

Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

9 September 2024

Subject:	Sandwell Children's Trust Performance Update
Director:	Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board considers and comments on Sandwell Children's Trust performance update.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Sandwell Children's Trust is required to report to the Scrutiny Board twice each year as part of the obligations set out in the contract between the Council and the Trust.
- 2.2 The purpose of the item is to provide an update for consideration and discussion regarding Sandwell Children's Trust.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	<p>Ensuring that children have the Best Start in Life is a key driver for Sandwell Children's Trust; ensuring that children are safeguarded, protected and, when unable to live with their parents, are effectively cared for.</p> <p>SCT works with families, foster carers, schools, statutory and voluntary providers to support the achievements of vulnerable children and those in the care of the council.</p>
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SCT works to ensure that children in the care of the Council receive the support and opportunities that any parent would give their child.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The contract with SCT has a comprehensive programme of governance arrangements. The contract requires that the Director of Children and Education, together with council senior officers from finance and legal services, and the Chief Executive of the Trust meet on at least a monthly basis to consider performance and operational matters. In addition, each quarter, the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Chief Executive of the council meet with the Chair of the SCT Board and the Chief Executive of SCT, at a Strategic Partnership Board.
- 4.2 The contract with the Trust specifies that representatives of the Trust should attend Council meetings when reasonably requested, specifically referencing attendance twice a year at the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board and at the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board if requested.
- 4.3 The contract requires SCT to provide regular performance updates for consideration by the Operational Partnership Board, the Strategic Partnership Board and then by the Cabinet. Progress against the performance indicators for the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 is set out in the Annual Review 2023/24, together with information about financial, workforce, and other performance areas.
- 4.4 Since April 2018 the Trust has been the subject of seven monitoring visits from Ofsted as well as a focussed visit, three inspection visits of the fostering service, a full inspection under the Ofsted's framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children (ILACS) in May 2022 and most recently an inspection of adoption services.
- 4.5 The judgement following the inspection undertaken in May 2022 was one of 'requires improvement to be good'. With the judgement of 'good' received by the fostering service in August 2021 and a judgement of 'good' for the adoption service in Dec 2022 there is a clear trajectory of service improvement.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2016, Cabinet was advised of the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996) to set up a new arrangement in the form of a children's trust to deliver children's social care services. As a result, Sandwell Children's Trust started operating on 1st April 2018. The Service Delivery Agreement includes a contractual requirement to attend Children and Education scrutiny twice per year. Any alternative to the current arrangement must be agreed by both the Council and the Trust and go through a formal contract variation process.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>Sandwell Children's Trust will receive £80.8m to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities for children's social care, and also to provide targeted early help services in 2024/25.</p> <p>The Contract Sum amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>The Service Delivery Contract between the Council and SCT is performance managed via a monthly Operational Partnership Board, a quarterly Strategic Partnership Board, and SCT is required to attend up to 2 Children's Scrutiny Board meetings and 1 Budget Scrutiny meeting each year. There is a partnership Improvement Board independently chaired by a DfE appointed consultant. Additionally, the Trust is required to submit its Annual Review to the Council.</p>
Risk:	<p>The council's strategic risk register previously identified a red risk relevant to this report, regarding improvements required in children's social care services.</p> <p>As a result of the ILACS judgement moving from inadequate to requires improvement, this was reviewed and the risk assessment has decreased from 16 (red) to 8 (amber). Based upon the progress to date, the risk assessment continues to be assessed as amber.</p>
Equality:	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report. However, the improvement in children's</p>

	services will have a positive effect on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Sandwell, including those with protected characteristics.
Health and Wellbeing:	SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.
Social Value:	SCT supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. SCT supports care leavers to access education, employment and training. Having strong governance and oversight supports SCT to achieve service improvement and better support children and families in Sandwell.
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications attached to this report.
Corporate Parenting	Ensuring that SCT continues on its improvement journey will support the Council in delivering its corporate parenting responsibilities. Children and Young people, via Voices of Sandwell and the Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA), have asked that they no longer be referred to as 'Children in Care' and 'Care Leavers' but as 'children we care for' and 'care experienced young people'. This use of language aligns with the corporate parenting approach to be 'more parent and less corporate' and is reflected in the annual review.

7. Appendices

SCT Annual Review 2023/24

8. Background Papers

None