



Sandwell
Children's Trust

Annual Review

DRAFT DOCUMENT

2022 - 2023



- 3 Foreword
- 5 Executive Summary
- 10 Introduction
- 11 **Section (a)** The Improvement Plan
- 15 **Section (b)** The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year
- 29 **Section (c)** The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year
- 30 **Section (d)** The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections
- 33 **Section (e)** The Trust's performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year
- 36 **Section (f)** Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year
- 57 **Section (g)** The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year
- Section (h)** Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure
- 58 **Section (i)** Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year
- Section (j)** The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)
- Section (k)** Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.

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 five 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 both our Fostering Service and Adoption 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; we will be relentless in pursuing the very best outcomes for our children and families.



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 annual 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 necessarily a detailed document which should be considered alongside our performance data.

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.



The Right Honourable Jacqui Smith
Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust



Emma Taylor - Chief Executive
Sandwell Children's Trust

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 and Infrastructure, Workforce and Audit and 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 is in place. 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 and families and ourselves and partners

Our ethos

Children and 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

Ourselves and 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, and reflect
- We embrace diversity and celebrate each others differences
- We promote the positives - we are advocates for the Trust



Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

EDI has a high profile across the Trust, we have seen progress but there is still a lot more to do. We continue to listen, learn and change. We all play a part in championing a diverse workforce, recognising and addressing any attitudes or behaviours that do not reflect our ethos. We want to be responsive to national and regional events that could have an emotional impact on our diverse workforce and the families we work with. We need to understand how these have affected different communities and develop actions to help deal with them.

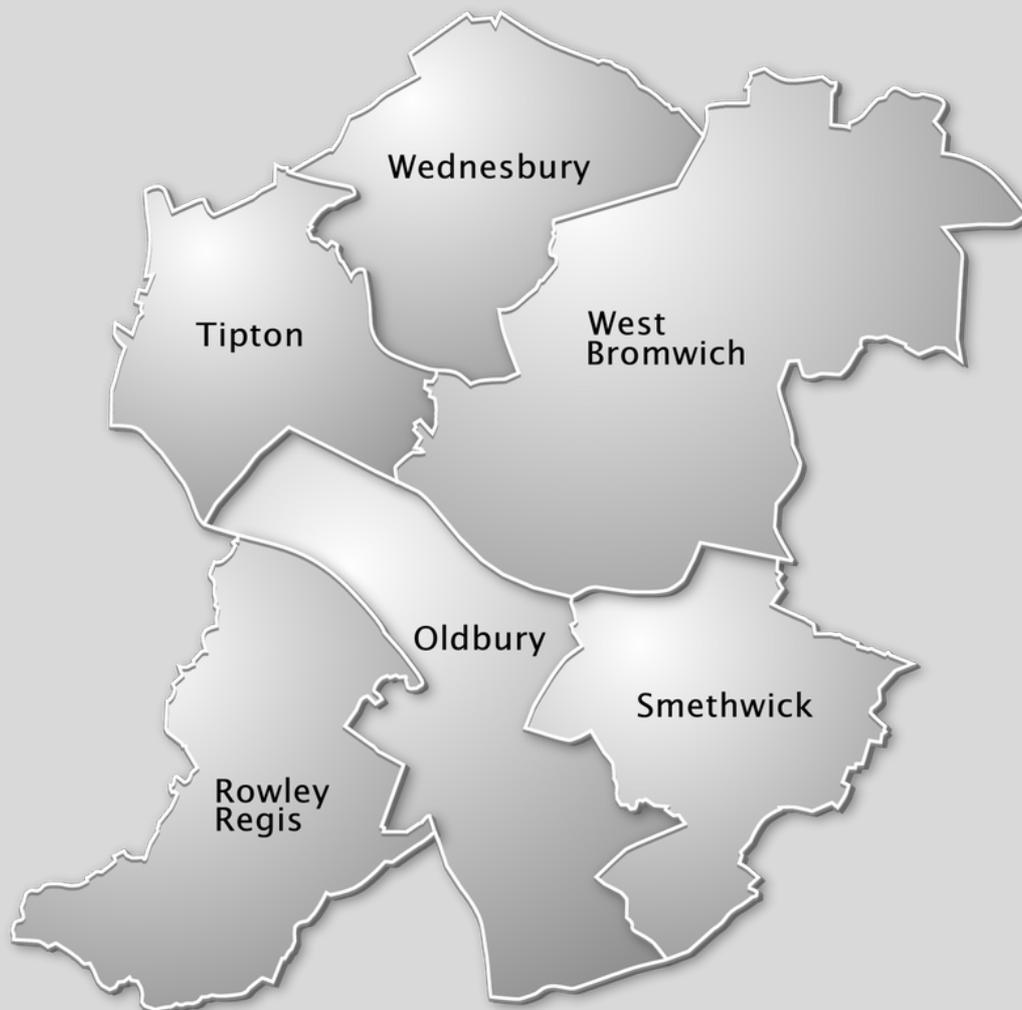
Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) was created in 2018 with a clear purpose; to improve the lives of children and young people in Sandwell. Founded on core principles of excellence, equality and opportunity for all, Sandwell Children's Trust is resolute in creating an environment that recognises and celebrates differences, designs services to meet the diverse needs of our children, young people and families attracts and retains the best staff. What we gain from our diverse communities and workforce is immeasurable.

We are striving to be an organisation that values differences and inclusiveness, where everyone can be the very best they can and in turn create a workforce that is knowledgeable about the communities we support so we can connect directly with our young people and families, and be responsive to their needs. Led by our Chief Executive and with the full support of our Trust Board, promoting equality, valuing diversity and maximising inclusivity is about recognising that we all have our part to play.

The children and families of Sandwell along with our staff and partners are important contributors to our continuous development, learning and the overall success of what we do. Therefore, we will ensure that we provide equality of opportunity for all so that meaningful ways of collaboration, participation and contribution can flourish, and we strive to strengthen our cultural competences and embed it as an employer, an organisation and in practice.

Overview of Sandwell and our children

Sandwell is an urban area lying in the centre of the West Midlands conurbation, made up of six small urban towns. It ranks as the 15th most deprived authority in the country for income deprivation that affects children, with this deprivation spread across the borough.



Sandwell has an estimated population of 341,900, which has risen year on year since the 2011 census. 84,867 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Sandwell. This is 24.8% of the total population in the area. There has been an 11% increase in the number of children and young people living in Sandwell since 2011, which has required the creation of 5,300 new primary school places and 3,915 secondary school places.

Sandwell is a diverse borough with 30.1% of the total population from black and minoritized ethnic groups. This percentage increases for children and young people from minoritized ethnic groups, who account for 49% of Children aged 0-17, compared with 26.2% in England. The largest minoritized ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are of Indian (8,246) and Pakistani origin (5,917).

Many of Sandwell's children and young people experience poor outcomes. Approximately 25% of the local authority's children 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 number of children entitled to free school meals has increased by 30.2% since March 2020 with 20,209 children currently in receipt of a free school meal, which equates to 33.2% of the school population. 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 it is 29.2% (the national average is 17.2%). Over 3,100 children are subject to an Education, Health and Care Plan. This figure has risen significantly since 2019 and continues to rise.

As of 31 March 2023, there were 802 children in care, with 333 children subject of a child protection plan and 624 Children in Need. The rate per 10,000 of children in care in March 2023 has reduced by 7.2 over the last 12 months, and currently stands at 94.5. This is an improving trend, and now below statistical neighbour average (97.1 per 10,000). We currently have a transformation plan and financial plan to reduce the number of children in care further. The rate of children on a children protection plan has also reduced over the last 12 months.

Introduction

The Annual Review is a formal requirement of the Trust's contract with the council. The aim of the review is to look back over the previous 12 months and understand how far we have achieved our goals. The review is the first strategic document of the year, informing our business plan and our improvement plan.

The Service Delivery Contract allows for the Trust to be 'relieved of its obligations to provide its services as a result of a "Relief Event'. A Relief Event is an event such as a fire, storm, accidental loss or damage to the Trust premises, power failure, or the failure by the council to fulfil the council dependencies.

Schedule 3 of the Service Delivery Contract outlines the matters that are to be reported on as part of the Annual Review. These are addressed in the following sections:

- Section (a)** The Improvement Plan
- Section (b)** Performance of Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year
- Section (c)** The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year
- Section (d)** The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections
- Section (e)** Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year;
- Section (f)** Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year
- Section (g)** The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year
- Section (h)** Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure;
- Section (i)** Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following
- Section (j)** Contract Year
- Section (k)** The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)
Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

The Improvement Plan

Sandwell Children's Trust is an independent organisation owned by Sandwell council. Day to day management is overseen by its Executive Management Team, which is accountable to the Trust Board.

In May 2022, Sandwell Children's Trust was subject of an regulatory inspection by Ofsted under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS). After a decade of children's services being inadequate, a judgement of Requires Improvement was achieved in all areas which was a significant turning point for the Trust and its partners. In December 2022 the Trust's Adoption Services were also inspected, where an overall judgement of Good was achieved.

As part of our improvement journey we have a robust improvement plan which outlines progress and evidence against the seven recommendations from the ILACS inspection in May 2022. These recommendations can be seen on page 31.

The current context is one of a national shortage of social workers, where almost all areas have been affected. There has been a disproportionate impact on the Trust, given its difficult history, workforce stability remains one of the Trust's biggest challenges. Despite this, efforts to improve continue at pace. There is a clear sense of direction and strong ambition for the Trust's future, which is underpinned by our six priorities. In early 2022 our locality model was established, whereby three Heads of Service oversee three social work localities, alongside borough wide services for children in care/care leavers, disabled children and fostering. The model is embedding well.

The Trust Board is both supportive and challenging. There is a strong ambition and high expectations from all members; and there is good oversight, with the Board receiving regular detailed reports regarding all aspects of the Trust's work, 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.

There is a positive partnership approach between the Trust and the council and there is evidence that children are prioritised in Sandwell; and whilst there is appropriate challenge through our governance arrangements, there are constructive relationships between officers and politicians across the Trust and council.

There is a clear sense of direction and oversight across the wider partnership, as well as clarity about our priorities which are overseen by the Children and Families Strategic Partnership. These include early help, mental health, and children in care.

Our Strategic Leadership Team has been established for two years now and is developing well. It is clear on its remit which is to deliver on our priorities, addressing any issues collectively so we continually improve. Likewise, our wider Operational Leadership Team comes together regularly, both to reflect on practice but also to spend time learning together as leaders and helping to shape improvements - all part of our inclusive and collective culture.

Our ethos underpins our whole approach and there are clear expectations about how everyone should behave and live our values. This links closely with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Overseen by a Strategic Governance Group, there is a strong commitment to excel in this area. Not only do we want to deliver on the strategy's action plan but make the strategy a 'state of being' for everyone in the Sandwell Family.

Transformation Programme

The Trust has mapped out an ambitious programme of projects which will ensure that it continues on its upward trajectory and improvement. The Transformation Programme has developed over its first full year in line with our ethos and is structured around our 6 priorities.

Time has been invested in the development of the programme ensuring that each priority has clear objectives captured in individual ambition statements, clarified by 'what this means' which articulate how the ambitions will be achieved. Each priority area is underpinned by prioritised projects with the appropriate level of resources, project planning, lead officers and all overseen by the Strategic Leadership Team to ensure co-ordination, alignment and collective management of risks.

Additionally, the Transformation Programme is fully aligned with the Trust's Savings plan. Every element of the savings plan appears in the Transformation Programme which means that the prioritised activity will continue to transform the organisation, deliver better outcomes for our children, young people and their families and deliver tangible savings or avoid costs.

We strive for excellence in all areas.



Priority areas and their ambition statements



Priority 1 - People

“A place where our people are proud to be part of a skilled Sandwell family by being respected, supported, nurtured and empowered to thrive”



Priority 2 - Practice

“To improve the lives of children and young people through caring, compassionate support and proportionate high quality interventions based on each child’s needs”



Priority 3 - Partnerships

“To work alongside partners across Sandwell to improve the lives of children and young people through collaboration, shared understanding of roles and mutual respect”



Priority 4 - Prevention

“To work alongside partners to ensure that our children, young people and families receive the right support, in the right place at the right time”



Priority 5 – Meeting Need and Measuring Progress

“To recognize and understand the needs of the children and young people we support by ensuring services are designed to best meet those needs, enabling children and young people to fulfil their potential”



Priority 6 - Striving for Excellence

“To create the environment that transforms the Trust into an intelligence led, innovative, aspirational and confident organization”

Section (b)

The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year

Over the course of the year, we have reported our key contract performance on a monthly basis and are pleased to say, we have maintained good performance in many areas.

Performance in a few areas dipped in the first half of the year due to staff shortages and recruitment issues of Social Workers, many of the Contract KPIs improved in the second half of the year.

As of 31 March 2023, the SCT has met 11 of our KPI targets, a further 3 are within the contract tolerance. There is one indicator within the failure zone for month of March 2023. Measure in failure zone is as follows:

- PI13 – Social Worker Permanent Vacancy Rate – this measure has increased slightly over the last month from 40.7% to 42.6%, this measure is still above target tolerance (14th consecutive month above target and tolerance). This performance is directly effected by a national shortage of experienced social workers.

Throughout the financial year a number of measures have seen a decline in the earlier part of the year, however significant improvements have been made and include:

- Percentage timeliness of Contact to MASH within 24 hours (PI1)
- Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences within 15 working days of the strategy discussion (PI3)
- Timeliness of Single Assessments within 45 working days (PI4)
- Children unallocated longer than 5 working days (PI5)
- Child Protection and Children in Need Visits within the last 4 weeks (PI6 and PI10)

Measures which have declined throughout the latter part of the year include:

- Children in Care Reviews within Statutory Timescales (PI12)
- Overall Caseloads across Children Services (PI13)

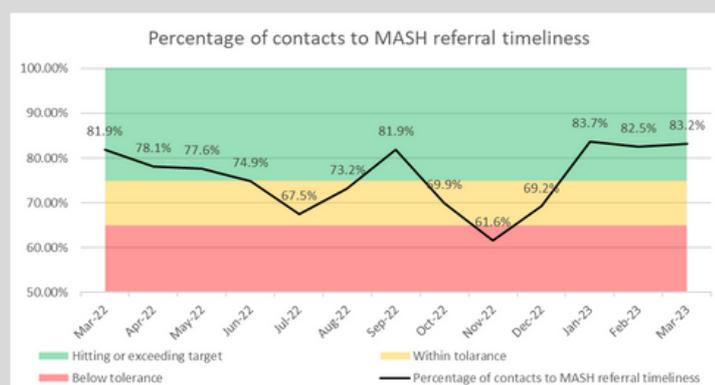
Between June and September 2022 there were significant staffing issues, which were reflective of the national and regional picture in respect of recruitment and retention of social workers. This impacted performance with a number of Children unallocated which impacted on a number of measures including PI3, PI4, PI5, PI6, PI10, PI11 and PI12 which eased in October 2022 with performance increasing significantly over the last 6 months of the financial year.

Below is the individual performance of the key performance indicators specified within the contract:

PI1 - 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 where threshold is not immediately clear. Throughout financial year 2022-23, performance fluctuated between 61.6% in November 2022 up to 83.7% in January 2023 (performance was above target for 6 reporting periods, within tolerance for 5 reporting periods and within failure for one reporting period).

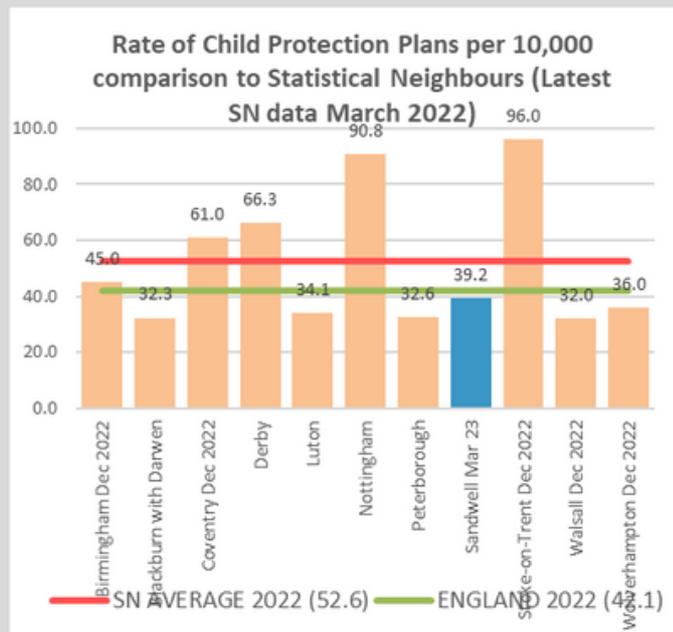


PI2 - The rate of Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population

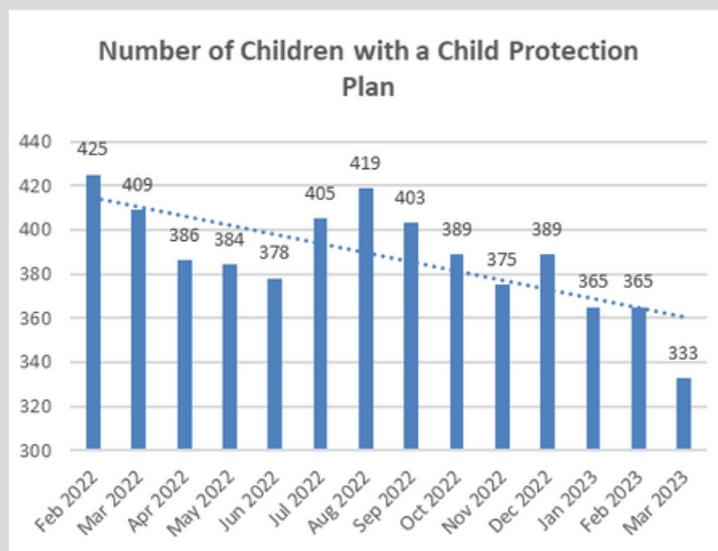
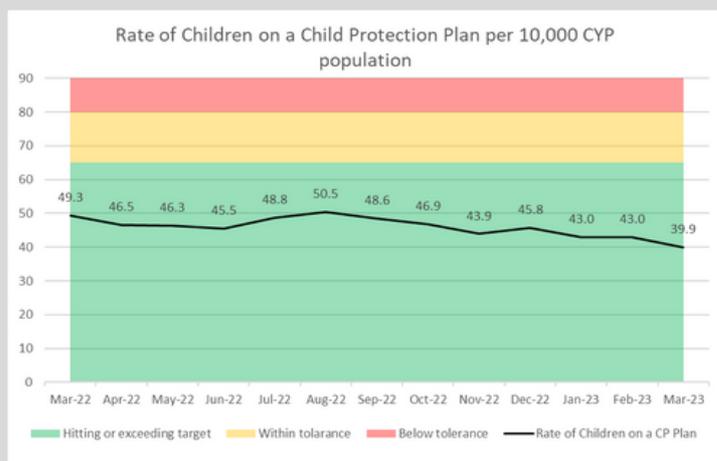
Target:<65 Children per 10,000 **Tolerance:< 80 Children** **Failure: > 80 Children**

This measure gives us a sense of our demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds for children where there are child protection concerns.

Our statistical neighbour average is 52.6 and the England average is 42.1 (measured at March 2022).



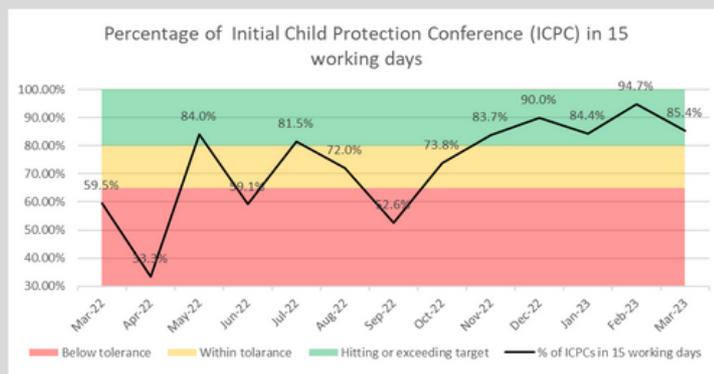
Throughout the year we have worked hard to ensure that the threshold for child protection was consistent, and this measure continues to decrease below our statistical neighbour average and now below England Average, and positively at the lowest rate since the Trust went live in April 2018 at 333 (39.2 per 10,000) Children on a Child Protection Plan (performance in this measure has achieved target in last 12 reporting periods).



PI3 – The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC’s) 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 timely we are when we are completing S47 enquiries and organising Initial Child Protection Conferences for children. 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.



Performance in this indicator has been sustained above target since November 2022 and is consistently above our comparators for 2022;

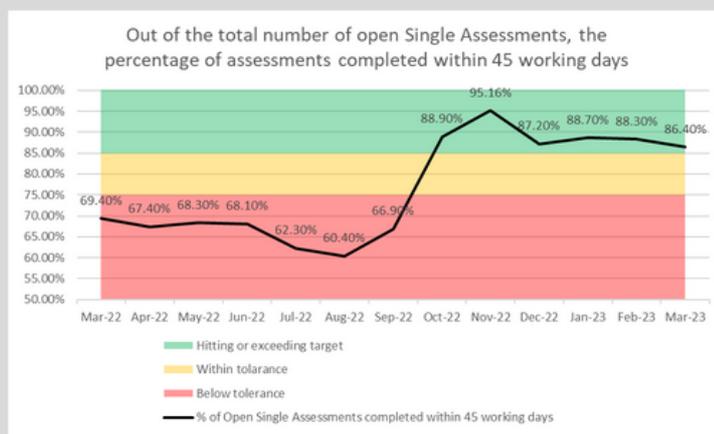
- Statistical Neighbours – 83.4%
- England Average – 79.2%
- West Midlands Average Q4 2021/22 – 77.6%

(This measure has been above contract target for 7 months of this financial year, within tolerance for two months and failure for three months)

PI4 - The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days

Target: > 85% **Tolerance:> 75%** **Failure: < 75%**

This measure shows how timely our Single Assessments are for children (in line with the statutory maximum expectation of 45 working days). Most Single Assessments are completed by Social Workers within Locality Service areas and Duty and Assessments Teams (between September 2022 and March 2023), but a significant amount are completed across other service areas as part of updating/review assessments for children.

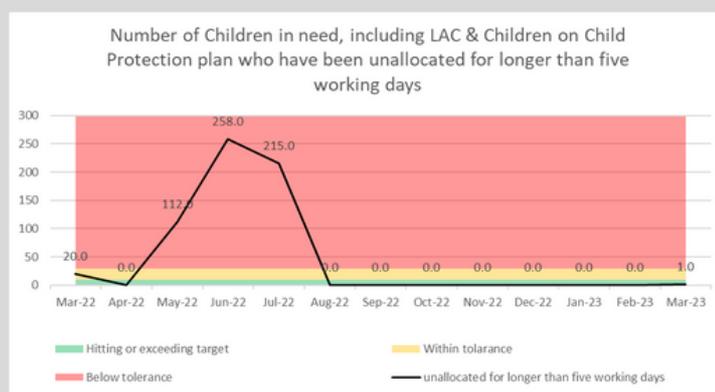


We saw a dip in performance early in the financial year, which coincided with workforce fragility and issues within unallocated children, performance improved significantly between October 2022 and March 2023 and above our comparators (West Midlands – 82%, statistical neighbour – 84.8% and England Average – 84.5%). Furthermore performance over the financial year was above target for 6 months of the financial year, but significantly improved above target for last 6 months (October 22 to March 23).

PI5 - 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.



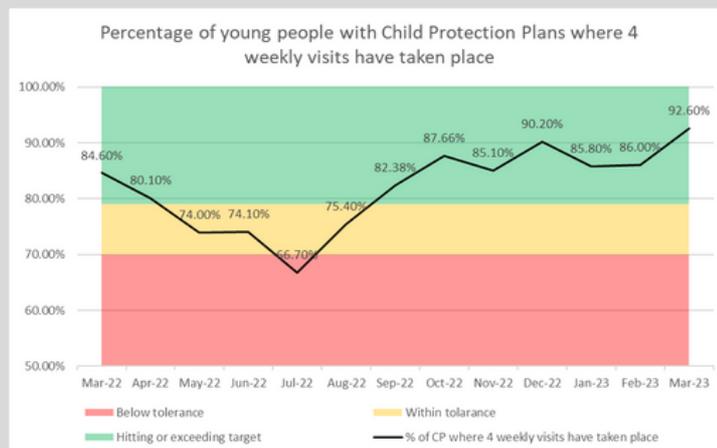
There are circumstances where having children unallocated for a short period of time is reasonable, but this should be kept to a minimum.

As can be seen our performance in this area has consistently been better than our target this year since 31 August 2022. Between 31 May and 31 July 2022 we had a high number of children unallocated for longer than 5 working days, this was due to workforce stability issues. A clear plan was implemented to manage allocations and transfer of work which continued throughout the financial year. The difficulty in recruiting social workers to our vacant positions had affected our performance in this area during this period (performance above target for 9 out of 12 month reporting cycle).

PI6 - The percentage of Children subject to a CP Plan visited within 4 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.



Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through practice reviews and management oversight. Good performance in this area contributes to demonstrating purposeful intervention and safeguarding.

The drop in performance mid-year is accounted for by increasing staffing fragility within the locality service, which has now stabilized (performance in this area above target for 9 months, tolerance for two months and below target and tolerance for one month).

PI7- 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 and discussing children's plans and our interventions. Good performance in this area would help to show we are ensuring our interventions are having the desired impact, and making changes where warranted. Plans that are not updated are normally an indicator of drift and delay within our interventions.



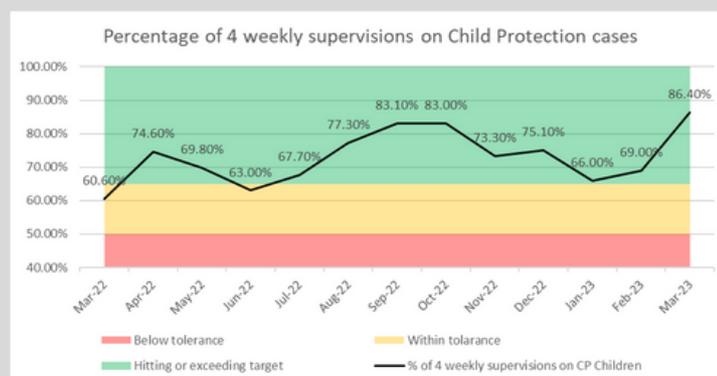
This measure is linked to how often Social Workers are holding / recording their Children's Core Group Meetings and Conference Chairs their Review Child Protection Conferences.

Performance has been relatively consistent – between 93.8% and 99.7% throughout the year this has remained above our target for 10 out of the 12 reporting months in 2022-23 with two months within tolerance.

PI8 – 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 child by child basis.



Our performance over the financial year has fluctuated between 63% in June 2022 and 86.4% in March 2023 and above target for 11 out of the 12 reporting months.

PI9 - 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 safeguard them better now and during future safeguarding concerns.



Our performance in this area has been good, although the relatively small sample sizes per month mean there can be variance month to month (performance has ranged between 73.1% and 91.8% and above target for all 12 reporting months).

PI10 - The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks

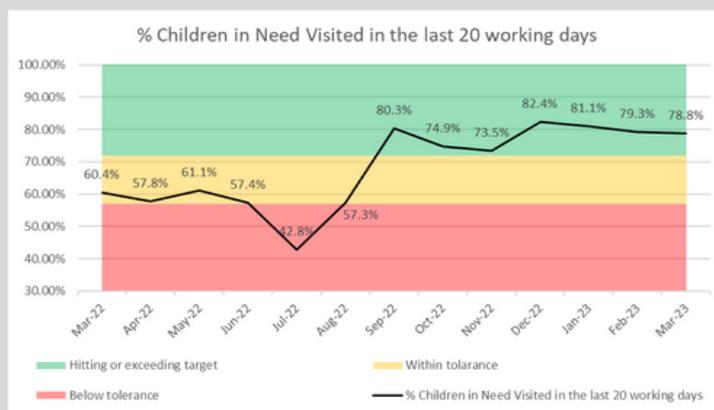
Target: >73% **Tolerance:>58%** **Failure: <58%**

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, and 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 and management oversight.

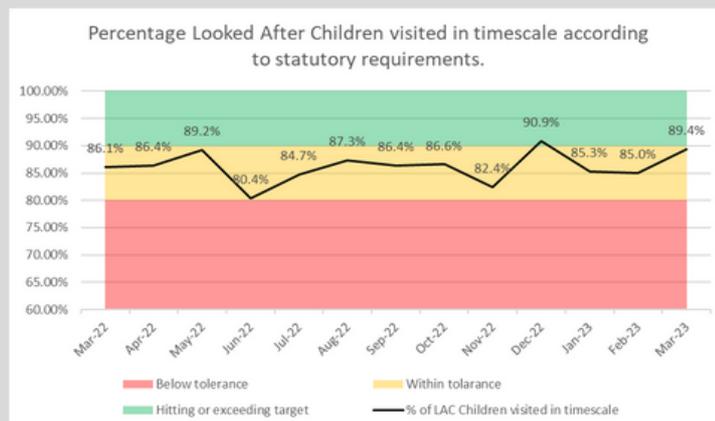
Performance in relation to Children in Need visits has improved significantly during September 2022 to March 2023 ranging between 73.6% and 82.4% this has been maintained above target over the 7 reporting periods, although between April 2022-August 2022 performance ranged between 42.8% and 61.1% where performance was below target for four out of the 5 months and in tolerance for one of those months.



PI11 – The percentage of Children in Care 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 Children in Care. The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is defined through statute. Good performance helps to show we have established relationships with our Children in Care, know their needs and meet their needs, driving permanence and robust planning.

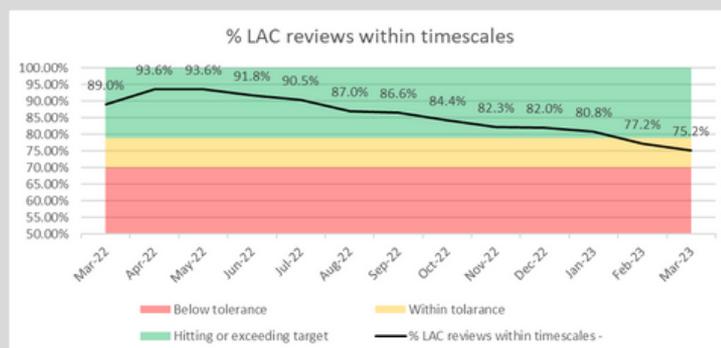


Many Children in Care are placed in stable situations, and are secure with their carers. Therefore, statutory visits range between 4-12 weeks based on Child needs and stability. Performance has ranged in this measure from 80.4% in June 2022 and 90.9% in December 2022, out of the 12 reporting months CIC visits has been within contract tolerance for 11 months. Performance in localities (where main staffing issues have been) has ranged between 75-85% during the year with CIC service between 85-95%.

PI12 - 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, and 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.



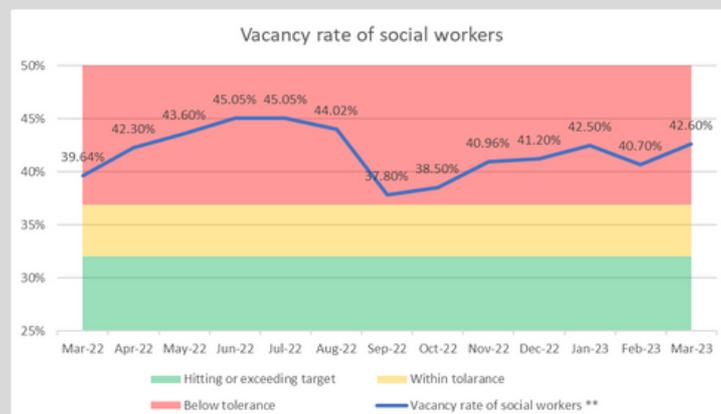
Good performance in this area will show that we independently review children's plans on a regular basis, at least every 6 months. This is a cumulative measure across the financial year starting in April each year.

Our performance in this area has been consistently above tolerance and above target for 10 out of 12 reporting months although performance is 9.8% below same period in previous year, this is primarily due to the period of workforce instability where CIC reviews needed to be re-convened between June and August 2022 impacted as this measure is cumulative throughout the financial year.

PI13 - 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 improvement.



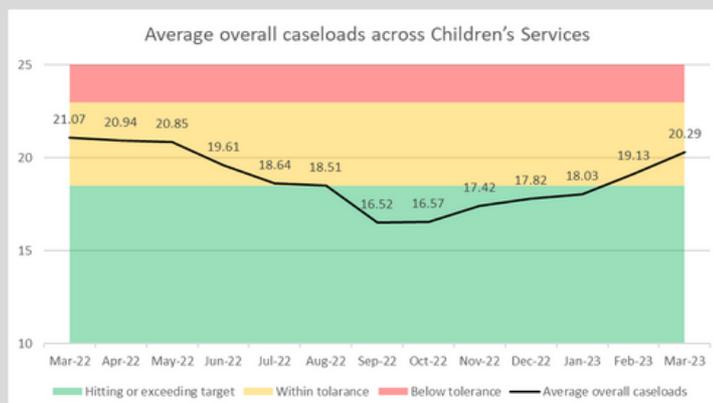
During the financial year there has been a national crisis in relation to recruitment of permanent Social Workers including a 2 tier agency workforce agenda consisting of high cost agency workers within project teams driving a national problem. This measure impacted directly on poorer performance on a number of other contract KPIs during the summer months.

Throughout the financial year our permanent vacancy rate has fluctuated between 37.8% and 45.05% which has been below target for the whole financial year. We continue to drive recruitment and retention within the Trust with a number of different initiatives to attract a more permanent workforce.

PI14 - Average case loads across the service

Target: >18.5 **Tolerance:>23** **Failure: <23**

This measure helps us to understand the changing demand within our organisation so that we can target our recruitment and retention activities, and adjust our establishment.



Over the previous 12 months you can see that caseloads started with an average of 20.94 in April 2022 this decreased to 16.52 in September 2022 (this coincided with the introduction of project teams within the service) and steadily increased up to 20.29 at end March 2023, when a number of project teams were removed.

Although fluctuations have been between 16.52 and 20.29 within the financial year, performance has remained better than target and tolerance. It is worth noting that whilst 20.29 children is the average workload per Social Worker, a more detailed review of senior social workers (not ASYEs) are carrying higher than average child workloads.

ASYE caseloads range between 12 and 18 based on the where they are within their assisted year of employment and their level of experience. Please see table below.

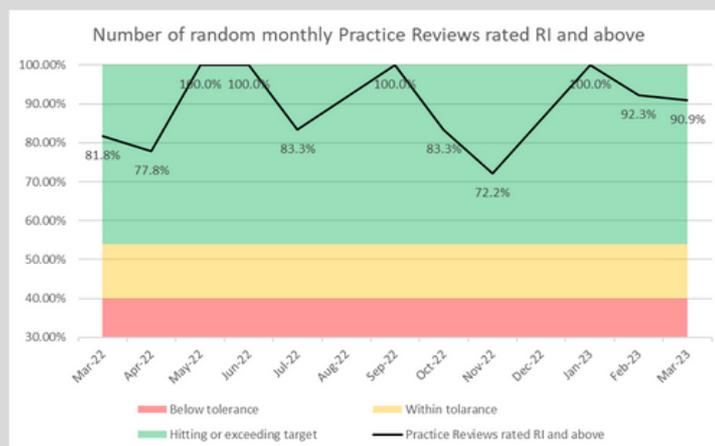
Length of Time ASYE	Childrens Workload Numbers
Up to 3 months	12
3-6 months	14
6-9 months	16
9-12 months	18

PI15 - The percentage of case file audits that are rated Requires Improvement or better

Target: >55% **Tolerance:>40%** **Failure: <40%**

This is a very important indicator as it shows the progress of practice improvement across Practice Reviews.

Good performance is an indication that our assessments, plans and interventions with children and families are improving.



The quality of our work has been consistent according to our random monthly practice reviews, despite the challenges we have faced, which should be seen as a positive. During the financial year performance has remained above target for whole year April 2022 – March 2023 ranging from 72.2% to 100%.

Please note that no practice reviews took place in August 2022 and December 2022 focusing on practice learning events these were:

- Adoption learning event in August 2022
- Learning from complaints in December 2022

Section (c)

The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year

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 and Practice Observations enable the Trust to evaluate practice and identify areas that require further strengthening whilst identifying areas of good practice.

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 and shapes further systems changes at a more strategic level.

Alongside understanding our performance better, our approach of sharing findings from our Quality Assurance activities enables the staff to continually cultivate a work culture where improving practice is business as usual. We have established a culture where managers and social workers are held 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 is still much to do to ensure practice is consistently improved with all service area/teams. 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 singular report.

Section (d)

Section (e) - The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections

The table below outlines the outcome of Ofsted's Visits and Inspections in 2022/23:

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
ILACS Full Inspection	9-20th May 2022	Requires Improvement to be Good https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80549
VAA Adoption Inspection	5-9th December 2022	Good https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/7/1264707

ILACS Full Inspection 9th to 20th May 2022 Inspection Highlights

Ofsted inspectors visited us between 5th to 9th May 2022 for Sandwell Children Trust full ILACS inspection. Feedback from inspectors was as expected, we have areas of strength and areas for continued improvement (all of which we already knew). The current biggest issue to sustained improvement is recruitment and retention of our workforce, which is a national issue.

Judgement	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 Judgement	Requires Improvement to be Good

Ofsted reported that, "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."

ILACS Inspection - Recommendations

- OR1 - The application of thresholds by partners when referring to children's social care, to ensure that children and families receive the right service.
- OR2 - Consistent threshold decision-making, particularly when escalating statutory involvement at the 'front door' when the criteria are met for child protection enquiries.
- OR3 - Management oversight and support, including the process of escalation and challenge by independent chairs to ensure timely progression of children's plans.
- OR4 - The effective application of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and decision-making, to achieve timely permanence for children who come into care.
- OR5 - Life-story work for all children in care, to support their understanding of the reasons for them being in care.
- OR6 - The range of suitable placements for older children and those with complex needs.
- OR7 - Timely transition planning to prepare children in care, including those with disabilities, for adulthood.

Adoption Inspection (VAA) – 5th to 9th December 2022

Inspection Highlights

HMI Ofsted inspectors visited us on 5th to 9th December 2022 to undertake a VAA inspection for our Adoption service the findings were as follows:

Judgement	Grade
Overall experiences and progress of service users taken into account	Good
How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires Improvement to be Good
Overall Judgement	Good

- The Trust progresses early permanence for children when adoption is identified as a part of a child's care plan. The Trust works closely with the regional adoption agency to progress early permanence as a result the number of Children placed in foster to adopt placements has increased
- Children build positive relationships with adopters
- Children are introduced to adopters in a planned and sensitive way
- Children's social workers work collaboratively with the Regional Adoption Agency to ensure that children and adopters, once matched and placed, are supported well. As a result, there have been no disruptions for children who have been placed by the Trust
- The Trust has developed a governance structure that enables leaders to maintain some good oversight of the delivery of the adoption service provided by the Regional Adoption Agency
- The culture of the Trust is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children. This is demonstrated in their desire to achieve permanence for children and stability in placements.

VAA Inspection - Recommendations

- Ensuring we encourage and gather feedback and consider the wishes, feelings, and views of children to help them improve the service
- Ensuring that life story books are personalised to each and every child consistently
- Ensuring that the later-life letter is individual and personalised to each child and that the prospective adopters receive the letter within 10 working days of the adoption ceremony
- Ensuring children are introduced to prospective adopters in a timely way that is child focused and without delay
- Ensuring that training and assessment of prospective adopters are non-judgemental
- Ensuring that we seek feedback from adopters about the experience of the adoption process from beginning to end and that we implement any learning from this.

The Trust's Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year

Financial Context

The finances provided to the Trust consists of funding from SMBC (the Contract Sum) and contributions from third parties. The basic contract sum was £70,473,917 and the 'third party' income was £7,720,579 which consisted of:

- ICB health contribution
- Education funding for placements
- DfE improvement grant
- Supporting Families claims
- Home Office funding

In addition to this we drew upon a high cost placement reserve from SMBC of £500,000. SMBC also funded the salary settlement, market supplement and social work project team costs over and above the contract sum amounting to £1,758,771. This makes a total income of £80,453,267.

We also had an opening deficit of £7,017,645. The surplus for 2022/23 is subject to audit but provisionally stands at £39,000 making the cumulative deficit £6,978,645 at year end.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The Medium Term Financial Plan is a rolling three-year strategy to manage our finances whilst addressing our deficit. We can review this on an annual basis in line with the review of our business plans.

The key aspects of the Medium Term Financial Plan are:

- Introducing more efficient ways of working
- Ensuring that we manage the demand for our work as efficiently as possible
- Ensuring we get best value for services
- Ensuring we take advantage of invest-to-save initiatives
- Delivery of savings aligned to our Transformation programme.

The cost-saving work outlined within this plan can be broken down to specific areas, such as the cost of children's placements, reducing the number of placements we need to utilise, ensuring that our service by service demand aligns with our establishment, and making sure the work we do is necessary – reducing drift and delay. The MTFP aims in the next three years to address our cumulative deficit which is largely due to staffing costs (agency premium), and high cost of placements for Children in Care.

For the year 2023/24 we aim to achieve a draft in-year surplus position of £740,000. This would be achieved through the delivery of cost savings totalling £2,200,000 compared with the previous year.

Year-end position

Income totalling £80,453,267 was received for 2022/23, and expenditure was £80,414,267, meaning the Trust has achieved a £39,000 provisional surplus, which was £1,908,130 below the aims outlined within the Medium Term Financial Plan. This was due to continued cost pressures on placements for Children in Care and reliance on high cost agency staffing and project teams.

This deficit is expected to be mitigated throughout the course of the next three years due to the development of a well governed cost savings plan tackling demand, supplier management and staffing permanence.

The below table highlights the provisional full-year outturn for - 2022/23.

Provisional full-year outturn	2021
Income	£80,453,267
Expenditure	(£80,414,267)
Operating surplus	£39,000
Surplus before taxation	£39,000
Tax on surplus	Nil
Surplus for the Financial year	£39,000

This year, some of the key points are:

- We received £500k of DFE Improvement Grant funding to fund some of our improvement initiatives.
- We drew upon the high cost placement reserve of £500k paid by SMBC.
- We received further funding of £1.76m from SMBC to fund the salary settlement, market supplement and exceptional social work project team costs.
- Contributions to placement costs from health and education partners have increased as a result of complexity of need and cost of living pressures.
- Key cost pressures remain within staffing (requirement for high cost agency staff to fill front-line roles) and placement cost increases (particularly external residential provision).

Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year

3.1 Workforce and Child Workloads

3.1.1 Workforce

It is important to acknowledge that Sandwell Children's Trust employs nearly 600 staff, of which around a third are social workers. If not for the range of specialist and support staff within the Trust, social workers would not have the foundation and infrastructure to work effectively with children and their families. Nevertheless, our focus continues to be to ensure we have a stable 'case holding' workforce, as it is the consistency and skill of this workforce that will bring about the improved outcomes we expect for our children and families.

There are a range of models we can use to determine how many social workers we need to work with our families, some more complex than others. However, we continue to have a very simple calculation for this, which is:

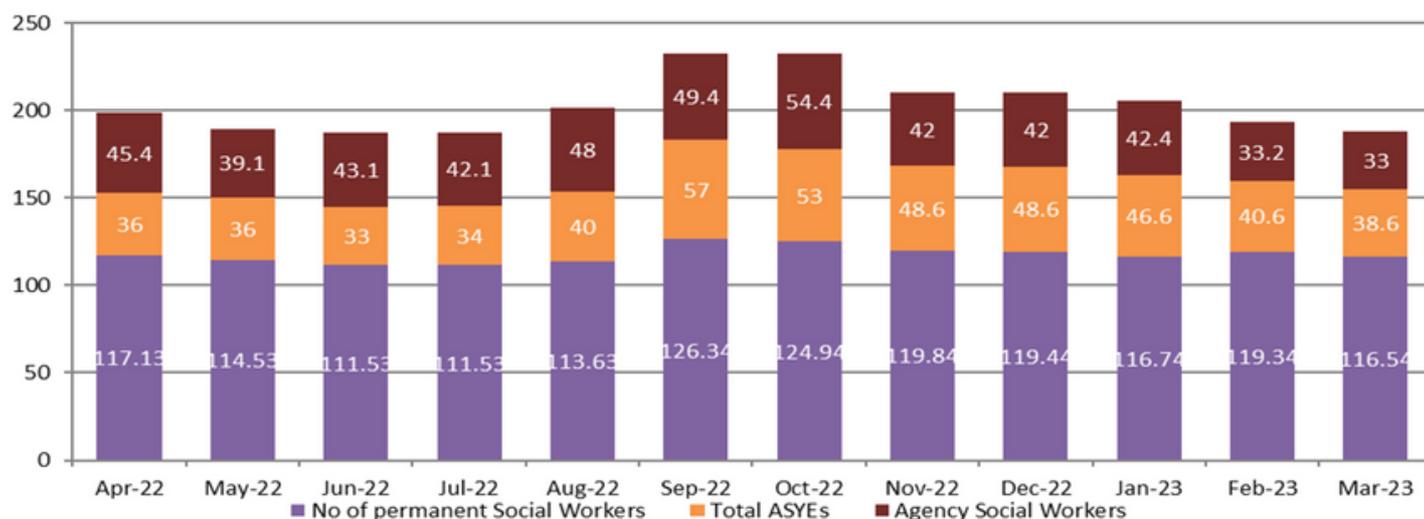
1. For social workers working with Children in Need and those with a Child Protection Plan (within Localities), an average of 18 children.
2. For social workers working with long term Children in Care (within the Children in Care Service), an average of 15 children.
3. For Social Workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE), there is a reduction of 20% within these average caseloads (although this is profiled across the year).

Case-holding Social Workers

We have an agreed establishment of 203 Full Time Equivalent social workers, based upon our current demand, and considerations within the Medium Term Financial Plan. This is made up of permanent social workers, agency social workers and those within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE's).

	Apr 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Jan 2022	Feb 2022	Mar 2022
Total Workforce - Level Needed	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
Total Social Workers	162.53	153.63	154.63	153.63	161.63	175.74	179.34	161.84	161.44	159.14	152.54	149.54
No of permanent Social Workers	117.13	114.53	111.53	111.53	113.63	126.34	124.94	119.384	119.44	116.74	119.34	116.54
Permanent Excluding ASYE	81.13	78.53	78.53	77.53	73.63	69.34	71.94	71.24	70.84	70.14	78.74	77.94
% Permanent (Excl. ASYE)	49.9%	51.1%	50.8%	50.5%	45.6%	39.5%	40.1%	44.0%	43.9%	44.1%	51.6%	52.1%
Total ASYEs	36	36	33	34	40	57	53	48.6	48.6	46.6	40.6	38.6
% Total ASYEs	22.1%	23.4%	21.3%	22.1%	24.7%	32.4%	29.6%	30.0%	30.1%	29.3%	26.6%	25.8%
Agency Social Workers	45.4	39.1	43.1	42.1	48	49.4	54.4	42	42	42.4	33.2	33
% Agency SWs	29.7%	25.5%	27.9%	27.4%	29.7%	28.1%	30.3%	26.0%	26.0%	26.6%	21.8%	22.1%

Staffing Levels (Permanent SWs, ASYE and Agency)



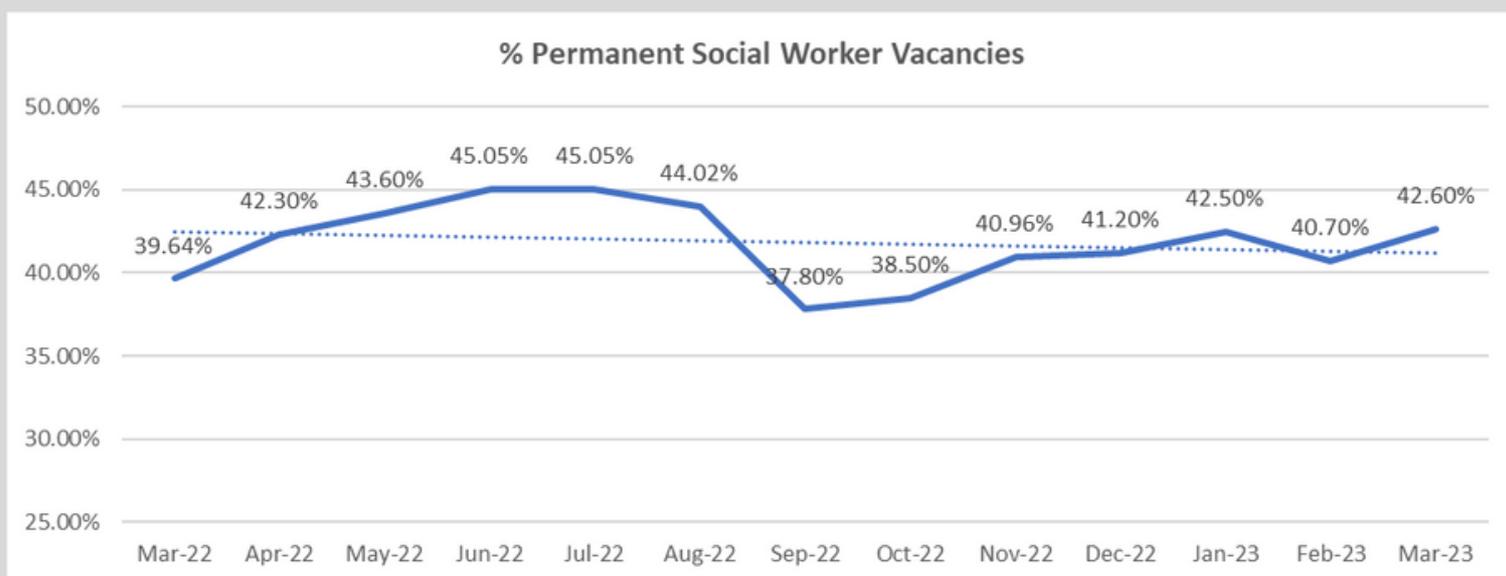
Our Social Work establishment has remained at 203 for the whole of the financial year, between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 there has been a net decrease of 13 Social Workers in the financial year from 162.53 to 149.54 the breakdown is as follows over the period;

- Permanent Social Workers has decreased slightly from 117.13 to 116.54 (net decrease of 0.59)
 - Permanent Social Workers – decrease from 81.13 to 77.94 (net decrease of 3.19)
 - Permanent ASYEs – increase from 36 to 38.6 (net increase of 2.6 workers)
- Agency workers has decreased from 45.4 to 33 (net decrease of 12.4 workers)

During the financial year we have introduced 5 agency project teams to support our Social Worker issues. These came into post in August 2022 with a final phased end of Project teams by June 2023, ensuring minimal impact on services we deliver to our children and families, including reallocation of children swiftly and robustly (three of these teams as of the 31 March 2023 had been disbanded). Further to this a cohort of ASYEs (37) joined the Trust between September 2022 and October 2022 which helped support deficit in vacancies within the service.

“PI13 Vacancy Rates of Permanent Social Workers” as stated above SCT has (at 31 March 2023) 116.54 permanent workers, compared to an establishment of 203. This number has decreased slightly since April 2022 (117.53) with our permanent vacancy rate sitting now at 42.6% (86.46 permanent vacancies).

- 38.6 ASYEs
- 23.7 Social Workers
- 54.24 Senior Social Workers



Our real time vacancy rate including agency social workers as of 31 March 2023 is at 26% with 149.54 workers in post over the establishment of 203 (52.46 real time vacancies), this has decreased from 162.53 (19.9%) in April 2022 (vacancy rates have increased over the last 12 months).

Current Background- National and Regional Context

- The Trust continues to struggle to both recruit and retain permanent and agency staff due to national workforce crisis.
- The independent review of Children's Social Care (May 2022) have recognised the staffing pressures faced and recommended that investment is made in the social care workforce to address high vacancy and turnover rates
- ADCS and NCAS conferences raised national pressures on resources within social care and confirmed that this is being felt nationwide by all local authorities and Trusts
- Regional MoU been reviewed and signed by all, workforce a regional priority
- 10 out of 14 West Midland Local Authorities now offer a financial incentive for permanent practitioners between £2,000 - £10,000
- The HR Team and Members of the EMT regularly meet with peers from other Trusts, Local Authorities and the DFE to discuss recruitment and retention concerns.

Our Strategic Approach

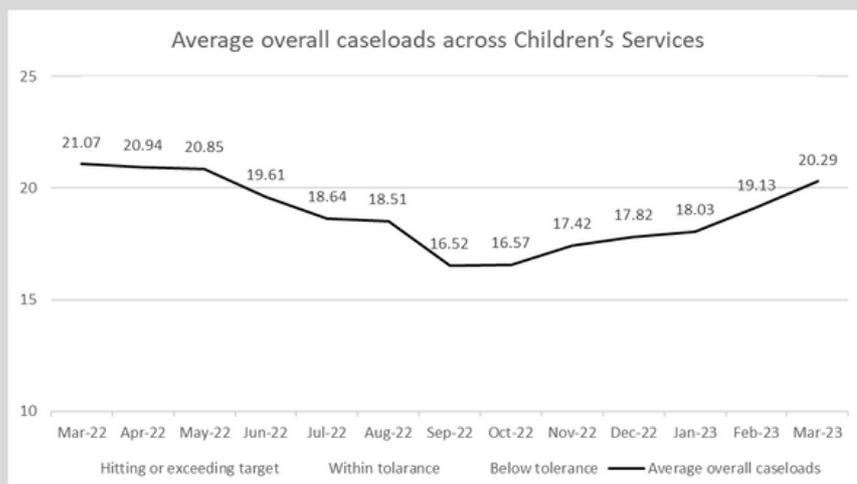
- Transformation Programme – Priority 1 is People
- Recruitment, retention and career development
- Creating a safe working environment and embedding culture of staff wellbeing
- Refocus and improve activity in relation to ED&I
- In April 2022 the Workforce Strategy 2022-2025 was released. The Workforce Committee, Chaired by Jacqui Smith- plus Trust Board members, EMT and Officers meet quarterly to oversee progress of Workforce Strategy
- The Workforce Strategy, provides a strategic approach to recruitment, retention, development, leadership, the provision of a safe working environment and the creation of a learning organisation- plus detailed operational activity
- In April 2022, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2022-2025 was released. The Workforce Committee also provides progress oversight and challenge to the Trust ED&I activity.

Current areas of focus:

- The creation of a Sandwell family ‘deal’. This includes an offering and expectations of a recruitment and retention package which includes developing our grow-your-own programme, career pathways and aspiring programmes
- The creation of a leadership hub that is driven by all managers and leaders across the Trust, supporting the Trust ethos and culture
- The introduction of service level induction plans, building on the recently released corporate induction plan
- Working with the operations directorate to devise and introduce exit strategy for the current project teams

Social Workers recruitment is a national issue with many LAs experiencing social work staffing pressures. In addition, the recruitment of agency social workers continues to be highly problematic (especially within the Child protection and Court Teams) with the project teams’ model being preferred by the agencies, driving costs significantly and creating a 2 tier within agency workers groups.

3.1.2 Workloads



**SCT SW workload average
31 March 2023**

20.29/per SW

**Statistical Neighbour
Average**

16.1/per SW

England average

16.3/per SW

The concern remains the high workloads held by some localities' Social workers. This issue in conjunction with the difficulties to recruit experienced SW contributes to the Trust's vulnerability.

3.2 Our Children

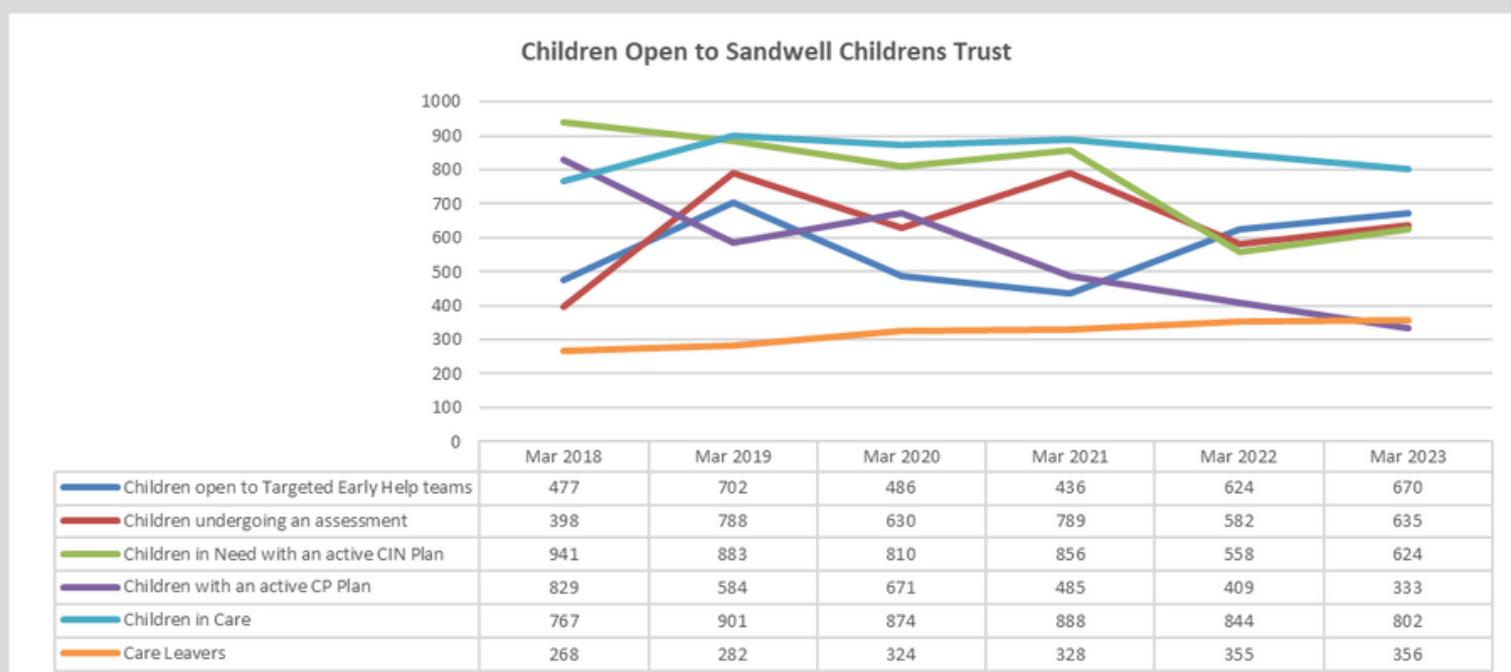
Since March 2018, we have seen a reduction of 260 Children open to Sandwell Children's Trust. In relation to early intervention and targeted early help there has been an increase of 193 Children open to the Strengthening Families Service* with Social Care statutory services seeing a reduction of 453 Children over the same period.

There are now slightly fewer Children in Care than our comparators (approximately 20 fewer children), the Trust have reduced the number of children and young people open to Children's Social Care from a total of 3,203 (including Care Leavers) to 2,750, which is a reduction of 453. 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.

Breakdown of children and care leavers 2018 - 2022

Service	Mar 2018	Mar 2019	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2022	Mar 2023	Difference Mar 2018 to Mar 2022
Children open to Targeted Early Help teams	477	702	486	436	624	670	193
Children undergoing an assessment	398	788	630	789	582	635	237
Children in Need with an active CIN Plan	941	883	810	856	558	624	-317
Children with an active CP Plan	829	584	671	485	409	333	-496
Children in Care	767	901	874	888	844	802	35
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355	356	88
Total	3680	4140	3795	3782	3372	3420	-260

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



As of 31 March 2023, we had 635 children with a Child in Need Plan, 333 children with a Child Protection Plan and 802 Children in Care. We have fewer children on Child Protection Plans and in Care than our statistical neighbour comparators.

Comparison with Statistical Neighbours

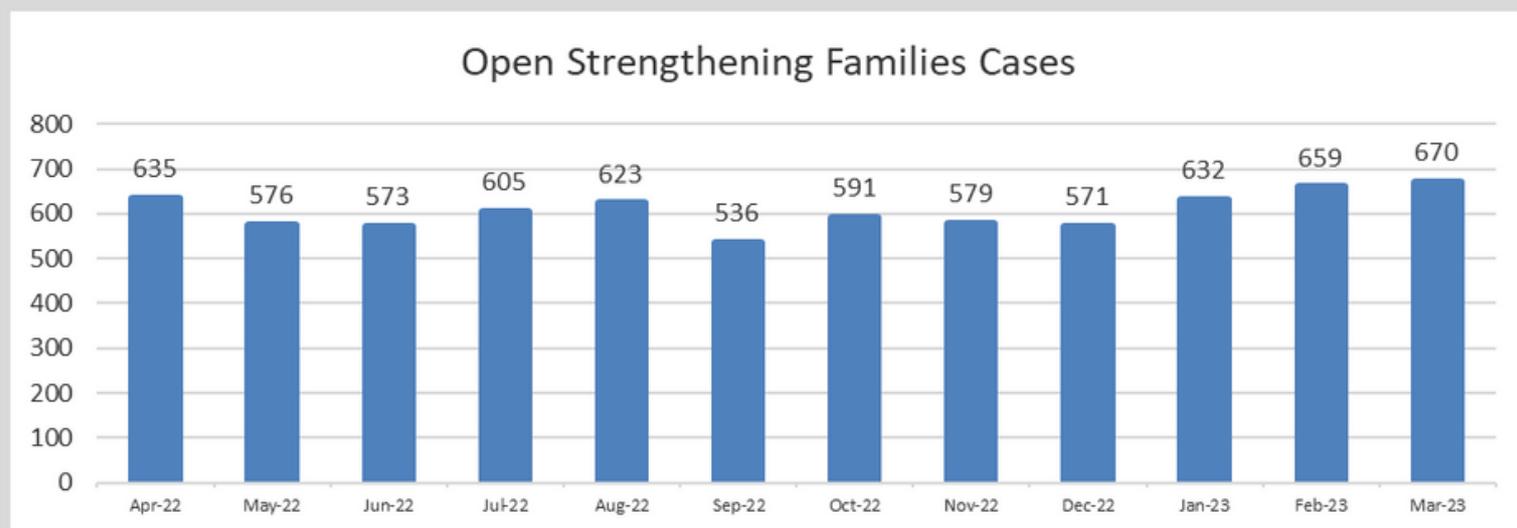
	Sandwell (31 March 2023)	Statistical Neighbour Average 2021- 2022	England Average 2021 - 2022
Children with a Child Protection Plan	39.2 per 10,000	52.6 per 10,000	42.1 per 10,000
Children in Care	94.5 per 10,000	97.6 per 10,000	70 per 10,000

Referrals, S47s and ICPCs

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
Referrals	6,301	6,377	5,402	4,454	4,194
Referral Rates Per 10,000	759.20	768.36	650.88	536.66	494.1

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 three years has seen a downward trajectory to 494.1 per 10,000 as at the end March 2023 this is now below our Statistical Neighbour and England averages of 570 and 538 per 10,000 and is in line with West Midlands Average of 503 per 10,000. The reduction is due to workers and partners better applying threshold criteria for statutory services and managing risk.

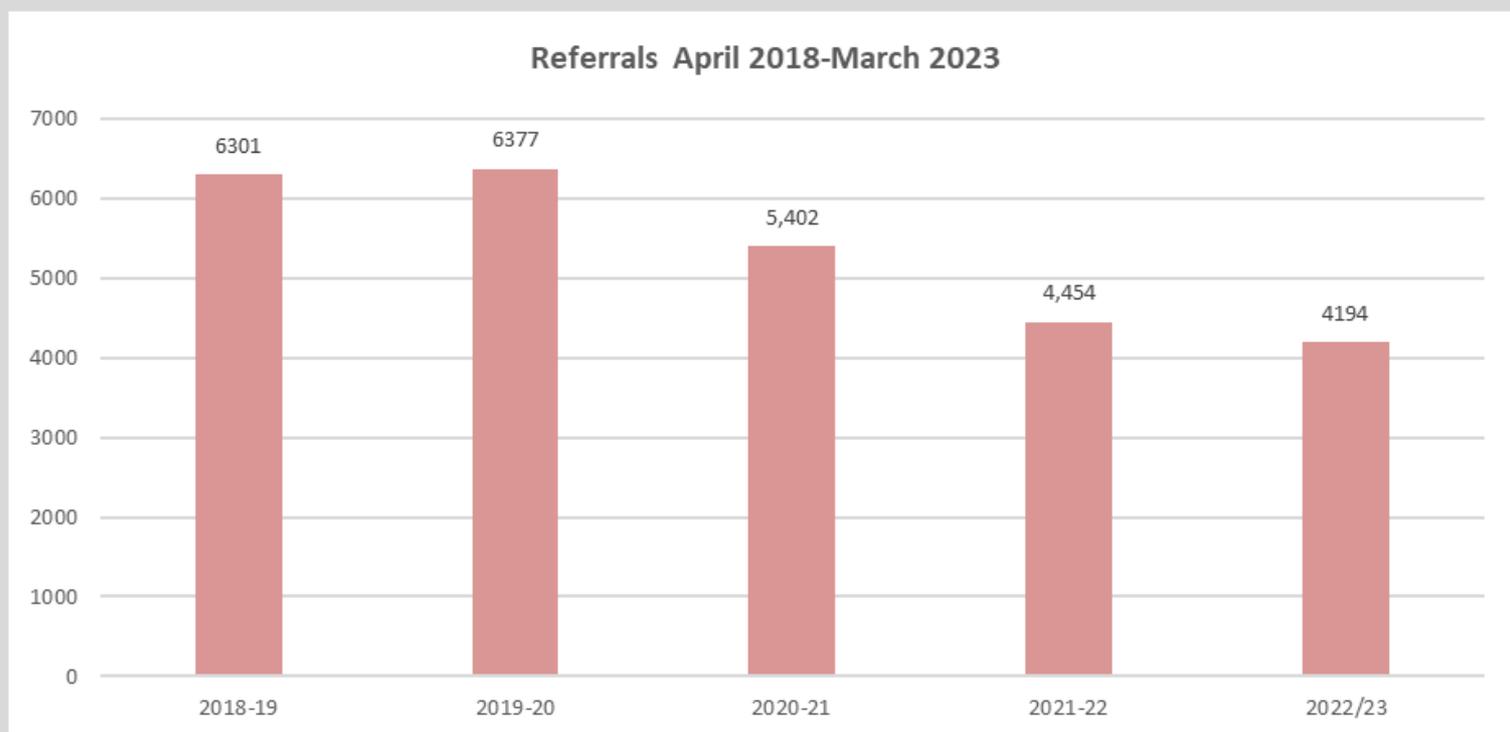
We are seeing more children stepping down to targeted family support in our Strengthening Families Service over the last 2 years in comparison to previous years, in addition we have more Children supported by Strengthening Families as both a shared service 89 last year to 106 this year and more Children Open to the 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 48% between April 2020-March 2022 to 40% this year.



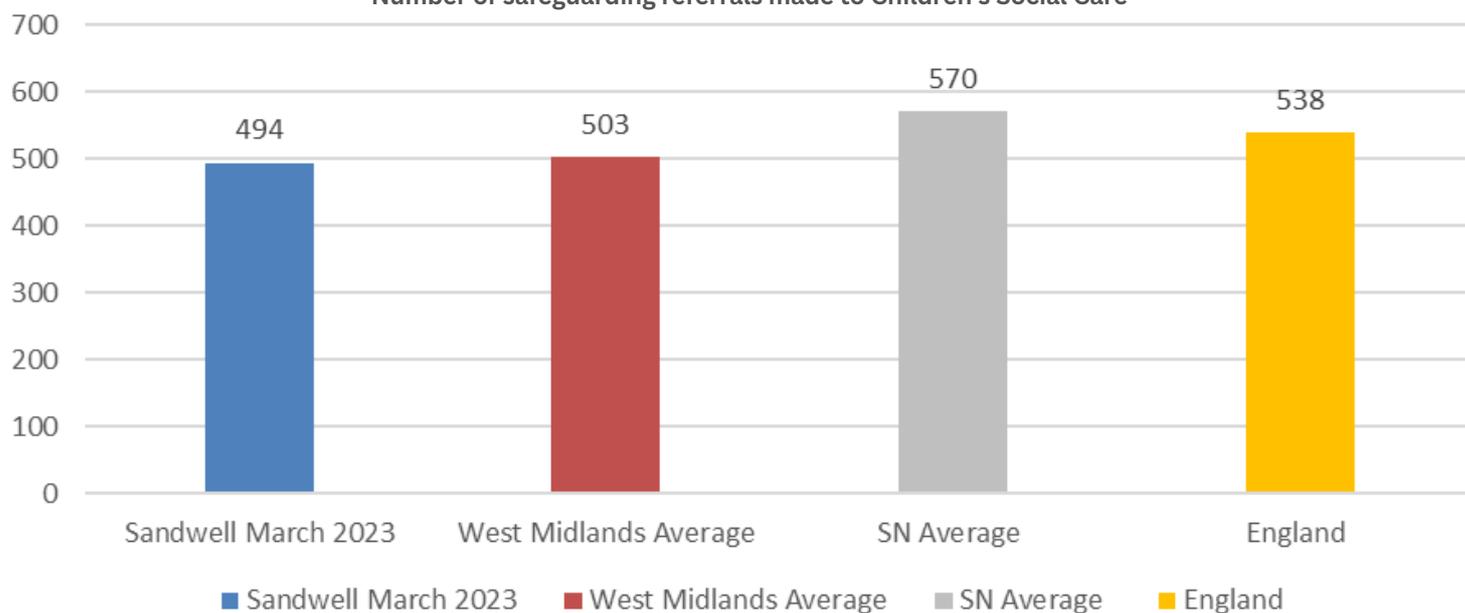
Around 23% (decreasing slightly from 25 in previous two years) of our assessments over the last 12 months are being stepped down to Strengthening Families or Universal Agencies and 37% are escalated onto a Child in Need, Child Protection or Child in Care Plan (30% previous two years).

23% of children have been re-referred within the previous 12 months, this has increased slightly since March 2021, slightly above our comparators. A deep dive highlighted re referral rates increased when duty project teams were introduced, where some assessments were more parent focused and were consequently closed too quickly. Remedial work and reinforcement of our practice standards have seen an improvement and the approach to duty has also been changed, this has begun to reduce in April 2023.

The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has reduced from a rate of 279 in March 2019 and stabilized compared to last year at a rate of 185 per 10,000 in March 2023 (183 last year), this continues to be lower than our Statistical Neighbours and in line with England and West Midlands averages. This shows that the Trust continues to consistently 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 needed.



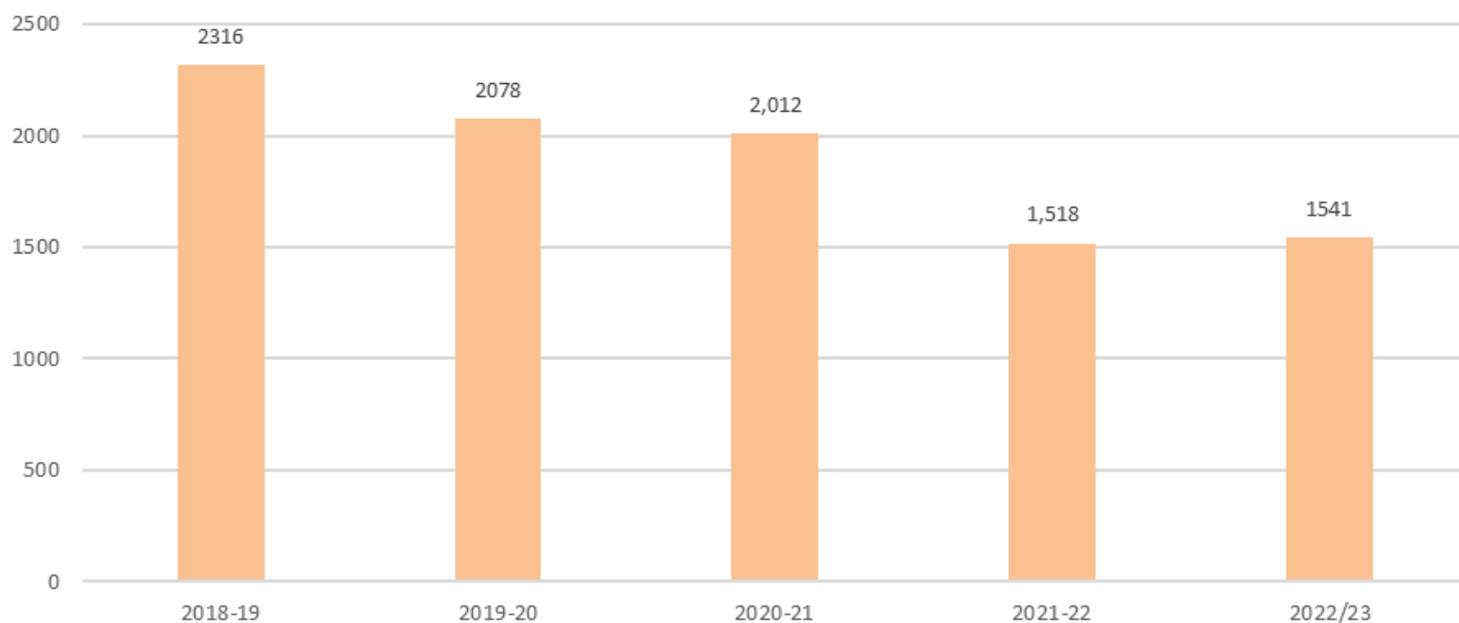
Referral Rates
Number of safeguarding referrals made to Children's Social Care

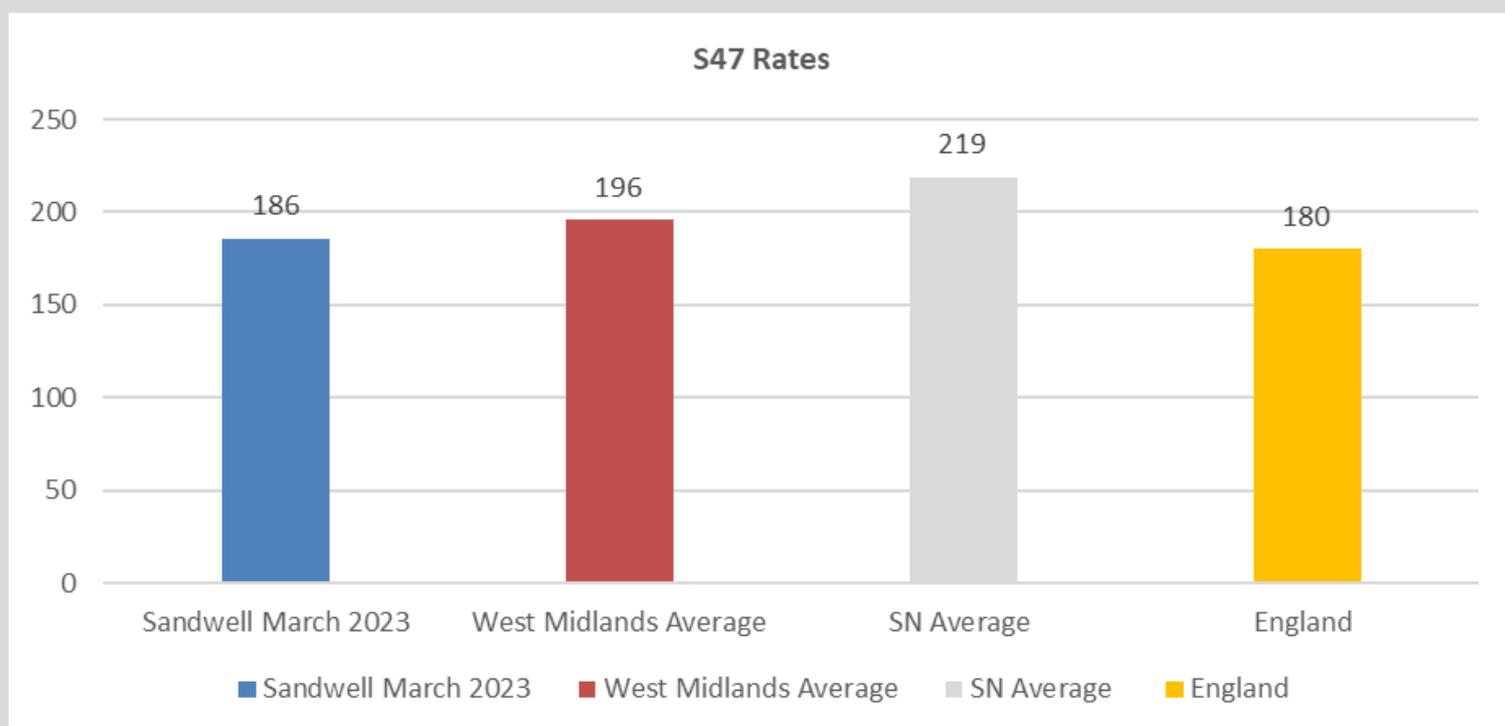


Summary of S47s 2018 - 2023

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
S47s	2,316	2,078	2,012	1,518	1,541
S47 Rates Per 10,000	279.05	250.38	242.42	182.90	185.67

S47s April 2018 to March 2023

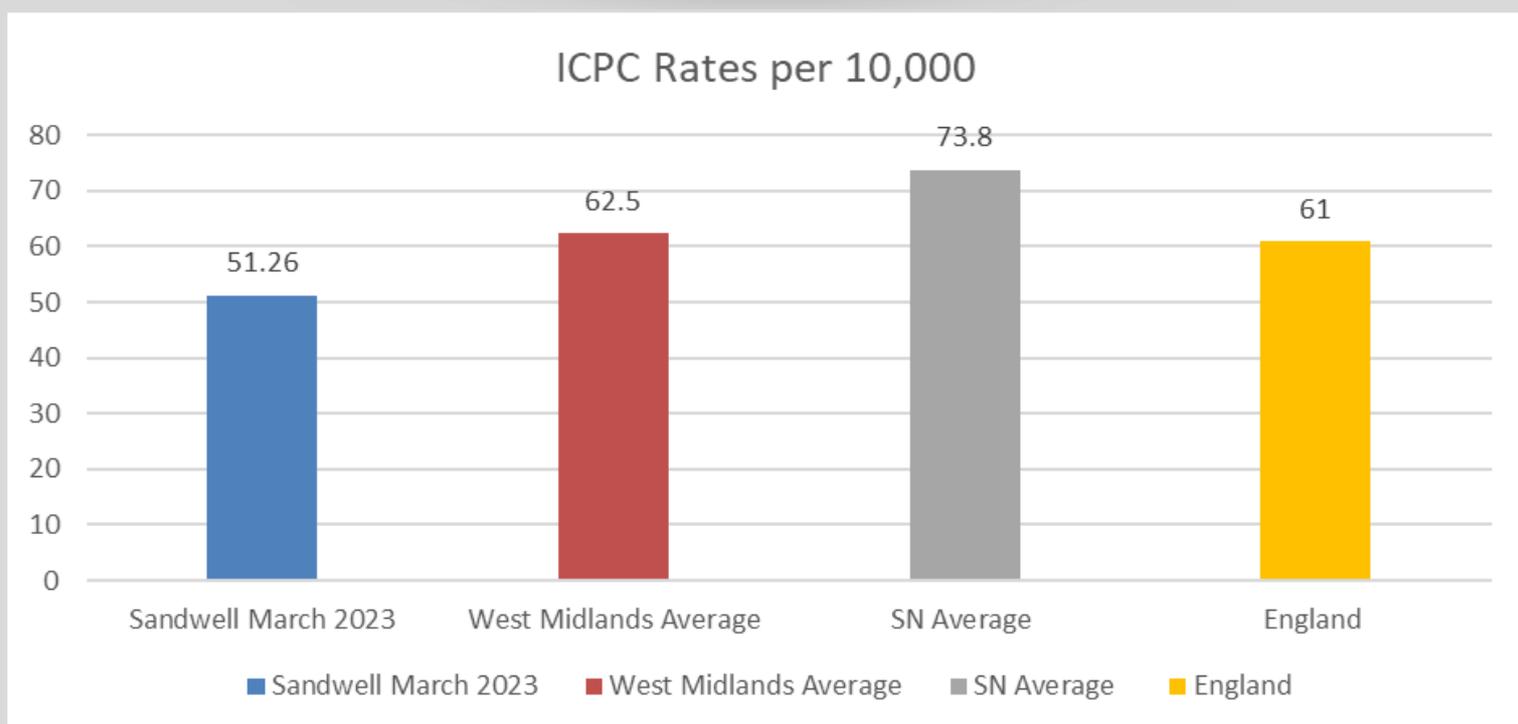
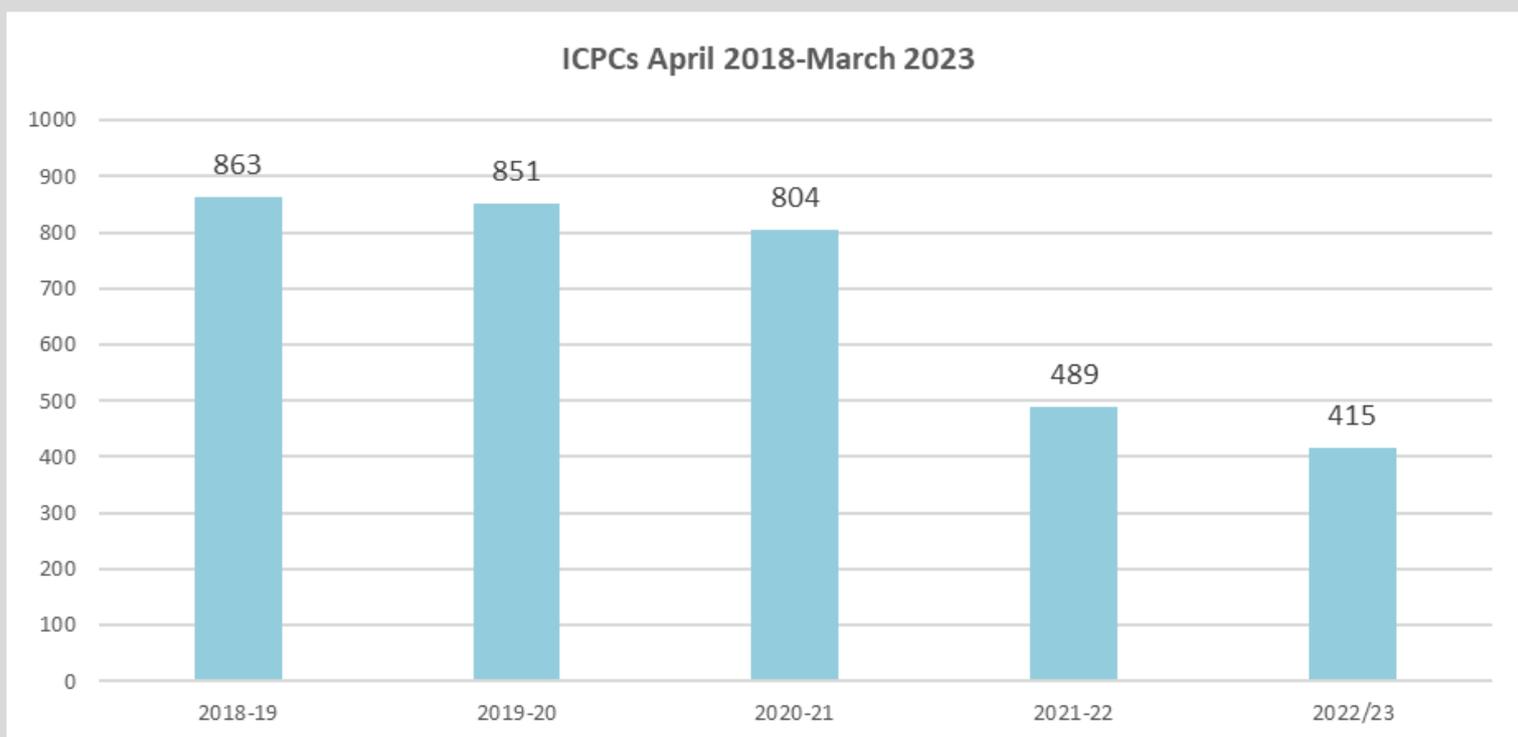




The rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has also reduced from 103.98 in March 2019 to a rate of 51.26 per 10,000 in March 2023 (this has reduced further since March 2022 at 58.92 per 10,000). Current ICPC rate is now below Statistical Neighbour, England and West Midlands Average. In addition, the latest conversion rate from ICPC to CP Plan is healthier and has improved to 83% over the last financial year in comparison to 68% in 2020 (and in line with 86% last year). The threshold discussions between Conference Chairs and Social Workers are ensuring that the right Children are going into conference, this has helped support the further reduction of Children on a Child Protection Plan in this financial year.

Summary of ICPC and ICPC rates per 10,000

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
ICPCs	863	851	804	489	415
ICPC Rates Per 10,000	103.98	102.54	96.87	58.92	51.26

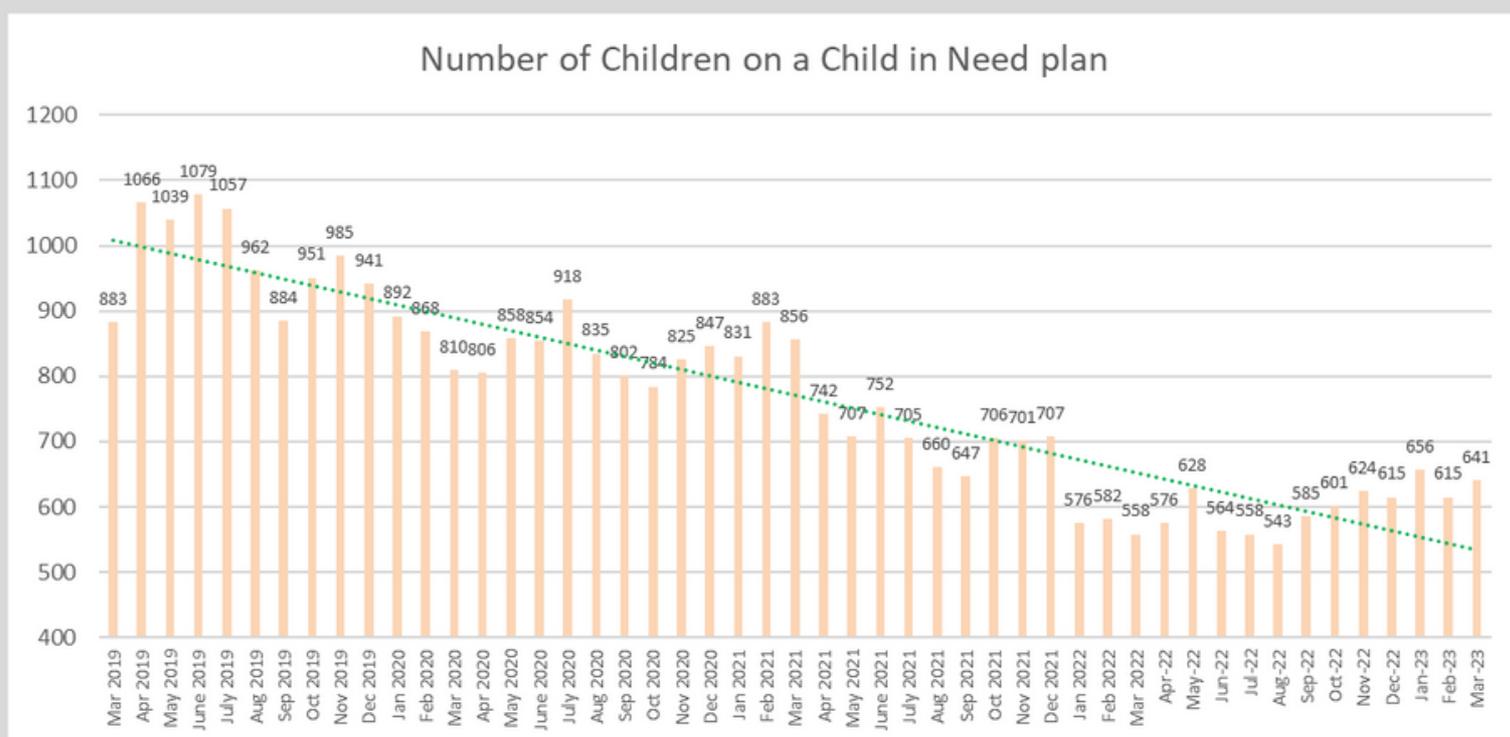


Overall, alongside the continued dip sampling of assessments, S47's and ICPC's the above measures provide clear evidence that we are acting more confidently and consistently when applying thresholds for our services and working in a more timely and consistent manner.

Children in Need

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, 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 from a high point in June 2019 of 1,079 Children to 558 Children as end March 2022, although a slight increase to 641 in March 2023 (reduction of 438 Children since June 2019. This is an area kept under constant review (to note we currently have less Children on a Child in Need Plan over 9+ months than in March 2022 120 (20.9%) to 106 (16.5%))

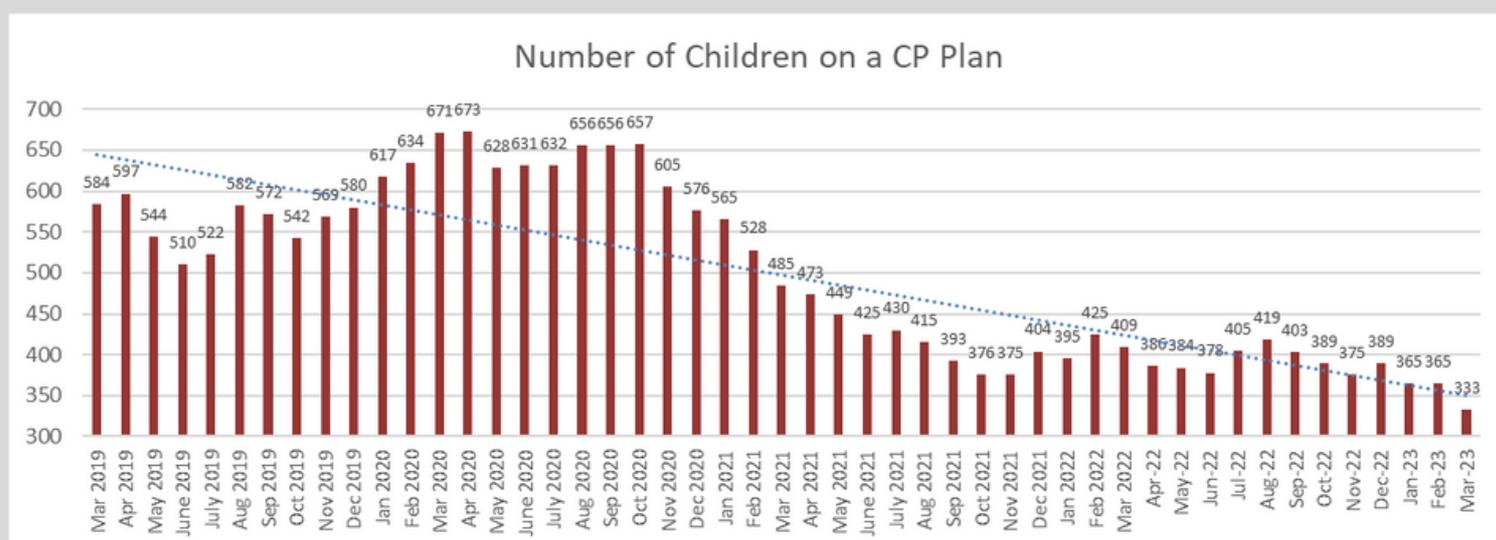


Children with a Child Protection Plan

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 had reduced to 409, furthermore this year this has reduced further to 333, which is now significantly below SN Average of 52.6 per 10,000 and lower than England and West Midlands Averages .

It was identified that there was drift and delay in progressing children's plans in 2018. To address this, we held a panel to ensure these children's plans were being progressed which contributes to the continued decrease of Children on Child Protection Plans.

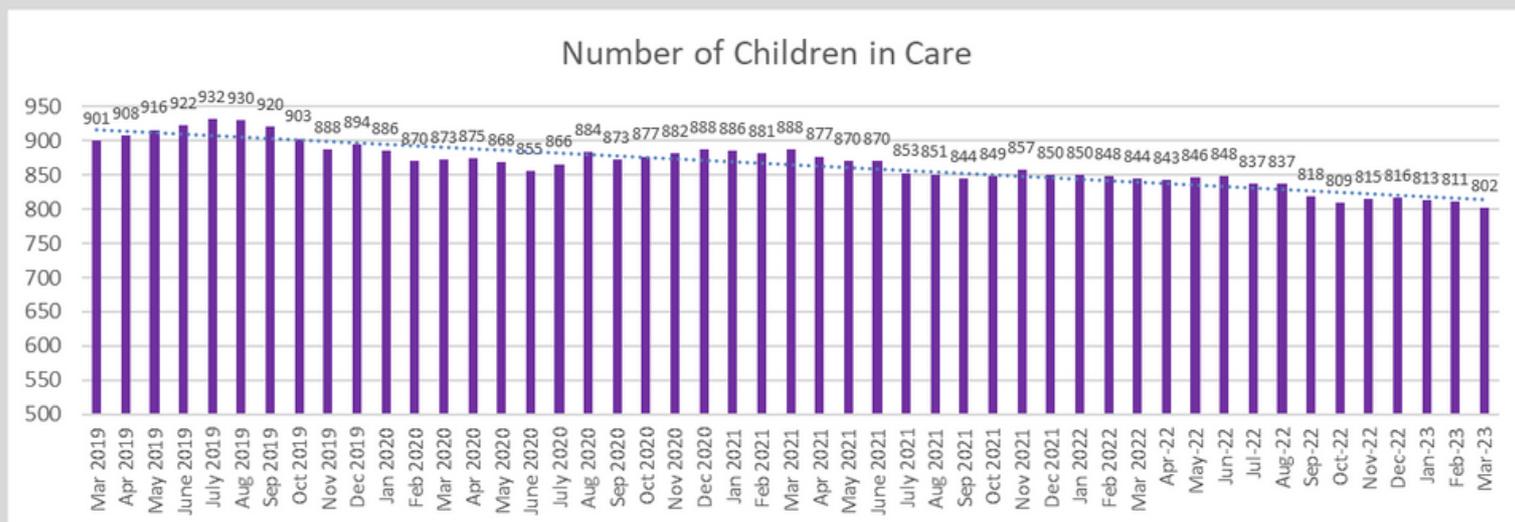
This has led to more Children 'stepped down' to a Child in Need plan, or a decision made to secure their long-term welfare. We have seen less Children stepping up from Child Protection to Care (this has been lower than previous years which has helped reduce our overall Children in Care Numbers). The service is regularly reviewing Children on Child Protection Plans for longer than 12 months to reduce the risk of drift and delay and to ensure Children's plans are progressed safely and robustly. As of 31 March 2023 we currently have 22.7% of our Children on a Plan for 12+ months which is now more in line with our Statistical Neighbour and National averages than earlier in the financial year. The below graph shows decreases of Children on a Child Protection plan over last 4 years.



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.

As of 31 March 2022 the number of Children in Care had reduced to 844 Children in Care (9.9% decrease), this financial year has seen a further decrease to 802 Children in Care as of 31 March 2023 (5% decrease) which now puts us at the lowest position since May 2018.



Although March 2023 information is not published for all our Statistical Neighbour Group, five West Midlands regional authorities are in our Statistical Neighbour Group. Our December 2022 data can be compared in line with the following Local Authorities up to this date, this gives you more up to date analysis to compare our performance at present time. As you can see we are below the average for these Local Authorities (although Stoke on Trent is a significant outlier regionally and nationally). Based on our latest Statistical Neighbour Average at 97.1 per 10,000, Sandwell are currently 2.6 per 10,000 lower than our comparator group, although we continue to be higher than England Average of 70 per 10,000.

We continue as a Trust to review 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, we have seen a 30% increase of Children exiting care on SGO in comparison to the previous 12 months (20 Children to 26 Children).

Children in Care of West Midlands regional authorities

Local Authority	Rate Per 10,000 Children in Care
Birmingham – December 2022	76
Coventry – December 2022	95
Sandwell – December 2022	96.2
Sandwell – March 2023	94.5
Stoke on Trent – December 2022	189
Walsall – December 2022	93
Wolverhampton – December 2022	79
Five Regional Stat Neighbour Average	106.4

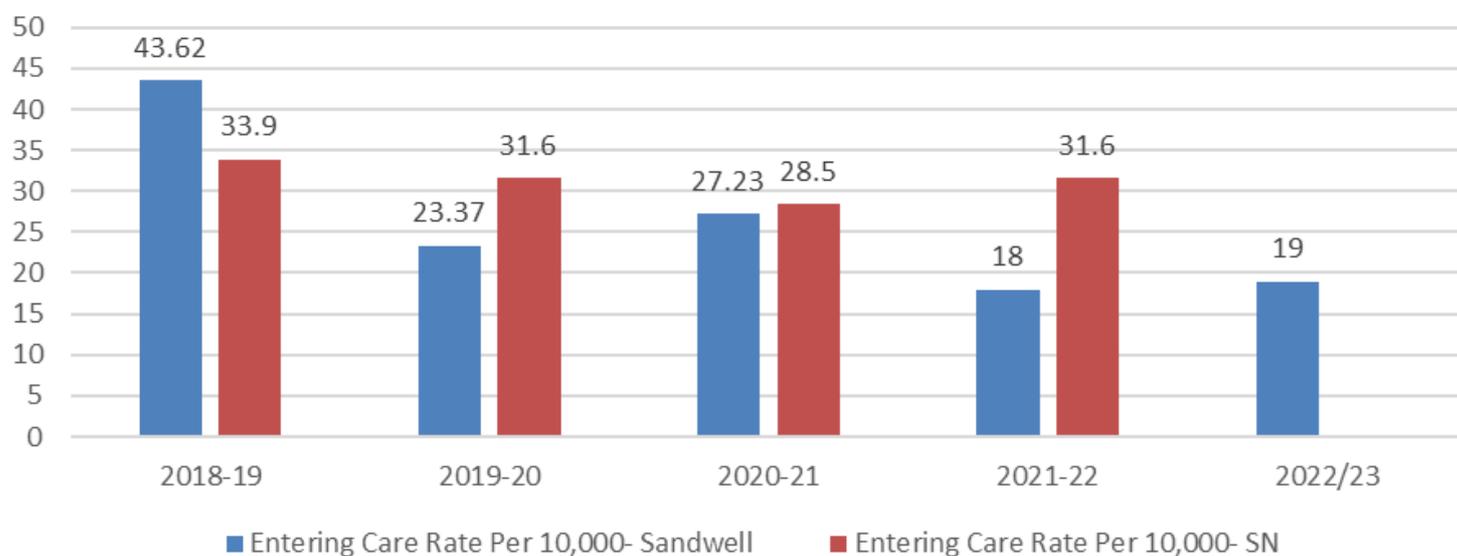
Children Entering and Ceasing Care

Between the 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the number of Children Entering Care was 161 with 208 Children Ceasing Care which is a further improvement on previous year which has helped support the reduction of Children in Care numbers further.

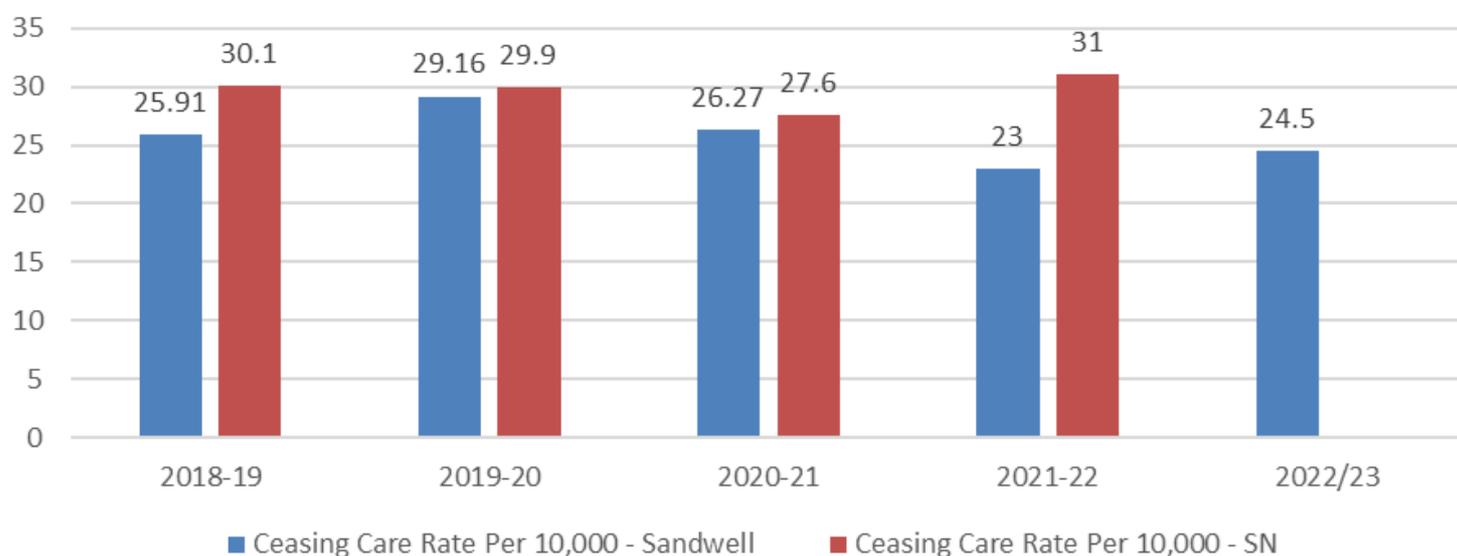
Summary of Becoming Looked After (BLA) and Ceasing Care by year

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
BLA by year	362	194	226	163	161
Ceasing Care by Year	215	242	218	201	208

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 latest 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 year a rate of 19 Children per 10,000 have entered Care), 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. We have started to undertake work in relation to children exiting care, this includes a bespoke exiting care project team which are reviewing children progressing to SGO and placed at home with parents. This will improve efficiency of children exiting care. Furthermore our improvement in our approach to Permanence will also increase the number of Children exiting care with greater robust planning and management oversight.

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

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	Latest SN Average	Latest WM Average	Latest Eng Average
BLA by year	362	194	226	163	161	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rates per 10,000	43.62	23.37	27.23	18	19	31.6	27	26

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

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	Latest SN Average	Latest WM Average	Latest Eng Average
Ceasing Care by year	215	242	218	201	208	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rates per 10,000	25.91	29.16	26.27	23	24.5	31	25	26

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.

The table shows the number of Children in Internal Foster Placements between 31 March 2022 and 31 March 2023, as you can see that there has been a decrease in Children Placed in Internal Mainstream/Connected carer placements from 298 to 288 (reduction of 10 Children), furthermore there has been a similar reduction of Children placed in External Foster Care Placements from 328 to 316 (reduction of 12 Children).

Children in Internal and External Foster Care

	March 2022	April 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Jan 2023	Feb 2023	March 2023
Foster Placement Trust Carers	298	295	303	302	301	303	294	294	296	297	296	289	288
Foster Placement External	328	329	327	330	327	325	329	323	319	320	316	319	316

Recruitment activity

Recruitment of Foster carers continues to be a focus of the Trust making use of a range of media and marketing opportunities . Recent activity has meant that the number of new enquiries has returned to and increased on pre-pandemic figures. With more than 260 new enquiries in 2021/22, furthermore we had a further 213 enquiries in 2022/23 of which, 29 initial enquiry forms were completed and 9 foster carer mainstream approvals (enquiry form completed to approval 31%).

We did have 8 mainstream de-registrations over the same period so in theory a net gain of one mainstream carer this financial year. On the 31 March 2023 we had 98 mainstream foster carer households and 92 connected carer households.

Furthermore, our approach to residential care is progressing at pace in order that we can make better use of local residential provision for when this is the right option for children. Following a number of engagement events with private providers, relationships have improved and the Trust and council are aiming to access up to 9 beds locally through local providers which should impact positively on children being placed in their own communities.

Care Leavers

Table 12: Care Leavers by year

	March 2018	March 2019	March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	Variance Mar 18 - Mar 23
Care Leavers	268	282	324	328	355	356	88

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 five years from 268 to 356 (an increase of 88 Care Leavers) with a slight increase from March 2022-March 2023 (355-356). 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 22 young people per worker. We also have a process in place to allocate Children in Care aged 17 years old to a PA to co-work and support robust transition into Care Leaving service.

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.

Section (g)

The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year

There were no formal action plans or rectification plans in the Contract year 2022/23.

Section (h)

Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure

Changes to Service Delivery Contract

- Market Supplement 2022/23
- Revision of Contract Review Timetable
- Additional Funding – Staffing 2022-23
- Transport Extension 2023 to 2024

Changes to Support Services Agreements

There were no changes to the support services agreements during the year, apart from extension for support level agreement for transport.

Other significant changes

On 30th January 2023 and 31 January 2023 Neil Cox and Vineeta Manchanda ceased as company directors. On the 15th March and 21 March 2023 Jane Bleach and Gillian Douglas were added as SCT company directors.

Section (i)

Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year

There are no proposed changes to the Services Specification or Financial Mechanism in the next contract year. However, we enter into constructive conversations about these matters to coincide with the Contract Review of next year.

There are proposed changes to the 15 contract KPIs in the next contract year 2023/24 which are currently being finalised between SMBC and Sandwell Children's Trust.

Section (j)

The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)

KPI Changes

SCT is currently in discussion with SMBC to agree the new contract KPI's.

Section (k)

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

There are no additional matters in this report that have been agreed by both parties.