

<b>Scrutiny Board:</b>	Childrens Scrutiny
<b>Report Title</b>	The Effectiveness of the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	5 January 2026
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<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Kim Madil</b> -Chief Superintendent - Local Policing Commander West Midlands Police <b>Sally Giles</b> - Director of Children and Education (DCS) <b>Sally Roberts</b> - Chief Nursing Officer Black Country Integrated Care Board <b>Emma Taylor</b> - Chief Executive Sandwell Childrens Trust
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
<b>Identify exempt information and exemption category</b>	<i>We are bringing this report because it affects All wards</i>
<b>Appendices (if any)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Annual Report 2024/2025</li> <li>2. Working Together 2023</li> <li>3. Neglect Strategy</li> <li>4. Child Death Arrangements</li> <li>5. TOR Black Independent Advisory Group</li> </ol>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) have been an established framework for safeguarding partners since 2018. They give equal responsibilities to 3 statutory agencies (Local Authorities, Police and ICBs) for agreeing the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Sandwell has designated a fourth equal statutory partner, Sandwell Children's Trust, who deliver the children's social care functions on behalf of the Council. These four key agencies are known locally as Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership with an addition of a non-voting representative from schools which reflects the updated guidance
- 1.2 Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) Annual Report 2024–2025 provides assurance on the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements. The report highlights Strategic priorities for 2024–25 which are

Help Vs Harm (Early Help), Neglect, and Harm outside the Home (Child Exploitation). key themes from practice reviews, including neglect, voice of the child, and information sharing, alongside vulnerabilities such as babies with injuries and young people at risk of exploitation. Identified strengths include strengthened governance, underpinned by Working Together 2023; the launch of the Integrated Front Door; a new Neglect Strategy; and improved multi-agency engagement by fostering deeper collaboration with partners, strengthening communication channels, and embedding a shared commitment to safeguarding priorities through the Partnership's ST\*R practice model. This approach ensures that all agencies work collectively to deliver consistent, child-focused interventions.

- 1.3 Actions taken in the last 12 months have resulted in a range of improvements, for example: updated practice guidance in respect of information sharing guidance; refreshed escalation procedures; enhanced performance monitoring; and feedback from children being more routinely gathered.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Committee considers the contents of the report and comments upon the information presented
- 2.2 That the Committee notes any specific issues within the report that could be considered as learning points for the Safeguarding Partnership

## **3. Background and Context**

- 3.1 This Partnership Annual Report 2024–2025 notes the progress and key achievements, as well as challenges, within the agreed priority areas. It also highlights areas of focus for the year ahead (2025-26), therefore providing the necessary assurance on the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Sandwell.
- 3.2 Statutory guidance - Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 - requires safeguarding partners to publish an annual report detailing activities undertaken during the reporting period. This needs to include the impact that safeguarding arrangements and activity have on the safety and wellbeing of children and how well their outcomes are improving as a result of partnership activity. During this reporting year, the Partnership focused on 3 key priorities and the annual report highlights progress against these priorities:
  - **Help Vs Harm-** Strengthening preventative support for families, including activity within the integrated front door
  - **Neglect** – Improving identification and response to neglect.
  - **Harm Outside the Home** – Tackling all forms of criminal and sexual exploitation through contextual safeguarding.
- 3.3 Each local area will need to deal with serious incidents, for example, a child being seriously injured or even a child death, where neglect and/or abuse was a contributory factor. When these tragic incidents occur, it is critical that safeguarding partners examine these in detail; therefore, the annual report also details learning from reviews and other audits sponsored by the Commander for Sandwell Police.

- 3.4 In March 2025 the national child safeguarding practice review panel's report 'It's Silent' highlighted the significant impact of race, racism and racial bias on child safeguarding practices. It revealed that race, ethnicity and culture were often not adequately addressed in these reviews, leading to a lack of meaningful reflection on practices. In response, SCSP launched our new Partnership Black and Black diaspora Independent Advisory group sponsored by the commander for Sandwell Police and began to engage our faith-based groups and voluntary sector to broaden safeguarding awareness. This Independent Advisory Group (IAG) ensures that the learning from national panel is reflected throughout any Child Practice review. As a result of the work under way with the partnership Black Heritage IAG several of the recommendations for safeguarding partnerships are already being delivered in Sandwell and the Safeguarding Executive is fully committed to ensuring delivery against all recommendations.

#### **4. The Key Highlights from 2023–2024**

##### **Governance Changes and partnership working**

- 4.1 In response to Working Together 2023, Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership implemented a new governance structure from April 2024. Safeguarding responsibility now sits with Local Safeguarding Partners, supported by a streamlined framework that enhances accountability, strengthens multi-agency collaboration, and ensures a sharper focus on improving outcomes for children and families
- 4.2 The Independent Chair role has been removed and each statutory partner (Council, Children's Trust, Police and Health) share chairing responsibilities leadership on a six-monthly basis, supported by an Independent Scrutineer.
- 4.3 A representative from schools is now embedded within our safeguarding arrangements at both strategic and operational levels. This includes active involvement from Head Teachers and colleagues across our Learning Communities, ensuring that education settings have a strong voice in decision-making and that safeguarding practice is consistently communicated
- 4.4 There is stronger collaboration across agencies, with improved data analysis enabling better identification of trends and areas for improvement.
- 4.5 The learning from Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews has been disseminated across all partner agencies. High-quality multi-agency training programmes have been offered to partners that incorporates learning from Safeguarding Reviews and National Panel recommendations.
- 4.6 There has been an improved approach to innovation, for example through the launch of the Integrated Front Door, enhanced early help and safeguarding pathways and the roll out of our shared ST\*R Partnership Practice Model.
- 4.7 A new refreshed Neglect Strategy has been launched, sponsored by the CEO of Sandwell Children's Trust

##### **Learning & Development: Learning from Child Death Reviews**

- 4.9 Neglect remains a key priority in Sandwell. The tragic deaths of SE and SF (2022) prompted two thematic Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, which have shaped a revised and strengthened strategic response. These findings informed a renewed commitment to improving practice, enhancing multi-agency coordination, and embedding a more robust framework for identifying and responding to neglect.
- 4.10 There has been increased investment in Neglect Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) training. Between April 2024 and January 2025, the partnership undertook a series of coordinated actions to strengthen its response to neglect. The Task & Finish group developed a revised screening tool, updated practice guidance, and a clear pathway for consistent intervention. An awareness video was produced to promote Sandwell's vision for children to thrive, and a concise one-page strategy overview was launched to support clarity and accessibility (See Appendix A). The refreshed strategy was formally endorsed by SCSP and launched at the November 2024 summit, with full implementation beginning in January 2025.
- 4.11 A revised neglect eLearning module was launched, with over 3,500 staff completing the training (as of end of March 2025) - enhancing awareness and promoting consistent practice across agencies. GCP2 training continued with strong multi-agency engagement, supported by clarified guidance on the Lead Professional role and mandatory contributions from relevant partners. A podcast-style reflective learning series was introduced to deepen practitioner understanding, and targeted briefings were delivered across agencies. Planning is underway for a multi-agency GCP2 briefing featuring practitioner voices to encourage uptake and demonstrate real lived impact. Overall, take up of training has been positive, although more work is needed to ensure that what is learned in training is applied in practice across the partnership.
- 4.12 From 1st April 2024 - 31st March 2025 there have been 3 notifiable child safeguarding incidents across Sandwell which have been referred and scrutinised through the Rapid Review process.

Year	Number of Rapid Reviews	Number resulting in LCSPR	Age at time of incident	Ethnicity
2024-25	3	3	11 weeks	White British
			10	Asian British (of Indian heritage)
			16	Black British (of African heritage)

The Key themes identified were:

- i. **Neglect** - LCSPRs focused on neglect, leading to a new multi-agency neglect strategy in Sandwell. Actions included screening tools for early identification
- ii. Consistent use of GCP2 and multi-agency audits and training

- iii. **Information Sharing-** the timeliness of information sharing and professional escalation between agencies were also themes. Reviews called for clearer escalation processes and better transfer of responsibility between local authority areas.
- iv. **Voice of the Child-** Reviews highlighted some missed opportunities to capture and act on children's wishes and feelings, with emphasis on embedding child participation in assessments and planning.
- v. **Complex Family Dynamics** – these often involved multiple vulnerabilities, such as parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health, and poverty. This has highlighted the need ensure a consistent holistic, coordinated response across agencies.

## 5. Consultation

- 5.1 Work with our black, black heritage and black diaspora workforce across the partnership leading to the creation of the IAG, commenced following the report published in March 2024 which focussed on Black Missing children and multi-agency failings. This was presented at the partnership safeguarding summit in November 2024 with colleagues asked to consider how they would improve outcomes for black children and families in the borough and overcome barriers to trust and confidence in public services from impacted communities. Since then, many colleagues of black heritage and allies regularly come together to advise the executive on what improvements could be made leading to a workforce survey which will inform the development of bespoke cultural practice training product and a recent community engagement event during black history month.

## 6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Sandwell Childrens Safeguarding partnership is funded from Partners' annual financial contributions.

## 7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 Children and Social Work Act 2017 abolished Local Safeguarding Children Boards and introduced new arrangements called Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA). Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) sets out statutory guidance requiring three key partners to share equal responsibility for safeguarding: Local Authority (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, with Sandwell Children's Trust delivering services) West Midlands Police Sandwell and Integrated Care Board (ICB) In Sandwell, a fourth equal partner is included: Sandwell Children's Trust, which provides targeted and social care services

## 8. Risks

- 8.1 The SCSP risk register is a key tool for identifying and monitoring risks that could affect the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. It is regularly reviewed by the partnership to ensure emerging issues are captured and addressed, with clear ownership and actions recorded. This helps maintain accountability and supports proactive decision-making to keep children safe.

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

- 9.1 The SCSP Annual Report supports the Public Sector Equality Duty by promoting safeguarding arrangements that protect all children regardless of age, disability, race, religion, gender, or socio-economic background. Partnership activity includes targeted engagement with diverse communities, ensuring that services are accessible and responsive to cultural needs. Equality considerations are embedded in training, audits, and practice guidance to reduce disparities and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.

## 10. Other Relevant Implications

- 10.1 Corporate parenting – This report and associated activity of the safeguarding partnership board is considered at the Corporate Parenting Board as appropriate.
- 10.2 **Climate change** There are no direct associated implications in relation to climate change.
- 10.3 **Social Value** - As a partnership our vision is for all children to be safe at home and in their communities, where they are loved, cared for and have the stability to grow healthily and to achieve their ambitions. We will put children at the heart of what we do.
- 10.4 **Health and Wellbeing-** SCSP places a strong emphasis on promoting the health and wellbeing of children and families as a core safeguarding priority. Through its multi-agency arrangements, partners work collaboratively to address health inequalities, improve mental health support, and ensure access to early help services. This includes integrating public health initiatives with safeguarding practice, tackling issues such as emotional wellbeing, neglect linked to health needs, and ensuring that the voice of the child informs health-related interventions. The approach aligns with MASA principles by fostering shared accountability and coordinated action across health, education, social care, and community services to improve outcomes for children.
- 10.5 **Crime and Disorder Act 1998-** The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 underpin SCSP's safeguarding priorities by promoting multi-agency collaboration to prevent crime and protect vulnerable children. Its provisions, such as the establishment of Youth Offending Teams and requirements for local partnerships, align with SCSP's focus on early intervention, reducing risk factors linked to exploitation and neglect, and improving outcomes for children and families. By embedding crime prevention within community safety strategies, the Act supports SCSP's commitment to creating safer environments and addressing the root causes of harm through coordinated action across health, education, social care, and justice services.

## 11. Background Documents

*Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Annual Report 2024/2025*

*Working Together 2023*

*Neglect strategy-*

*Child Death Overview Report*

**12. How does this deliver the Outcomes in the Council Plan?**

12.1 The SCSP Annual Report contributes directly to the Council Plan outcomes by ensuring children and young people in Sandwell are safe, supported, and able to thrive. Through strengthened multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, early help initiatives, and targeted work on neglect and exploitation, the partnership helps deliver priorities around strong and resilient communities, improved health and wellbeing, and better life chances for children and families. This aligns with the Council's commitment to protecting the most vulnerable and promoting equality across all services.

**13. Appendix**

<https://www.sandwellcsp.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports/>

<https://www.sandwellcsp.org.uk/documents/sandwells-neglect-strategy/>.

<https://www.sandwellcsp.org.uk/documents/bccdop-new-arrangements/>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--PAG ToR Final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--PAG-ToR-Final.pdf)

