

# Corporate Parenting Annual Report

## 2023 – 2024





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# Chair’s Foreword



**Welcome to Sandwell Council’s Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report. We are pleased to share the ongoing progress made by Members and partners for the children we care for (CWCF), and our care experienced young people (CEYP).**

As the newly appointed Cabinet member for Children and Families and new Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) Chair, I am eager to build upon the progress made by my predecessor, Simon Hackett. We continue to focus on improving the support services that we provide, with the aim of making a positive difference to our children and young people.

Over the past 16 months, Voices of Sandwell (VOS) and the Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA) have been active in shaping the development of services. Their participation, views and suggestions continue to hold us as their corporate parents to account.

Last year’s annual report noted the board would achieve key priorities during the upcoming year:

Our commitment to improve the lives of the children we care for and CEYP continues by making progress with:

- Strengthening our governance arrangements and accountability.
- Supporting our CEYP to access free medical prescriptions.
- Improving preparation for adulthood through new initiatives, including the House Project.
- The provision of targeted emotional wellbeing support for our children and young people who are struggling.
- Further enhancing our local offer for CEYP.
- Revised and strengthened our Sufficiency Strategy to increase the number of homes in Sandwell, aiming to keep children local.

In June 2023, we hosted our first Corporate Parenting week to raise the corporate parenting profile and provide better understanding of what It means to be a corporate parent. The week saw engagement from over 600 individuals participating in activities throughout the week.

I am also pleased to announce that both Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) have received accreditation as Foster Friendly Employers through the Fostering Network. This scheme recognises the crucial roles of our employees who foster, providing them with support through flexible working hours, paid time off for training, and assistance in welcoming a new child into their home. Over the next year, we aim to collaborate with our partners to increase the number of foster-friendly employers across the borough.

SMBC, SCT and wider partners continue to actively listen, advocate and involve all our children and those with care experience across all services.

We want to thank our CPB members for continuing to support our children and young people to enable them to thrive.

We want to thank all our children and young people for their active participation, holding us to account and making sure our services meet their needs.

**Jalal Uddin**  
**Cllr. Jalal Uddin**  
**Chair of Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board**  
**Sandwell Council’s Cabinet Member for Children and Families**





# 1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The CPB is committed to providing the best possible support and opportunities for the children we care for, and CEYP. This annual report highlights our activities, achievements, and challenges throughout the last 16 months.
- 1.2 The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG) has revised its governance structure and terms of reference, shifting from monthly to quarterly meetings. This change sharpens the focus on key priorities, enhances accountability, and supports more effective decision-making to strengthen Sandwell's Corporate Parenting agenda.
- 1.3 Following last year's deep dive programme, Corporate Parenting Board continued to review and complete deep dives into specific areas to understand how we are performing and if there are barriers for our services and young people, with a view to improving support available.
- 1.4 The fifth CPB deep dive focused on Sandwell's Local Offer for care-experienced young people 16-25 years old. The Board reviewed its offer alongside VOS and FIYA by utilising the 2022 West Midlands ADCS blueprint. Key areas of focus include relationships and safety, participation in society, finance, accommodation, health, and education, employment, and training.
- 1.5 Several initiatives were successfully implemented at minimal cost, with further requirement of funding to fully implement the proposed offer. These include funding for family group conferences, apprenticeship wage gaps, university bursaries, a 'Plus One' leisure pass, free eye tests and dental checks, birthday presents, and a mentoring scheme. Additionally, business partners have pledged their support by providing laptops and mentoring to enhance the Local Offer.

- 1.6 The Board reviewed the NEET strategy by focusing on key areas:
  - Identifying at-risk young people
  - Preparing young people for adult life
  - Accessing specialist support
  - Strengthening post-16 education and training
  - Expanding employment and apprenticeship opportunities
- 1.7 Although NEET figures for 19–21-year-olds slightly improved to 47.1% in October 2023, it remains a significant concern. Efforts are underway to strengthen NEET data and review key areas such as Personal Advisor (PA) support, system functionality, and quality assurance. Prioritising earlier PA allocation (15 years and 9 months) is a continuing focus to support smoother transitions to adulthood, and remains a key priority for the Board.
- 1.8 The sixth deep dive explored barriers to accessing education, skills, employment, and training. The Virtual School continues to support students aged 16+ through strategic partnerships and early intervention for those at risk. SMBC's forthcoming Skills and Employment Strategy will target a reduction in NEET rates among 19–21-year-olds—a key priority for the Board, despite positive outcomes in the 16–18 age group. The Skills, Employment and Training team remains active in offering guidance, alongside ongoing support from CAMH's service and the Emotional Well-being Service pilot to improve work readiness.
- 1.9 During the seventh deep dive children and young people shared their diverse interests, including mentoring and community roles, emphasising the importance of services to be "Less Corporate, More Parent." The new Working Together Strategy emphasises the need for co-production and the importance of using inclusive and child friendly language when writing and speaking to and about our children and young people. Children and young people to use forum space to build meaningful relationships, life skills and peer engagement.

- 1.10 We held the first Corporate Parenting Week in June 2023, successfully enhanced partnerships within Sandwell Council and with external partners. The week raised the profile of Corporate Parenting and what it means to be a Corporate Parent, enabling individuals to develop the confidence to be more effective in their roles.
- 1.11 The Virtual School continues to secure places for our children in good or outstanding schools, while also improving educational access for Separated young people arriving mid-year in Sandwell. Current efforts are focused on closing post-16 attainment gaps and offering diverse extracurricular opportunities that reflect young people's varied interests and talents
- 1.12 Our Skills, Education, and Training team have listened to the voice of our children and young people, identifying innovative engagement strategies and opportunities tailored to individual needs. This includes the Accelerate programme and activities funded through the Commonwealth Games Legacy fund. Monthly drop-in sessions offer additional opportunities to maintain and strengthen trusted relationships.
- 1.13 The introduction of the emotional wellbeing pilot programme and an expansion of the CAMHS service team have improved mental health support access for our children and young people. We have seen a rise in the number of young people attending their health assessments and a review of the process has seen them conducted more efficiently.
- 1.14 There has been a launch of a new fostering brand and marketing campaign to increase Sandwell based foster carers, with regular promotional activity visible across the borough. Recognition for SMBC and SCT as Foster Friendly Employers, which is aimed at helping to support and recognise the role of our employees who foster, with a further desire to increase homes within the borough, keeping our children and young people close to their roots.

- 1.15 Young people continue to influence and shape the services provided to them, holding their corporate parents accountable and leading on the development of the 'Working Together' guide for professionals.
- 1.16 Following the 2022–2023 partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA), Assistant Directors held workshops with young people to identify ways the wider Council can expand work experience, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities. As one of the Council's top five priorities, Corporate Parenting is driving the inclusion of these opportunities within the Directorate's 12-month business plans.
- 1.17 We recognise the challenges ahead including securing stable local placements for all children, strengthening support for young people at risk of becoming NEET, and improving the local offer for care-experienced young people
- 1.18 The CPB is committed to addressing these challenges through collaborative and innovative work, aiming to build a brighter future for all children in our care.



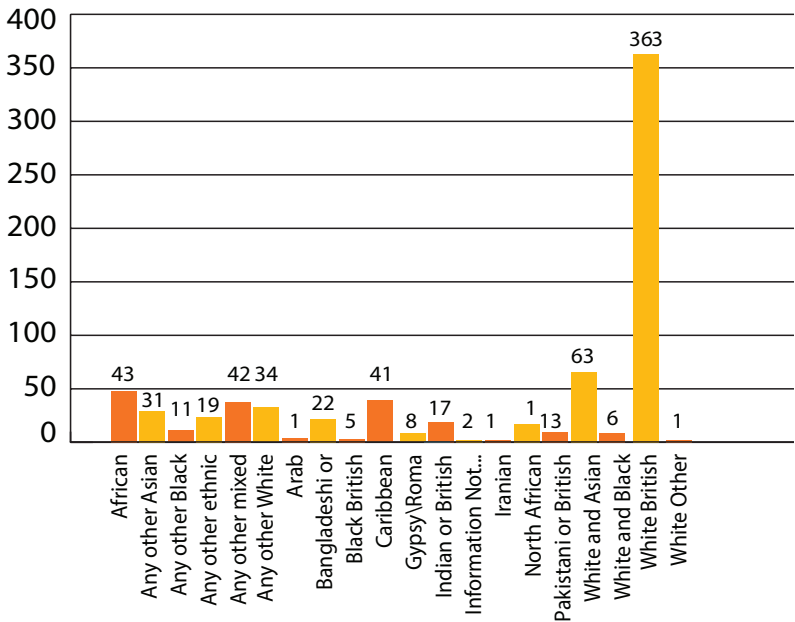
CHILDREN WE CARE FOR

There were **808** children we care for care at 31st August 2024. **55%** are male, this is above the Sandwell| 2022 mid-year population estimate (**52%**) but below the England average at **56%**.

**44%** are female which is slightly below the Sandwell 2022 mid-year population estimate (**48%**) but above the England average at **44%**.

Age Group	Count at 31st Aug 2024	Percentage
0 to 4	149	18%
10 to 15	193	24%
16+	294	36%
5 to 9	179	22%
Grand Total	808	100%

Ethnicity of Children We Care For at 31st August 2024



At 31st August there were **42** Separated young people (This was 14 for March 2023).

Young people in care for longer than a year, with the same social worker for the last 12 months has improved since September 2021 from **31.8%** to **52.1%** at the end of August 2024.

ACCOMMODATION

CiC long term placement stability: **61%** - This was **63%** for Dec 2023.

In the last 12 months **9.8%** of CiC had **3** or more placement moves. This was **8%** in December 2023

**83.4%** of Care Experienced young people are in Suitable Accommodation. This was **87.2%** in December 2023



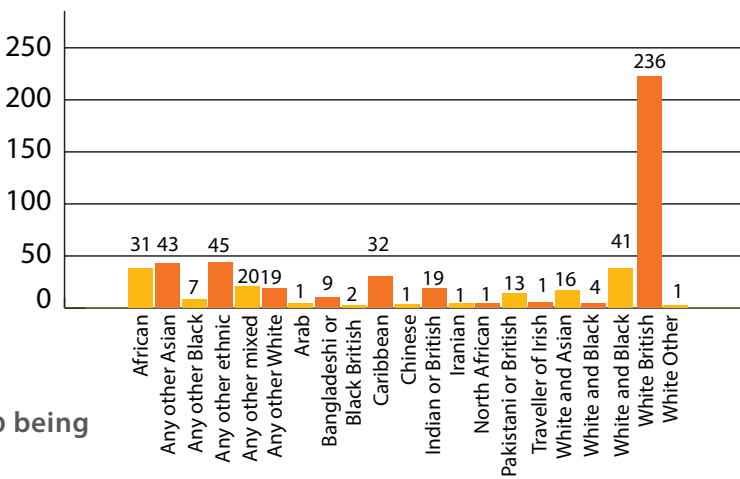
Disclosures: Education data: September 2023 – July 2024 | Social Services Data: April 2023 – March 2024  
Mental health and emotional Wellbeing - April 2023 – February 2024

CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

At 31st August 2024: The total number of care experienced young people was **543** between the ages of **16-24**.

Age Group	Count at 31st Aug 2024	Percentage
16	80	15%
17 to 18	170	31%
19 to 21	208	38%
22 to 24	85	16%
Grand Total	543	100%

Ethnicity of Care Experienced Young People at 31st August 2024



Care experienced young people are predominantly male at **62%** with **37%** being female and **1%** indeterminate.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

In the academic year ending July 2023, **92.9%** of Personal Education plans were completed **15% (-2% National)** of the overall CwCE cohort (of school age) attend an 'outstanding' education setting. Of these settings **11%** are in the Primary phase and **20%** in the Secondary. **89% (+9% from 2020)** attend an education setting that is 'good/outstanding'; this is **+1%** higher than all children national. **87% (+7% from 2020)** of these are Sandwell settings and **86%** are Out of Borough (OOB).

Average attendance for children in care at July 2023 was **93.7%**

**79.3%** of Care experienced aged 18+ have had an updated Pathway Plan in the last 6 months - this was **86.7%** for December 2023

**51%** of Care experienced are engaged with education, employment or training - this was **45.7%** for December 2023



HEALTH

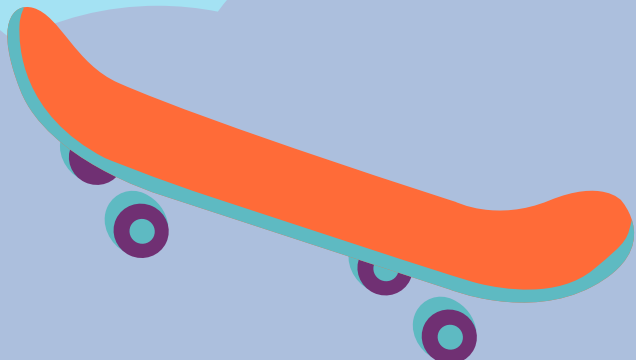
For Children 5+: Review Assessments, **85.9%** of eligible young people have had their assessment within timescale by March 2023. This was **86.3%** for December 2023.

Dental checks, **66.2%** of eligible young people have had their check within timescale by August 2024. This was **25.5%** for December 2023.



### 3 The Voice of the Child

- 3.1 Our groups are all about having a good time during activities, being part of a family and doing things with our corporate parents from the council, trust, and partner organisations.
- 3.2 **Here is what we have been up to in the last 16 months:**



01

We have completed interviews for new staff joining SCT and presented the importance of listening to the voice of the child during their inductions.

02

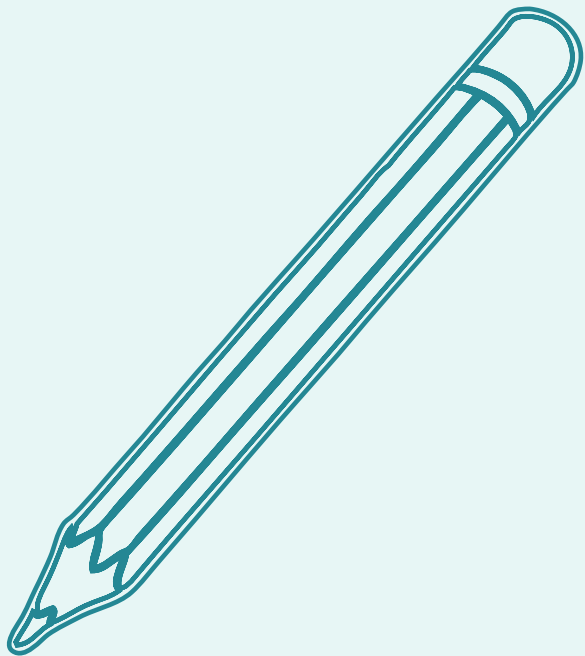
We have suggested improvements to the local offer, and it is good that we are seeing things happen like free prescriptions, laptops, and bus travel.

03

We helped to develop and host Corporate Parenting Week, during the week we took part in visits, hosted a live questions & answer session with staff and we also presented to the full council.

04

We attended lots of workshops and forums to share our ideas on topics like anti-bullying, cost of living summit, and the National Care Leaver's Benchmarking Forum event in Birmingham where we met Princess Anne. We went to Manchester to discuss our approach to participation in Sandwell and put participation on the map.



05

We have regularly attended (and co-chaired) the CPB and delivered presentations about the work we do.

06

We have co-produced the 'Working Together Guidance' which was launched in August 2024. The guide will ensure all children and young people have their voices heard.

07

We met with people from The Rees foundation, the CEYP Covenant and other organisations who are all working to support children and young people like us.

08

We hosted events for SCT including the Staff Awards and the Annual General Meeting.

09

Every week, we had drop-in sessions where people can help us – like the CAB, Think Sandwell, and the job club.

10

Suggested improvements to the Local Offer, it is to see things happening like free prescriptions, laptops, and bus travel.





# 4 Education

4.1 The Sandwell Virtual School continues to have high aspirations for children we care for by ensuring they have access to every opportunity and the very best education to achieve their full potential. This commitment is reflected in their motto: *Learn, Achieve, Together*.

These are some key achievements:

- As of September 2023, out of 831 Sandwell children we care for approximately 48% were placed in education outside of Sandwell. This is a reduction of 6.1% from the high in 2016.
  - 88% of children we care for attend an education setting that is 'good/outstanding'. This is an increase of 3% since 2023. This is 5% above the national standard.
  - The attendance of Sandwell children we care for has increased by 1.1% over the last academic year to 93.96%, it is also higher than the national average (92.5% Autumn 2023).
- 4.3 Our continued investment in trauma education in Sandwell Schools has helped in understanding the impact of trauma on our children and has had huge dividends in keeping both permanent exclusions and suspensions low for our children. There was only 1 permanent exclusion from schools in 2023.



4.4 Aspire to University programme, currently engages 41 children in a seven-year programme. In 2023, ten students 'graduated' from the programme, all went into positive destinations including studying Law, Diploma in Esports (Business and Gaming), Aerospace Engineering, Architecture and Software Engineering.

4.5 The Virtual School have a variety of creative curriculum activities and over the last academic year children and young people have participated in:

- **Arts and Crafts Day:** Children enjoyed a pantomime, decorated biscuits, created decorations and participated in and experienced a 'Dohl' lesson.

*"They both loved the independence and being able to express themselves and make friends."*

- **Film Making Workshop:** Children developed reels and edited their own epic videos.
- **Easter Arts Festival:** A Partnership between HAF, Sandwell Virtual School and The STEPS Centre - 46 adults and 84 young people attended.
- **WMVS Foundation in partnership with Women & Theatre: Easter Performance:** 17 Sandwell children participated in 3 days of creativity dance, and drama including a performance.
- An Introduction into TV Acting at The Grand Theatre Wolverhampton
- Year 7 Prosthetics Workshop: A hands-on experience to learn television/film prosthetics make up from a television/film professional!

4.6 Sandwell Virtual School/SIPS Music Services Music Provision -This continues to be fully funded and aims to strengthen perseverance and self-esteem in our children aged 8 to 11. 81 young people have participated in weekly 1:1 music lesson playing a variety of instruments (keyboard, drums, tabla, guitar, ukulele, flute, clarinet, saxophone, vocal, trumpet, baritone, and violin). Additionally 12 students have successfully passed their latest grading.

4.7 The Virtual School band 'IGNITE', made up of children and young people learning to play instruments via the virtual school provision, has performed at four concerts and 30 children had the opportunity to attend 'The Music of Harry Potter' at The Symphony Hall in Birmingham.

4.8 The Sandwell Virtual School has continued to deliver 'trauma informed' training and engaged 552 service partners during the academic year. There were 480 engagements for the Designated Teacher Trauma and Attachment Training, with an average of 80 attendees per training session. Of these, 73% were school staff, 11% were educational professionals, 16% were social care staff.

*"Another excellent reflective conference. This always helps me to stop and reflect on my work and see its importance. Thank you to a wonderful team who together change the life chances of the children in Sandwell"*

- 4.9 During the annual Celebration Awards Evening on 6th October 2023: 168 young people were nominated and 66 received awards for meeting national standards, outstanding progress, and special recognition in categories such as Creative Hero, Positive Role Model and Community Champion.
- 4.10 Significant efforts have been made to support young people transitioning from care to Education, Employment and Training. Notably, Year 11 NEET rate decreased from 24% in 2017 to 1.8% in 2023 due to direct interventions.



4.11 **Key Stage 1 (6–7-year-olds):** This year group has shown improvement across all areas of attainment. Reading increased by 19%, Writing by 7%, and Maths by 17% compared to 2022, narrowing the gap with all Sandwell children. The percentage of children achieving 4+ English and Maths grades rose by +2% while the overall Sandwell average fell by -6%.

4.12 **Key Stage 4 (14- 16-year-olds):** The percentage of children achieving 4+ English and Maths doubled since 2017, reaching 32% in 2023. Nationally, all children experienced a 4% decline. There is a positive trend in attainment, with the average points score rising by 3.10 from 2019.

**Sandwell Virtual School continues to support children in our care to reach their full potential through high quality local education, improved attendance, and reduced exclusions. With creative learning, trauma-aware support, and long-term programmes like Aspire to University to ensure they continue to grow in confidence and prepare for a successful future.**



# 5 Skills, Employment and Training

- 5.1 SMBC remains committed to providing comprehensive careers guidance to our children and young people. Our Connexions service continues to offer independent and impartial careers advice, supporting students from school through post-16 education, employment, or training opportunities (EET).
- 5.2 In the academic year 2023 – 2024, Connexions conducted 1255 interventions with our children across year groups 8 to 14. These interventions were delivered in various ways, including advocacy, face-to-face and virtual interviews, phone conversations, texts, emails, and action planning workshops for students in years 8, 9, and 11 aspiring to progress to higher education.
- 5.3 Our NEET strategy group, comprising of members from SCT, Employment and Skills, Looked After Children Youth Justice Service and now Inclusion Learning Services, allows a more targeted approach to the children we care for, and CEYP with EHCPs. The group actively monitors the NEET strategy action plan.
- 5.4 Emphasis has been placed on the transition period from successful EET outcomes at ages 16/17 to the comparatively lower performance at 19 and beyond. Connexions and the Employment and Skills team have worked closely on early identification of those due to leave care without a current positive opportunity, offering dual support to explore further education, higher education, apprenticeships, or employment opportunities. The Employment and Skills team hold monthly workshops to showcase job opportunities and assist with applications.
- 5.5 During Corporate Parenting Week, an engagement session took place with employers to discuss the employment barriers, enlightening employers on how to make their recruitment practices more inclusive and adapt opportunities as needed by our children and young people.

- 5.6 Through a social value opportunity, DSI Billing Services Limited Group, who provide the Council's letter printing and post service, offered an employer experience day, where our CEYP gained insights into business operations. Directors shared their employment journeys, starting from entry-level positions. Experiences of the directors inspired the young people and showed to them how hard work was rewarded. As a result, both CEYP who attended the experience day secured apprenticeships.

DSI director:

*"Working with Sandwell has been an eye-opener, transforming our approach to social value and making a real impact on individuals"*

From the journey of a care experienced young person:

*"I was given an opportunity and now I'm now earning whilst I'm learning"*

- 5.7 Forward plan and improving the overall children we care for and CEYP NEET figures:
  - Our children and young people face multiple barriers to education and employment including mental health. We continue to work with our young people to find ways to support their required need and intensive support before they can be referred to Skills and Employment Services. To address this, the emotional wellbeing hub has been launched by Barnardo's until March 2025 to provide further support and 'Bridging the Gap'.
  - The Service continues to identify opportunities that are available, as engagement with young people remains a key priority. Due to young people's social anxiety and other mental barriers, the services continue to work with SCT to support young people to attend education, employment, training appointments or meeting.

- NEET data continues to be analysed by the NEET strategy group. A more detailed breakdown of the data and codes reflecting the actual 'ready and available for work' cohort is to be reviewed. Additionally, as a partnership, SMBC is reviewing how to collect SEND CEYP data to be shared with the wider partnership.
  - Although the apprenticeship bursary has provided further support to Sandwell young people, wages and the affordability of apprenticeships remain significant barriers to young people who choose the apprenticeship route as the bursary does not elevate the young people to National Living Wage.
- 5.8 The 12-month forward plan is proposed to explore best practices for post-16 care-experienced individuals who are NEET, that have been able to achieve good rates of EET and how they have done that. Additionally, the NEET strategy group will pilot new operational approaches to address barriers and improve Sandwell's NEET performance.



**Sandwell's Skills, Employment and Training service continues to empower young people to build confidence, raise aspirations, and access real-world opportunities, equipping with skills to thrive in education, work, and life.**

## 6 Physical Health

6.1 A health needs analysis was conducted for children coming into care through SCT between April 2023 and March 2024. A total of 121 records were analysed focusing on the physical health needs.

The findings were as follows:

- 38% of children had outstanding routine childhood immunisations, making them more vulnerable to preventable diseases and reducing herd immunity.
- During the Initial Health Assessment, 12.3% of children showed signs of developmental delay with speech related delay being the most common at 9.9%. To address this, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust Children's Therapies Department have ring fenced appointment slots each month exclusively for these children.

6.2 Additional health needs were identified in the Initial Health Assessment and added to the care plans for relevant support to be taken for 40 of the children who entered care:

- 10 children were referred to CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services).
- 4 received emotional support referrals.
- 4 entered care with scabies and 1 had ring worm.
- Other issues included a heart murmur, hearing concerns, untreated eczema and vitamin D deficiency were identified.

To ensure all young people's health assessments are completed, the designated nurse has conducted assessments in a secure unit setting while young people were on remand.

6.3 Health assessments are closely monitored through a range of mechanisms, including 6 monthly auditing that examines completion timescales, communication, and quality compliance. The Strategic Health Meeting challenges providers regarding return rates and explores solutions. Continuous improvement is achieved through feedback and education.

6.4 Initial health assessments are closely monitored throughout the year, with the team consistently achieving above the national 85% target for IHA's completed within 20 days of a child coming into care when informed within the first 5 days.

6.5 At the time of this report, 86% of review health assessments have been completed, maintaining a high standard. The Designated Nurses and health team for children we care for, and SCT are collaborating to improve RHA (Review Health Assessment) procedures and streamline the process, making reporting to SCPG clearer. The project aims to ensure the children we care for Health Team requests BAAF forms earlier, SCT promptly sends BAAF forms to the health team for timely allocation, SWBT understands the Integrated Care Board (ICB) Dashboard requirements for RHA, and to change RHA monitoring at SCPG from a rolling percentage to monthly/quarterly achievement percentages.

6.6 The strategic health group is continuing in its efforts to ensure that all children are reviewed in a timely manner and where there are issues putting in solutions to resolve them with the relevant agency.

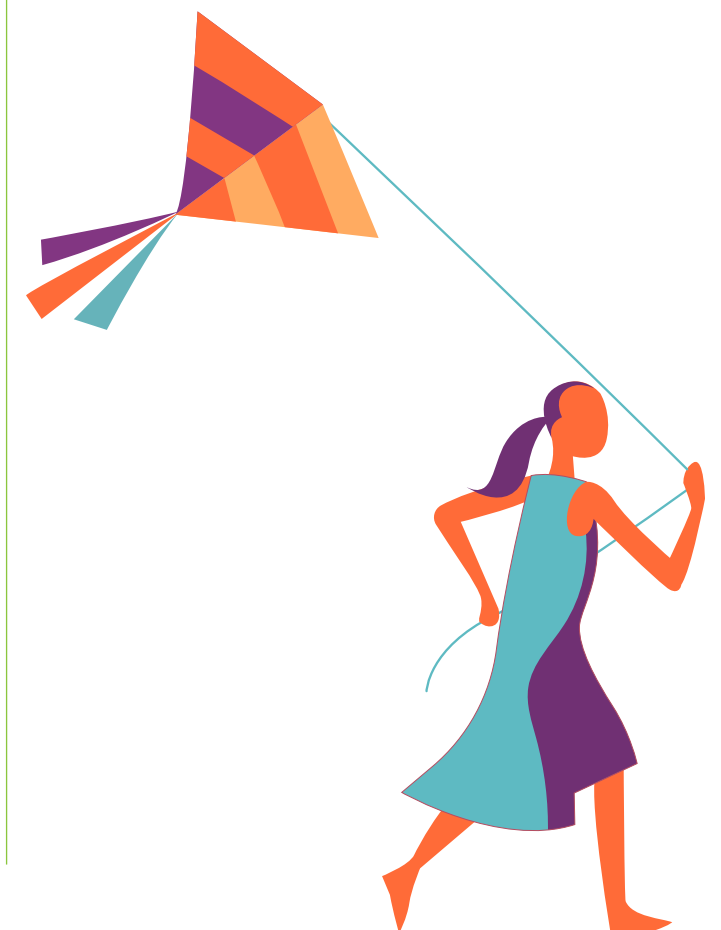
6.7 Data has shown a continuous decrease in the percentage of children over 5 receiving dental assessments this year. To address this, Designated Nurses collaborated with a Paediatric Dentist from NHSE to create a Dental Pathway for children we care for. This new pathway aims to increase dental visits by regularly reminding carers to arrange appointments and providing accurate dental health information for care plans.

6.8 44 separated children and young people entering care each received a sleep pack to address sleep issues arising from night-time travel and daytime sleeping. 6 children reported significant sleep disturbances; 5 were referred to CAMHS, with one refusing the referral—this will be followed up.

Other reported health issues included cardiology concerns, visual problems, vitamin D deficiency, dental pain, and physical injuries sustained during their journey, all requiring follow-up care. All separated children and young people underwent TB screening and received updates to their immunisations. Each child's health needs were assessed using enhanced documentation.

6.9 Black Country ICB have agreed recurrent funding for pre-payment prescription certificates for CEYP aged 18 - 25 who would otherwise not be entitled to free prescriptions as part of our concordat for CEYP.

**The ICB continues to improve the lives of the children we care for by identifying health needs early and providing fast access to support, from immunisations to mental health care, helping them grow up healthier, safer, and well supported.**





# 7 Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

- 7.1 Sandwell CAMHS children we care for team are a small team of 7 (4x FTE/2 x .02 FTS) that sit within the main core CAMHS team. They have specialist training in approaches that are evidence based for the highly complex needs of the children we care for. The team is managed by the Service Manager/Clinical Lead for Sandwell CAMHS and consists of a Consultant Psychologist - Lead, two Clinical Nurse Specialists, one Art Psychotherapist, a Child Psychotherapist and a WTE Systemic Psychotherapists..
- 7.2 As well as these posts there is a full-time specialist nurse who is employed to support the commissioner with the funding and quality of placement for children and young people placed out of area. However, this post has been vacant for part of the year. Some of the services provided by this clinician have been covered by the clinical lead and supported by others in the team.
- 7.3 The Sandwell CAMHS children we care for team are trained in evidence-based approaches for working with the children we care for e.g. Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Dialectic Behaviour Therapy, Mindfulness, Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing, Trauma Focused Cognitive Behaviour therapy, Art Psychotherapy and Child Psychotherapy. Clinical interventions aim to integrate attachment, systemic, psychodynamic, and psychoanalytic traditions in practice recognising the individual needs of the child or young person. Due to a new Information System, we were not able to report on data last year. This has been rectified due to a new system of recording. The following data reflects figures for 1 April 2023 – 29 February 2024.

Fig 2: Current caseload

Open cases at end of February 2024	62
New referrals between April 2023 – end February 2024	106
Discharges between April 2023 – end February 2024	85

A point of interest is the source of referrals in terms of who makes the referral to CAMHS. This can be seen in fig 3.

Fig 3: Source of Referrals 1 April 2023 – 29 February 2024

Source of Referrals	Number of Referrals
Acute Secondary Care: Emergency Care Department	16
Child Health: Community-based Paediatrics	2
Child Health: Hospital-based Paediatrics	7
Child Health: School Nurse	1
Justice System: Court Liaison and Diversion Service	1
Justice System: Police	3
Local Authority and Other Public Services:	
Education Service/Educational Est'mnt	4
Local Authority and Other Public Services: Social Services	17
Other Primary Health Care	1
Other SERVICE or agency	12
Other: Out of Area Agency	2
Primary Health Care: General Medical Practitioner Practice	39
Primary Health Care: Health Visitor	1

- 7.4 The data shows us that only 17 out of the 106 referrals for children and young people in care were made by their social worker. When a referral is received from a professional other than the child's social worker a form is sent to their social worker as corporate parent to be completed for more information and for consent to continue with the referral. This has the potential to slow down the process of the referral but has been much better since having

a streamlined system of a single point of contact into the Children's Trust where requests are sent, and an administrator disseminates the requests to the correct social worker for a speedy return. A senior manager has oversight of this process.

## 7.5 Waiting Times

CAMHS are expected to see all children and young people within 18 weeks of receiving a referral and are measured against this expectation. Eighteen weeks for children and young people who are care experienced is a long time and although this is within national standards, Sandwell CAMHS's ambition has been to assess the mental health needs of children and young people referred to the team much sooner than the national standard. The aim was to have a 10-week standard. Fig 4 shows the data for the period under question.

Fig 4: Average Waiting Time in Weeks for first appointments 1 Apr 23 – 29 Feb 24

Type of Meeting	Number of Weeks
Average Waiting Time for First Appointment	10
Weeks Waiting from Initial Appointment to	
Second Appointment	3

- 7.6 The data shows that on average the target is being met. The first appointment is a professionals meeting which is the start of our assessment and where they begin to gather all the information about the child/young person to begin to make sense of their story and their need. The second appointment is when the service meets the child/young person for 'Voice of the Child' appointment to fully understand their mental health, risk and what they would like. Within this waiting time is the time waiting for forms to be returned from Social Workers where Social Workers have not been the referring professional. To date there are no

child/young person waiting to be allocated for therapeutic intervention.

- 7.7 The Nurturing Attachments and Complex Trauma Training programme has continued to be provided for foster parents who foster children/young people who meet the criteria for specialist CAMHS, to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide attachment focused parenting. The more foster parents understand about the impact of abuse and neglect on children, the more likely they are to offer therapeutic nurturing care. Traumatized children need to be helped to work through their trauma as they may continue to experience the neurological, developmental, and psychological impact from their early histories even when they are placed with a supportive and loving family.
- 7.8 Specialist nurses have continued to provide fortnightly drop-in sessions to social workers. Between three to five cases are discussed each session depending on the level of complexity. The cases are booked in by an administrator at the Children's Trust and overseen by a social care manager. These continue to work well, allowing for more systemic and psychological thinking.
- 7.9 In response to the CEYP Mental Health review, which highlighted a lack of support and provision for emotional wellbeing and mental health, we have recently commissioned Barnardo's to pilot the "Sandwell Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Service." This service is operational until March 2025, and provides three key areas of support. The pilot programme will focus on 'getting help' support, which includes:
- Conducting wellbeing assessments for children entering care
  - Offering support to children, young people, and their wider networks in cases of placement breakdowns, with the objective of preventing a third placement breakdown
  - Establishing a 'getting help' service specifically for CEYP.

## 8 Life and Memory Work

- 8.1 Life and memory work with the children we care for has been a priority for both SCT and CPB. Over the past 15 months, there has been a focus on ensuring practitioners have the skills and experience to complete high-quality and creative life and memory work with the children in our care and with care-experienced young adults.
- 8.2 In January 2023, the Life and Memories Direct Work Board was established, led by the Principal Social Worker of SCT. The board's terms of reference identified 5 purposes and aims to improve the quality of Life and Memories work facilitated and completed with the children in our care:
- Through inclusive consultation an agreed approach, purpose, roles and responsibilities for Life and Memories Direct work and rolled it out across SCT
  - Support and drive the improved performance and quality of life and memory direct work in each service within SCT, using the SCT Values and Ethos, STAR Practice Model and Quality Assurance Framework.
  - Identify and learn from good practice, building confidence within individuals, teams, and services to ensure their intervention make a difference to children's lives and improve outcomes for the child and their family.
  - Improve collaborative partnerships with partners including Mental Health Trust, Adoption@Heart, CPB to ensure a mutual understanding of the Life and Memories Direct Work requirements.
- 8.3 Children, young people and young adults were consulted with, and they told us what their expectations are, and they wanted a name change from 'Life Story' to 'Life and Memories'. This was a powerful message for our practitioners and managers to hear.
- 8.4 Practice guidance has been drafted, outlining clear roles and expectations alongside the Partnership STAR Practice Model. Staff now have a tool kit to assist in direct work with children and young people.
- 8.5 Throughout 2023/2024, SCT Academy has developed and facilitated bespoke briefing and training packages.
- SCT wide training sessions: In April, May and June SCT held briefing sessions via the Practitioners and Managers forums with 284 participants. These briefings are now part of all induction sessions for new staff with over 320 participants to date.
  - 6x Direct Work and Interventions bitesize sessions facilitated by Advanced Practitioners attended by 90 practitioners.
  - Gathering Life and Memories through Life Story Books: Bitesize Sessions 2024, facilitated by Advanced Practitioners & children we care for Practitioner with 30 practitioners attending.
  - Gathering Life and Memories through Later Life Letters: Bitesize Sessions 2023/2024, facilitated by Advanced Practitioners & children we care for Practitioner with 30 practitioners attending
- 8.6 We have developed performance data to enable the monthly progress of children and young people involved in life and memory work and Later Life letters. The roles of the Independent Reviewing Officers in life and memory work have been enhanced, with Life & Memory now a standing item on children we care for review meetings.
- 8.7 Key work will continue with life and memories practice guidance booklets issued to all practitioners and foster carers. We will track life and memory work/books through performance data and ensure that every child and young person has an up-to-date impact chronology to inform their life and memory book/journey. Additionally, we will roll out the video in conjunction with the Voice Team for our children and young people.

***'We want to ensure every Corporate Parent understands that life and memory work is everybody's business'***

## 9 Access to services

- 9.1 Over the past year, we have worked to enhance the local offer for CEYP. A regional blueprint was collaboratively developed by the 14 Councils and Trusts in the West Midlands, and this was used as the foundation for Sandwell's local offer.
- 9.2 We consulted with FIYA to identify the key needs of CEYP in Sandwell. Several initiatives have been progressed with the support of corporate parents:
- Laptops and internet dongles were provided through an initiative led by the West Midlands Combined Authority.
  - Free bus travel for 12 months was arranged courtesy of West Midlands Travel.
  - Sandwell's Housing Team arranged for subsidised home contents insurance.
  - The Leaving Care Grant was increased to £3,000 per person.
  - SCT introduced a Care Ambassador programme for employment and training opportunities.
  - A dedicated website promoting the local offer was launched for CEYP.
  - Efforts are underway to recognise 'care experience' as a protected characteristic.
- Further enhancements to the local offer continue to be explored.
- 9.3 Additionally, young people prioritised the introduction of free eye tests and glasses, complementing the free prescriptions introduced by the ICB in 2023-24. This is currently being considered by the ICB.

**Sandwell care experienced young people continue to gain the tools and confidence to gain the tool and confidence to shape their futures. With practical support, like free travel, laptops, and stronger help with housing, health, and education, they feel recognised, respected, and ready for adulthood.**





# 10 Preparation for Adulthood

- 10.1 Preparation for adulthood is crucial for our care-experienced young people, as it equips them with the necessary skills, confidence, and support networks to navigate the challenges of independent living and achieve their full potential. There have been developments to improve this for young people:
- 10.2 For young people aged 16-17, the year began with 90% having an updated pathway or care plan. This figure dropped to 84% by year-end, with an average of 89% throughout the year. For those aged 18-24, the year began with 72.3% having an updated pathway plan, rising to 79.3% by year-end, averaging 79.9% over the year.
- 10.3 Currently, a Personal Advisor (PA) is allocated around a young person's 17th birthday. However, plans are in place to allocate PAs at age 16 to better prepare young people for adulthood and ensure a smooth transition. This includes a robust duty system for those aged 21 and above.
- 10.4 We recognise that our young people need to understand their post-18 accommodation options, finances, healthcare access, and education and training opportunities. To promote this, we have continued to develop our Local Offer and ensure our young people have access to wider opportunities.
- 10.5 Sandwell launched its House Project on 13th February 2024, Sandwell is proud to be the 17th House Project nationwide. Since the launch, 13 young people have joined and started their first group sessions in April 2024. The House Project supports our young people as they near independence, helping them develop friendships and establish a lasting network of support. The weekly group sessions offer discussions and experiential learning opportunities with partner agencies. On completion of the project, young people move into a flat which they transform into their own home using the skills they have learnt with support from their House Project.

- 10.6 We also continue to offer the Home Programme, which offers flats to 25 young people and assists them to become successful tenants. Both projects rely on SCT relationship with Sandwell Housing and overseen at CEYP Accommodation Panel.
- 10.7 Within the Care Experienced Team, we continue to develop specialisms amongst the Personal Advisors (PAs). Links have been set up with the Prison Service and Probation, to develop drop-in sessions at HMP Brinsford. There has been a focus on improving links with Adult Mental Health and Adult Social Care which can be a challenging area. Further expertise lies with PAs who have excellent knowledge of Asylum Law.
- 10.8 We have good relationships with our Employment and Skills colleagues who currently offer monthly drop-ins for young people and staff at Metsec. Additionally, we have a project being offered by Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) around barriers to employment. The CAB have also developed a specific project for our CEYP who are pregnant or are new mums.
- 10.9 Project Linus UK have adopted Sandwell CEYP and distribute handmade quilts, which are aimed to provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children and young people who are in need of a hug. They are made by UK volunteer knitters and quilters and over 30 CEYP have received one to date.



- 10.10 The key areas of work for the next 12 months include:
- Allocating a Personal Advisor to all children we care for at age 16.
  - Completing preparations for the House Project and Home Programme for the pending Ofsted visit to successfully register as providers of supported accommodation.
  - Continuing to develop the support and specialism offered to our Separated children and young people, with a potential specialist hub within the existing teams.
  - Reviewing and improving the support we offer to our young people who request access to their files.

Sandwell care experienced young people continue to gain the skills, support, and confidence to live independently. With tailored advice, housing help, and projects like the House Project and Home Programme, they're stepping into adulthood with clarity and control.



# 12 Separated Migrant young people

In April 2023, there were 17 Separated young people aged 0-17 and 21 aged 18+. By March 2024, these numbers rose to 42 and 33. This is a 147% increase for the 0-17 age group and a 57% increase for those aged 18+.

- 12.1 In November/December 2023, there was an increase in the number of asylum seekers placed in Sandwell hotels by the Home Office. Some of these individuals, initially assessed as adults, later presented as children. This necessitated the Brief Enquiries and Age Assessments to be undertaken by SCT.
- 12.2 SCT was initially unprepared for this sudden increase but managed to complete necessary assessments due to ongoing Age Assessment training for social workers.
- 12.3 SCT has made progress in this area, with a proposal for a specialist UASC Hub including 2 Social Workers, 2 Personal Advisors, and a Care Support Worker. All UASC arriving via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) are now directly allocated to a social worker within the children we care for service, improving the child's journey.

As more separated children arrive in Sandwell, swift assessments, steady social work, and strong local partnerships are helping them feel safe, supported, and ready to build stable futures.

- 12.4 SCT attends regular meetings with The Migrant Health Partnership, Sandwell New Arrivals Partnership, and West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership. Staff have accessed training opportunities via WMSMP, the Home Office, and other providers.
- 12.5 Over the next 12 months, SCT aims to streamline its approach to working with Asylum Seeking children, build relationships with key agencies, explore accommodation needs with Housing and Commissioning, and set up a specific participation group for young people. SCT will continue to work closely with health and education colleagues to ensure the needs of young people are met.



# 13 Conclusion

This year's annual Corporate Parenting Report highlights the progress made in supporting the children we care for and CEYP. Through strategic initiatives, dedicated services, and collaboration, we have achieved positive outcomes. However, challenges remain, and as a Board, we are committed to addressing these barriers to enhance the support we provide.

Looking ahead to 2024/25, our key priorities include:

- Supporting multiagency partners in applying for 'Foster Friendly' status and encouraging local businesses to do the same.
- Continuing co-production between children young people, corporate parents, and partners to improve the local offer, with a focus on the initiatives outlined above.
- Exploring best practice models for supporting post-16 care-experienced individuals who are NEET.
- Refocusing the NEET strategy group to pilot new solutions and improve Sandwell's NEET performance.
- Continuing to develop the support and specialism offered to our separated young people, with a potential specialist hub within the existing teams.
- Complete preparations for the House Project and Home Programme for the pending Ofsted visit to successfully register as providers of supported accommodation.
- Continue coproduction with young people, corporate parents, and partners to further improve the local offer, with a priority focus on the initiatives detailed above.

- Enhance the child-friendly communication and coproduction across CPB multiagency partnerships and stakeholders.
- Continue co-producing the Corporate Parenting Strategy: 2025-2028 with children, young people and partners.

As we navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead, we are committed to continuing our work to improve the lives of all children and young people in Sandwell. The strong co-production and partnerships across CPB is what drives forward our key priorities and ensure decisions are made to improve the lives of our children and young people. While we can celebrate the many successes, there is still much to be done to fully support the children we care for and care-experienced young people.

## Acknowledgments

Corporate Parenting Board Members 2023-2024  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Councillors  
Officers  
Care Experienced Young People  
Sandwell Children's Trust  
National Health Service/Integrated Care Board  
West Midlands Police  
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)  
Children we Care For and Caregivers  
Other Agencies



14 You Said, We Did, We Are Doing

You Said, We Did, We Are Doing		
You Said	We Did	We Are Doing
All councillors know and sign our newly redrafted pledge.		The new Corporate Parenting Strategy is being co-produced and all members will sign up to the pledges. This will be available in Autumn 2025.
An enhanced profile and renewed focus on Corporate Parenting through the launch of our first annual Corporate Parenting week in 2023.	The first annual Corporate Parenting Week was in June 2023. The week was co-produced by CPB partners who put on multiple face-to-face activities and events.	We will continue to hold our annual week, with themes directed by our Children and young people.
SMBC continues working in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) to become a beacon for good Corporate Parenting practice	The LGA were part of the launch of the Corporate Parenting week and supported the Board to identify how to effectively co-produce the Strategy: 2025-2028 with partners, children and young people.	Continue to build a relationship with the LGA who support updates and deliver Corporate Parenting training to leadership, Cabinet and elected members.
SMBC, SCT and wider partners, plus the private sector become the ‘family business’ by offering jobs and apprenticeships to our care experienced.	Youth employment summit in July 2024 highlighted the need to increase opportunities for our Children We Care For and Care Experienced Young People	CPB and Skills, Employment and Training partner continue to work with SMBC directorates and partners to create Employment and Training opportunities for Sandwell CEYP.
All reports demonstrate their impact on the CWCF and CEYP.	SMBC Corporate reports now have an impact assessment to ensure all reports consider Corporate Parenting and the impact it will have on the CWCF and CEYP.	
Sandwell CPB supports our NHS partners to put free optical and dental prescriptions in place for care experienced 18-25 years old.	NHS partners have secured free medical prescriptions for Sandwell Care Experienced Young People.	CPB continues to work in partnership with NHS partners to ensure CEYP 18-25 year olds receive free eye tests and dental prescriptions. NHS partners have secured free medical prescriptions for our CEYP.
SMBC, SCT and wider partners will continue to listen, champion and engage with our CWCF and CEYP across all services		CPB will continue to work with SMBC, SCT and wider partners ensure to engage and co-produce with the CWCF and CEYP. By incorporating the Working Together Strategy, we will ensure to use inclusive language to engage with our children and young people.
Review the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023 and launch the new young people’s pledges and promises.		Sandwell Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2028 is currently being co-produced with CPB members, children, and young people, it reflects the Working Together Strategy and Child Friendly initiative. Part of co-production is producing a smart and outcome-based pledge that will keep the board and partners accountable.

You Said, We Did, We Are Doing		
You Said	We Did	We Are Doing
Continue with the Local Offer review, identifying and addressing financial implications where appropriate.		CPB continue to support SCT and partners to benchmark and produce the best Local Offer for Sandwell CEYP that matches others across the Region.
Ensure all social workers, practitioners, foster carers and managers are trained in life and memory work.	Sandwell Children Trusts have embedded a model across the service which ensures all practitioners understand the importance of life and memory work to the children and young people.	
Develop an emotional well-being service for the CWCF and CEYP to support the needs identified by young people.		SMBC utilised COVID emergency funding to pilot an Emotional Wellbeing Service through Barnardo’s for the CWCF and CEYP between March 2024 and March 2025. It will deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well-being assessments when children enter the care system</li><li>• Support for children, young people, foster carers and residential providers to prevent placement breakdowns</li><li>• Provide an emotional well-being service for CEYP.</li></ul> CPB will continue to work with SMBC and SCT to review the extension of the services in the months to come.
Develop an action plan to reduce the number of care experienced 19+ who are NEET.	Skills, Employment and Training have completed a care experienced NEET action plan which is monitored by the SCPG.	
Develop a mentoring programme with young people: for young people, they are the experts, and nobody knows more about what it means to be in care than they do.		CPB continue to support SCT and partners to benchmark and produce the best Local Offer for Sandwell CEYP that matches others across the region to provide mentoring programme.

15 Glossary

Acronym	Meaning
CPB	Corporate Parenting Board
SCPG	Strategic Corporate Parenting Board
NEET	Not in Education, Employment and Training
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
CWCF	Children We Care For
VOS	Voices of Sandwell
FIYA	Forum for Independent Young Adults
CIC	Children in Care
CL	Care leavers
SMBC	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
SCT	Sandwell Children's Trust
ICB	Integrated Care Board
EET	Education, Employment and Training
CEYP	Care Experienced Young People
SEND	Special Educational Needs & Disabilities
PEP	Personal Educational Plan
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children/Separated Young people
EHCP	Educational, Health and Care plan
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
SF	Strengthening Families
VOS	Voices of Sandwell Forum
FIYA	Forum for Independent Young Adults
Supported Lodgings	A type of placement, often in a shared house, with staff on site either 24 hours or on a drop-in basis. The young person must be aged 16 or older.
Supported Lodgings	A young person over the age of 16 lives with a "host" in their home, in the style of a lodger. The host will provide support for the young person, but isn't expected to provide transport, pocket money, clothing etc.
Staying Put	In circumstances where a young person remains with their former foster carer/s after their eighteenth birthday, the arrangement becomes a "Staying Put" arrangement.

Acronym	Meaning
EDT	Emergency Duty Team
FC	Foster Carers
IFA	Independent Fostering Association
IHA	Initial Health Assessment
RHA	Review Health Assessment
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
PA	Personal Advisor
PEP	Personal Education Plan
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SSW	Senior Social Worker/Student Social Worker/Supervising Social Worker
SW	Social Worker





