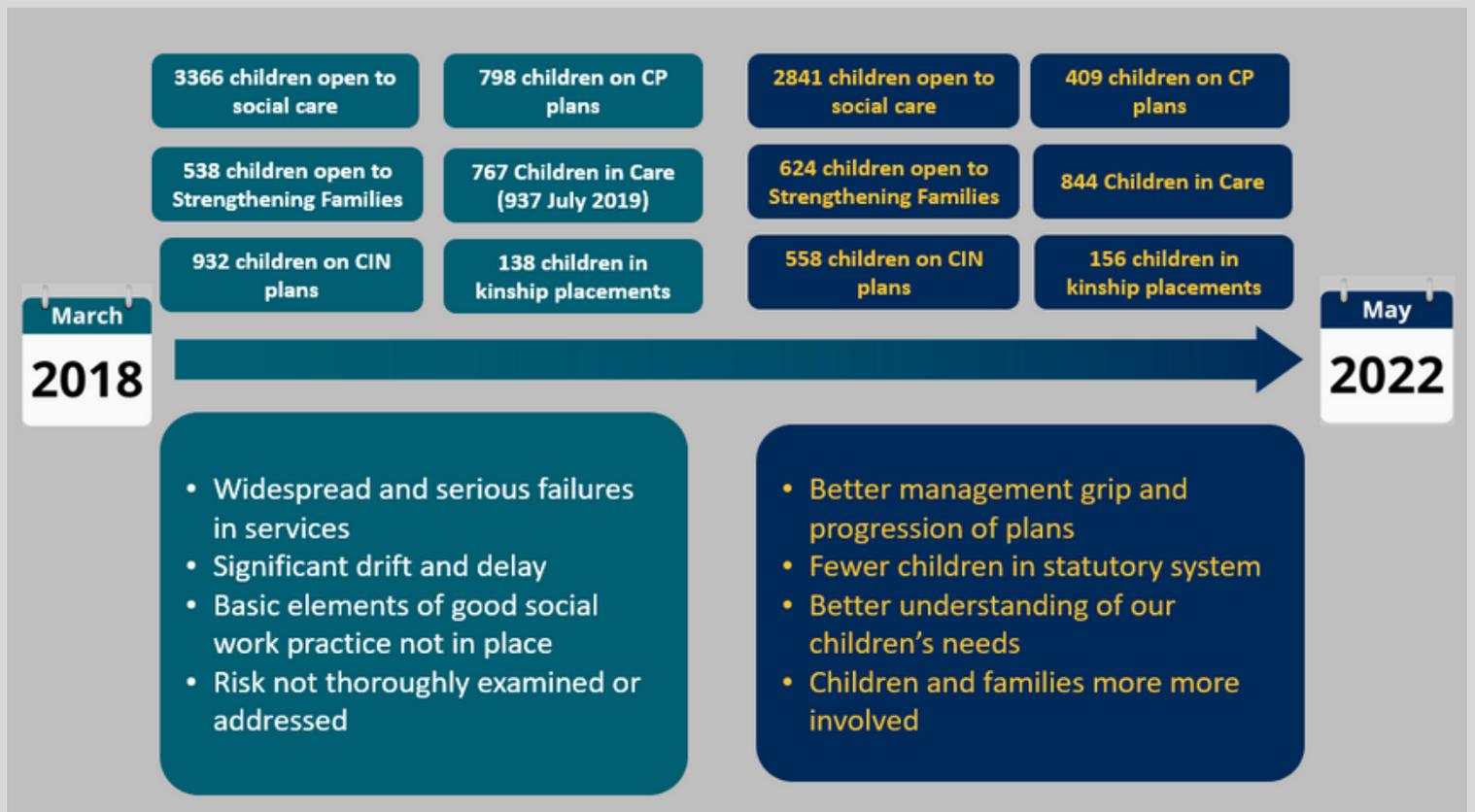
During the Covid 19 pandemic Ofsted suspended ILAC inspections, resuming in late 2021.

Sandwell Children's Trust was subject to an ILAC inspection between the 9 – 20 May 2022. The subsequent report graded the Trust as follows:

Judgment	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

The report highlights the progress that has been made and lifts the service out of 'inadequacy' for the first time in 10 years despite the challenges of a 'legacy of inadequate practice, high staff and manager turnover, and the pandemic'. This marks a significant achievement for the Trust in spite of the additional difficulties created by the national shortage in Social Workers and an international pandemic with full lockdown. The verbal feedback and written report highlight that we have improved across all areas, as reflected in the consistent 'Requires Improvement' gradings.

Inspectors acknowledged that senior managers have clear visibility of the issues that need to be addressed with mitigating actions being implemented. The Trust believes that this assessment provides the platform for continued improvement, at a more accelerated rate.



As with many organisations the Trust focused on delivering effective services during the extended pandemic lockdown periods. This significantly impacted on its opportunities and capacity to progress improvement activity. Taking this into consideration as well as the improvement trajectory evidenced by the ILAC inspection the Trust recommends that the requirement to achieve the standard 'Good' as set out in the OFSTED guidance is deferred to the next ILACS inspection.

vi: Whether the Trust is achieving the aims and objectives set out in Clause 2 of this Agreement (Aims)

Following its inception in 2018 the Sandwell Children's Trust has continued its steady improvement and has laid the foundations for its progression to Good and beyond. Strong governance processes underpin an effective and visible leadership across the Trust, from the Chief Executive, Directors and the wider leadership team which has enabled the Trust to free itself from historic inadequacy.

During an assurance visit in March 2021 OFSTED acknowledged that the Trust had managed well throughout the pandemic which demonstrated that the Trust was on an upwards trajectory. OFSTED also rated the Fostering Service as good in August 2021 which was another indicator of positive progress being made by the Trust.

Initially focusing inwardly, the Trust addressed key organisational features widely regarded as requirements to support good quality practice and effective service delivery. OFSTED reported, following the ILACS inspection in May 2022, that services for vulnerable children and families had improved since the inspection that took place in November 2017.

OFSTED Inspection May 2022

“Services for vulnerable children and families in Sandwell have improved since the last inspection in November 2017, when they were judged to be inadequate. Since April 2018, children’s services have been delivered by Sandwell Children’s Trust on behalf of the local authority. New strategic leadership, which includes the chief executive of the Trust, has increased the pace and trajectory of improvement over the last year. Stronger strategic leadership has led to improvements in much of the service, through changes such as the move to a locality model, implementation of an early help strategy, a social work career pathway and high-quality specialist services. Many of children’s needs are well met by social workers who collaborate effectively with partners in other services.”

Workforce stability and engagement

Shortages in the number of Social Workers remains a national issue. However, the Trust continues to develop its approach to recruitment and retention, capitalising on its unique selling points as an employer and the recent OFSTED inspection outcome.

Engagement of staff has been a key focal point, ensuring that staff feel valued and listened to by the organisation and senior leaders. OFSTED made reference to the workforce challenges following the May 2022 ILACS Inspection.

OFSTED Inspection May 2022

“Leaders are realistic about the challenges of developing a sustainable workforce. There have been challenges to existing workforce retention, in particular the loss of agency social workers, which has resulted in a period when allocation to a social worker was delayed for some children. A comprehensive workforce plan has been implemented, which includes recent investment to create additional teams to support social work capacity in response to high staff turnover, a comprehensive staff learning and development offer, and investment in career pathways to support staff recruitment and retention.”

Leadership

Children's services are challenging environments where staff need to trust and feel inspired by their leaders. The Trust Leadership team models expected behaviour and sets clear expectations for staff. Accountability has been improved and processes continually improved so that decisions are informed and taken more quickly. Reflective practice has been encouraged and challenge is provided in a constructive and structured manner.

The Trust leadership team has proactively sought feedback from a variety of sources and ensured they were seen to act in response, engendering trust among their staff and partner agencies. They have taken time to build and maintain relationships with staff and partners, encouraging them to understand the benefits of a collaborative approach. OFSTED recognised this in the May 2022 Inspection Report.

OFSTED Inspection May 2022

"Services are improving and there are no longer widespread and serious weaknesses in Sandwell. Leaders have achieved a significant change in the culture and impact of leadership across both the Trust and the council, which is improving services for vulnerable children and families. Leaders have faced considerable challenges in implementing this, as a result of the legacy of inadequate practice, high staff and manager turnover, and the pandemic. While there is tangible progress, leaders are realistic about the scale of improvement still needed as a consequence of past systemic failures. Over the last year, a new chief executive at the Trust has brought energy and vision to develop a strategic pathway for service improvement. A whole-system change programme is now being implemented through a clear and comprehensive programme of improvement based on six clear priorities."

Organisational culture

The Trust has and continues to develop its culture to support continuous learning and service improvement enabling a focus on practice and positive outcomes for children, young people and families.

Fundamental to this change in culture has been the collective development and embedding of the 'Trust's Purpose, Ethos and Standards'. The document clearly articulates the Trust's approach and expectations but more importantly all of the Trust's actions, decisions and relationships are underpinned by a collective understanding that everyone associated with the Trust lives the ethos. OFSTED made reference to staff feeling valued and supported in the May ILACS 2022 report.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

It is an enormous strength of Sandwell Children's Trust that we have a diverse workforce and we serve a diverse community in the Borough. But this also brings a responsibility to ensure that everyone who works with us can bring their whole selves to work and can be sure of a supportive and inclusive workplace – and to do our best for the children and families we serve, we need a deep understanding of the various communities and cultures within Sandwell.

The Chief Executive has taken a personal interest in developing the Trust's approach to EDI, leading a task and finish work group to develop an EDI Strategy, an accelerated Action Plan, mandatory training for managers and ensuring that there is an effective dialogue with all staff through Forums and EDI representatives as well as the staff survey.

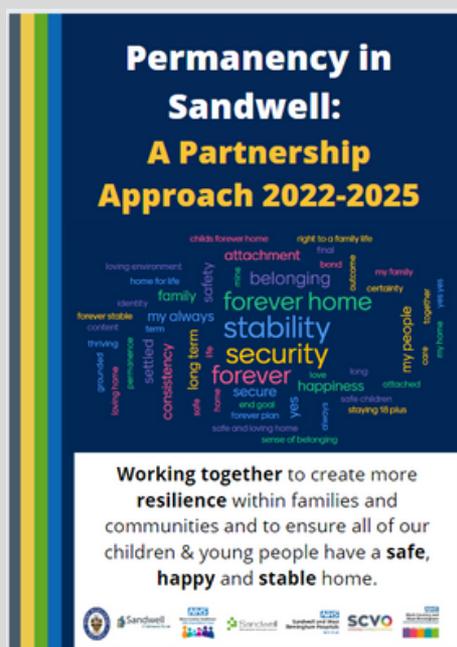
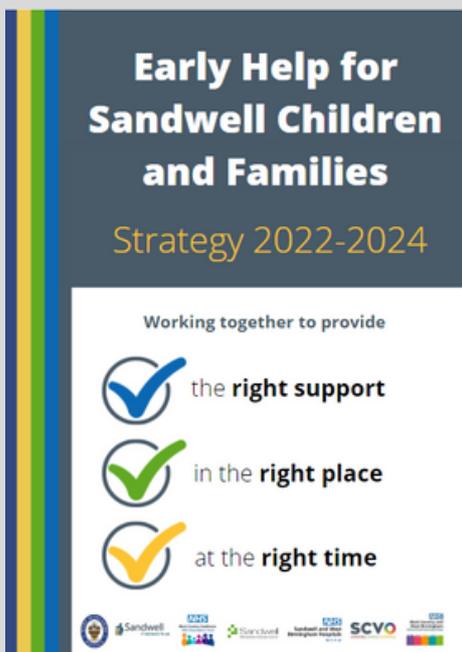


OFSTED Inspection May 2022

“Staff in Sandwell are positive about the visibility of senior leaders. Social workers feel well informed about the considerable changes and developments within the Trust. They value being consulted and many feel committed to Sandwell Children's Trust in the long term. Social workers enjoy working for the Trust and feel it is a friendly and supportive environment. Most workers feel valued and well supported. Social workers are able to access a range of training to support their professional development. Social workers value group reflective discussions and reflective supervision.”

Inter-agency working

The Trust understands the link between strong multi-agency working and providing an effective service. Consequently, it has worked to improve relationships with partners, achieve strategic buy-in and improve information sharing arrangements as well as improve use of shared assessment tools with longer term ambitions around developing its locality model with partners.



The recent roll-out of partnership wide Early Help Strategy (and action Plan) and Permanency Strategy demonstrates how the Trust has taken lead roles to foster effective relationships to deliver initiatives for families in Sandwell.

The Front Door has been assessed to work well but more can be done to improve the way the Trust and partner agencies collaborate to improve the effectiveness of the service and reduce the number of referrals. Establishing a focus on earlier work with families delivered by the right partner. This is an immediate priority for the Trust.

Specific reference was made by OFSTED in the May 2022 report regarding the work of the Strengthening Families practitioners and how their work has led to timely preventative support.

OFSTED Inspection May 2022

“Children benefit from effective early help. This has been further strengthened through co-location with partners, including housing, adult social care and teams which include a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) worker and a domestic abuse advocate. Early help assessments and child-focused plans are detailed and thorough when completed by strengthening families practitioners, resulting in timely preventative support. For many children and families, this focused help and support prevents the need for the involvement of statutory services.”

Effective systems

The Trust understands that Social Workers need to be supported by effective systems enabling them to maximise opportunities for direct work with families. It is continually monitoring and developing the use of the case management system to support Social Workers and similarly adapting the roles of Social Care Assistants and Business Support.

Back office functions have been developed and improved ensuring that Finance and Human Resources services are delivered to meet overall business requirements. Demonstrated by the development of a Medium-Term Finance Plan that operates within available resources, underpinned by effective financial management support to budget holders.

The availability of accurate performance information has been a focus to ensure that managers are able to identify those teams that are performing well and those who required additional support. Also enabling managers to identify those children who are most vulnerable and require more immediate needs.

In the May 22 OFSTED report reference was made to improvements in the way in which the Trust uses performance information to inform plans to improve services for vulnerable children.

OFSTED Inspection May 2022

“Use of performance information has improved, with leaders now able to use a range of data, including performance, quality assurance and complaints information, which informs plans to improve services for vulnerable children. This is strengthened by the value placed on the voice and experiences of children, young people and families who use services, who are now beginning to be involved in the quality assurance process.”

Continuous Improvement – The Trust’s Transformation Programme

The Trust has a focus on continuous improvement. The development of a Transformation Programme based on the Trust’s 6 priorities is gaining traction with Priority Leads in place, ambitions for each priority articulated and initial priority action plans developed which are in the implementation stage. During the May 2022 OFSTED inspection it was recognised that a whole system change programme was being implemented which was based on six clear priorities.

OFSTED Inspection May 2022

“Over the last year, a new chief executive at the Trust has brought energy and vision to develop a strategic pathway for service improvement. A whole-system change programme is now being implemented through a clear and comprehensive programme of improvement based on six clear priorities.”

vii: Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

There are no other matters.

Conclusion

Since 2018, the Trust has delivered its commitments as detailed within the Service Delivery Contract. In addition to this, the Trust has outlined a clear direction of travel underpinned by a robust programme of activity which will continue to improve the services provided to the most vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell.

Staff and leadership across the Sandwell partnership recognise the progress that has been made since 2018, and the headline feedback from the OFSTED inspection that took place in May 2022 states that 'Services are improving and there are no longer widespread and serious weaknesses in Sandwell'.

This feedback endorses the view that a break in contract at this time would not be in the best interests of the Trust and the Council, and most importantly the children and families that we support.

The Trust welcomes the opportunity to have further discussions with the Council with regard to the scope of services and opportunities to support our continued improvement journey.