

Cabinet

Report Title	Child Friendly Sandwell - Discovery Phase Report and Priority Theme Recommendations
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 10 September 2025
Report Author	Samantha Harman
Lead Officer	Executive Director Children and Education Services
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Children & Families
Why is this a key decision?	To be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Wards Affected	
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open
Is the report urgent?	No
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	
Appendices (if any)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sandwell's Child Friendly Discovery Phase Activity and our Recommended Priority Areas. 2. Discovery Phase Report - Rationale

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report presents the outcomes of Sandwell Councils UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities and Communities Discovery Phase and Priority Theme Recommendations for agreement.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report to Cabinet is recommended to: -

- 2.1 Endorse Sandwell Council's continued commitment to becoming a Child Friendly borough, acknowledging the work undertaken so far representing the development of priority themes for our children, young people, families and communities.
- 2.2 Approve the recommended priority themes of 'Safe and Secure', 'Family and Belonging' and 'Equal and Included'.
- 2.3 Approve the organisational priority themes of Communication, Culture, Leadership and Co-operation to support with the delivery of the programme.
- 2.4 Approve the preparation and submission of an action plan to support the Development and Delivery phases of the programme and authority to approve the action plan to the Executive Director of Children and Education Services in consultation with the Assistant Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families and the Child Friendly Sandwell Member Working Group.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 Sandwell Council and the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF have been working together in partnership as a Child Friendly Candidate Community since August 2024. UNICEF UK has made the difficult decision to cease delivery of the Child Friendly Cities & Communities programme at the end of June 2026.
- 3.2 Child Friendly Cities & Communities is part of UNICEF's global Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI). Although the UK programme will no longer be delivered by UNICEF UK after June 2026, CFCI will continue to be an international network, providing resources and inspiration for all who seek to uphold the rights of every child at the local level.
- 3.3 Our focus is on making sure there is a positive and lasting legacy for our children and young people growing up in Sandwell. We are extremely proud of the impact the programme has had to date and will continue to have thanks to the significant work already undertaken to embed children's voices into decision-making processes and make sure that the services and spaces on which children and young people depend take into account their fundamental human rights.
- 3.4 The local structures and ways of working that have been put in place through the programme will mean that children and young people in Sandwell will continue to benefit and continuing the child friendly borough programme independently supports the Council to deliver its commitments to equality and diversity and key elements of the Council Plan 2024-27 and represents the Council living its values, being ambitious, inclusive, customer focused and accountable.

- 3.5 Sandwell Council has recently completed a six-month Discovery Phase. With the aim to establish Sandwell's current position on the state of children's rights and wellbeing, and work with partner organisations, children and young people across the borough to identify priority themes for action.

Priority Themes

- 3.6 The priority themes, **Culture, Communication, and Co-operation & Leadership** are more aligned with the mechanism of action. A further three themes are selected through the Discovery Phase process and the recommended choices are detailed in this report.
- 3.7 The areas identified as priority themes through the Partner Discovery Day are consistent with the key areas of focus in the Sandwell JSNA. **Safe and Secure, Healthy** and **Education and Learning** with **Equal and Included** as a golden thread.
- 3.8 Feedback from engagement with children and young people, through analysis of the SHAPE survey and Play Sufficiency Assessment, supports the focus areas **Safe and Secure, Equal and Included, Family and Belonging, Healthy** and **Education and Learning**.
- 3.9 The areas identified through the wider Discovery Phase Activities have identified the priority themes of focus as **Safe and Secure, Family and Belonging** and **Equal and Included** with **Education and Learning** and **Healthy** in fourth and fifth place respectively.

Discovery, Development Phase and Next Steps

- 3.10 In reviewing the supporting evidence, and through conversations, it is recognised that there is considerable overlap between the themes both in terms of outcomes that cut across areas, and priorities reflecting different stages of a process and work can be undertaken to align other themes into our chosen areas through the development and action planning phase.
- 3.11 As part of this commitment, we have developed a Discovery Phase Report evidencing that Sandwell's chosen priority themes are directly influenced by children, young people, families and communities.
- 3.12 The Development Phase of the programme requires a collaborative approach to the development of an action plan with a clear outcomes framework which will determine the direction of travel for the Delivery Phase.
- 3.13 There is an expectation that we work with children, young people, families, communities and our partners to co-produce the action plan and that children and young people's rights are central to this process.
- 3.14 As the Development Phase commenced during the summer holiday period our intentions are to complete this stage of the process by November to enable a qualitative collaboration with our education partners.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 **Option 1 – Agree the priorities themes.** The priorities themes have been carefully considered and have a strong evidence base and clear rationale. This option is recommended and addressed through this report.
- 4.2 **Option 2 – delay the development stage.** The Council could choose to undertake further Discovery Phase work and delay the Development Stage as an alternative option. Whilst this option would provide opportunity to capture further evidence to support identification of the priority themes, the evidence and feedback captured through the Discovery Phase from multiple sources strongly supports the three themes set out in paragraph 3.7 above. Therefore, it is highly likely that any further evidence captured would support these areas as well. This would also delay the next phase of our programme, which is the development and delivery of the action plan to start progress in delivering the improvements identified through the Discovery Phase. This option is not therefore recommended.
- 4.3 **Option 3 – not proceed with the becoming a child friendly borough.** This option does not align with the Council's corporate and strategic objectives and was therefore dismissed.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Discovery Phase activity in Sandwell marks a significant milestone towards ensuring that children and young people's rights are central to the development of policies and services that affect their lives and is a critical initial step in our Child Friendly Communities journey. It involved an exploration of the current state of growing up in Sandwell, through surveys, policy and strategy reviews, training and conversation. Each planned activity sought to identify
- Existing assets in relation to the mandatory badges and other key areas, for example what is currently in place in Sandwell to promote child-friendliness, and what is working well.
 - Current challenges and gaps, i.e. what is needed or what could be improved.
 - Share ideas on how to address some of these challenges and
 - Share opinions on which priority themes to focus on through the initiative.
- 5.2 A key element of the Discovery Phase was the engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, primarily our children and young people, parents, community groups, local authority officers and partner organisations. This inclusive approach aimed to ensure that the perspectives and experiences of all community members are considered. As well as analysing evidence and information we already had access to, a programme of activities was also planned across the 6 months.

- 5.3 The Discovery Phase involved a thorough assessment of how well children's rights are currently being respected and promoted within Sandwell. This included evaluating areas such as education, health, safety, and participation and identifying gaps and areas for improvement. Whereby specific programmes of work have been focused on supporting the views of our most underrepresented communities.
- 5.4 The Discovery Phase culminated in our Children's Discovery Day on March 30, 2025, attended by children and young people from across Sandwell, council officers, partners, senior leaders and our elected members. It was a day packed full of conversation, discussion and challenge and it presented us with an opportunity to reflect with the children and young people present in the space on the previous 6 months findings and sense check as to whether this was a good indicator of the emerging themes.
- 5.5 Through the Discovery Phase we actively worked face to face with 2,650 children and young people and talked to over 80 partners organisations and upskilled approx. 117 individuals in a child's rights-based approach and introductions to child friendly practices.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The cost to the Council for the continuation of the programme will be met from existing resources and by utilising both internal and external expertise.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 Governance of the Child Friendly Programme is directed by the Cross-Party Members Working Group and the Children and Families Strategic Partnership Board as the reporting board with representation from key stakeholders and partners.

8. Risks

- 8.1 A risk assessment is required as part of the implementation and action planning stage to assess the risks associated to delivery. Any risks identified will be addressed with a series of actions to mitigate the risk.
- 8.2 Risks associated at this point is potential reputational damage to the council should we choose not to proceed with the programme given the investment to date and the previously agreed commitment.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment (EIA) screening is underway.

10. Other Relevant Implications

- 10.1 **Corporate parenting** The Discovery Phase required extensive consultation and engagement with children and young people across the borough. Which included our care experienced children and young people.
- 10.2 **Social Value** Sandwell Businesses were engaged in the Discovery Phase programme and are already actively offering opportunities that align with our child friendly aspirations. Child Friendly Sandwell will provide opportunities for children and young people to influence procurement processes, policies and cultural change across the Council and wider partners.
- 10.3 **Health and Wellbeing** Children's capability to generate well-being is shaped through relationships they have with other people and the spatial conditions of their everyday life adopting a child friendly way of working can improve health and wellbeing not only for our younger population but also wider communities and residents.

11. Background Documents

None

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes: -

- Growing up in Sandwell
- Living in Sandwell
- Healthy in Sandwell
- Thriving Economy in Sandwell
- One Council One Team Approach.

- 12.1 Working towards achieving a Child Friendly Sandwell impacts positively on all strategic objectives and unifies the council in the delivery of the Council Plan and the wider five board partnership priorities.
- 12.2 Engagement with children and young people during the Discovery Phase specifically contributes to the following outcome outlined in the Council Plan in the One Council One Team strategic theme: All our residents, including our children and young people, are active participants in influencing change – through being listened to, their opinions are heard and valued

Relevance Check

Budget Reduction/Service Area:

Service Lead

Date:

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No

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