

Sandwell Children's Improvement Plan

Improving the lives of children and young people in
Sandwell



Department
for Education



Sandwell
Children's Trust



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Document Control

Organisation	Sandwell Children's Trust	Owner	Sandwell Children's Trust Chief Executive
Title	Sandwell Improvement Plan	Subject	Improvement Plan
Filename	Sandwell Improvement Plan MASTER	Protective marking	IL0

Date of Last Review	
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Revision History

Revision date	Editor	Version	Description of revision
17-04-2018	Jackie Hodgkins	1.0 - 5.0	Working revisions as part of liaison with Strategic Priority Leads.
04-05-2018	Chris Yates	6.0	Changes made considering comments by the Commissioner and Sandwell Children's Trust Chair.
09-05-2018	Chris Yates	7.0	Changes made considering comments by Improvement Board Chair and Ofsted representatives.
10-05-2018	Chris Yates	8.0	Final version submitted to Ofsted following final review and feedback from SMBC Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive (Acting in the capacity of DCS).

Document distribution

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Document approvals

Approvers	Date approved
Sandwell Children's Trust Chief Executive	10-05-2018

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Foreword

The Right Honourable Jacqui Smith, Chair of Sandwell Children’s Trust and Councillor Simon Hackett, the Lead Member for Children’s Services, Sandwell Council

The creation of the Sandwell Children’s Trust offers a crucial opportunity to improve the services that we offer to the most vulnerable children and families in Sandwell. When life gets tough for children, they deserve the best care and the best people to support them.

Our ambition is that the Trust, building on recent improvements, will drive a sustainable model of delivery and improvement designed to bring good and outstanding services to the Borough – getting the basics right; innovating where possible and using the freedoms of the Trust approach to develop a new and sharper focus to address the challenges we face.

We have already assembled a Board that is setting a clear vision and will strive to achieve the Trust’s aim of rapid and sustained improvement in Children’s Social Care. An early priority is to create an environment that enables and supports staff to deliver excellent practice; to be innovative and creative and become a centre of social work excellence.

Sandwell Children’s Trust is one of a small number of such organisations in the country. Our test is to ensure that this improvement plan and our wider ambitions to deliver excellent practice with a stable and supported workforce is driven forward with energy and enthusiasm. We are determined to rise to that challenge.

Sandwell Context

Sandwell Profile

Sandwell is an urban area lying in the centre of the West Midlands conurbation, made up of six small urban towns. It is a deprived area, ranking as the 11th most deprived authority in the country and this deprivation is generally spread evenly across the borough.

Sandwell has a growing population with an increasing birth rate and decreasing death rate. Over 34% of the population is from an ethnic background other than White British.

The population under 18 years old is 78,698 and there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people living in Sandwell. This has required 5,200 new school places since 2010.

Many of Sandwell's children and young people experience poor outcomes. 19,300 children live in poverty. Around 7 in 1000 children die before their first birthday, levels of teenage pregnancy are higher than the national average and 25% of 11-year olds are classified as obese.

The number of children receiving support from services is as follows:

- At the beginning of March 2018, 2,871 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service.
- At the beginning of March 2018, 871 children and young people were the subject of a child protection plan.
- At the beginning of March 2018, 1 child lived in a privately arranged fostering placement.
- At the beginning of March 2018, 753 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 95 per 10,000 children).
 - 406 (or 54%) live outside the local authority area.
 - 54 live in residential children's homes, of whom 92% live outside the authority area.
 - None live in residential special schools.
 - 576 live with foster families, of whom 51% live outside the authority area.
 - 59 live with parents, of whom 15% live outside the authority area.
 - 22 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.



Our Approach – What’s informing our improvement journey

On the 6 October 2016, the Secretary of State for Education directed Sandwell Council to work with the newly appointed Commissioner to establish a new body to deliver high quality children’s social care services. This decision was taken following successive inspections by Ofsted judging children’s services to be inadequate. Since this time progress has been good in taking the necessary steps to establish the Trust, which went live on 1 April 2018. It has been noted throughout the Commissioner’s engagement with the Council that there has been a strong political will to improve children’s services, which has been evidenced throughout the collaborative way the Council has worked with the emerging Trust.

Soon after the Commissioners appointment, he identified seven key priorities which he believed the council needed to urgently work on to address the ongoing systemic failures (see appendix 1). These seven priorities were the building blocks which aimed to drive the required improvements. Progress has been made in some key areas- namely staff being provided with upgraded IT equipment, increased capacity of social workers alongside the relocation of most social care staff into a newly refurbished office accommodation specifically designed to provide a modern-day environment and work place where social work can flourish.

A re-inspection of Sandwell’s Children’s Services commenced in November 2017 and the report was published on 29th January 2018. This inspection rated most aspects of the service as inadequate and highlighted many ongoing and entrenched practice issues which still needed to be addressed. Whilst the overall findings of the inspection were disappointing, Ofsted recognised that the council’s new senior management team had begun to gain some traction in improving services and had made progress in both the use of performance information and the introduction of more effective quality assurance and audit arrangements. Ofsted also recognised some areas of practice which had improved, these included: improvements in the provision of early help; strengthened front door arrangements leading to better identification of risk; and improvements for services for care leavers.

Ofsted SIF Inspection judgements 29th January 2017

Children who need help and protection	Inadequate
Children looked after and achieving permanence	Inadequate
Adoption Performance	Inadequate
Experience and progress of care leavers	Requires Improvement
Leadership, management and governance	Inadequate

The contract / partnership between the Council and the Trust includes a performance management framework which will underpin the objective to achieve an Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement by 2020 and Good by 2022. This improvement plan will form the basis of improvement activity of the Trust and the Council over the next two years with the aim of delivering their shared vision for children’s social care in Sandwell.

Our approach to the Improvement Plan

Both the Council and the Trust share a joint endeavour to deliver good services to children and families. Sandwell's Children's Trust from April 2018 became responsible for the operational delivery of the transferred services. The required improvements are detailed within this improvement plan alongside its priorities. The Trust's fundamental aim is to build on the recent advances highlighted by Ofsted during their November 2017 inspection and drives a comprehensive model of delivery and improvement designed to bring good and outstanding services to Sandwell.

The primary ambition of the Trust is to radically transform services drawing on the experience of the executive leadership team, supported by the chair of the Trust Board, along with the Non-Executive Directors. The Trust will also utilise the support from our improvement partners, Children's Commissioner and partners across the Borough.

The Improvement Plan has been completed jointly by the Local Authority and the Trust, and both parties recognise the scale of the improvement required and complexities this will bring when undertaking such large-scale and wide reaching improvements. As a sign of the Council's ongoing dedication to this improvement it has invested an additional £13 million into Children's Social Care budget to support improved service delivery.

In designing the Improvement Plan the intention is not to create a plan that is overly complex and fails to translate into front line practice. Conversely, the plan has been designed in a way that it can be used as both a learning tool by practitioners whilst at the same time driving the wide-ranging improvements needed.

The plan is based on eight key priorities which set out what the Trust aims to achieve, how it intends to do this and what good and better services will eventually look like. The plan is informed by Ofsted's recommendations following the most recent inspection, and incorporates the Children's Commissioners key priorities from his own diagnostic work undertaken whilst working with the council.

To ensure that the plan addresses the findings of the Ofsted inspection, actions are cross referenced and coded in a way which identifies the origin of the recommendation/priorities. For example, an **(O)** represents an Ofsted recommendation, **(OR)** repeat Ofsted recommendation (denoted in purple to highlight our key priorities) whilst a **(C)** represents the Children's Commissioner's six remaining priorities. Additionally, a further 15 priorities have been identified referenced within the plan with a **(S)** for SIF.

See Appendix 1 – For a detailed list of Recommendations.

Priority		Alignment to Ofsted SIF Recommendations
1	Leadership	OR1, O10, C3, C6
2	Workforce	C1, C2, C7
3	Practice	OR3, OR4, OR8, C4, S3, S6, S7, S8
4	Children Looked After	OR6, OR7, O9, OR11, OR12, O13, OR14, O15, O16, S1, S2, S4, S5
5	CSE, Exploitation, Missing & Trafficked	OR5, S9, S10
6	Performance and Quality Assurance	S14, S15
7	Partnership	O2, S12, S13
8	Voice and Experience of the Child	O17, S11

Part 2 – Ensuring Delivery

Governance

The Sandwell Children's Trust Board

The Sandwell Children's Trust Board has commented on this plan and will also play a key role in holding the executive directors to account on progress of the programme of improvement and seeking assurance that the Improvement Plan is delivering the required improvements. The Trust Board is chaired by the Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith.

The Children's Services Advisor (CSA)

Doncaster Children's Services Trust has been appointed as the Children's Services Advisor (CSA) for Sandwell and will report on a regular basis to Ministers. The Advisor will work with the Children's Commissioner and the Trust's Executive Management Team to ensure that there is a sustainable Improvement Plan in place. The CSA will provide support by establishing an Improvement Board providing additional governance and strategic oversight and delivery of the improvement plan. Furthermore, the CSA will support the Trust in providing constructive challenge alongside diagnostic support.

The Local Authority

Both the local authority and the Trust are committed to working together in order that the required improvements are accelerated. The unique partnership requires the local authority to monitor and support the Trusts progress via regular operational and strategic partnership boards. During these meetings performance information will be examined, the Local Authority effectively holding the Trust to account on its performance.

Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) and key partners

The success of this Improvement Plan will require a strong and effective contribution from key partners. The board is represented by senior managers from local partners and stakeholders which include Sandwell Council's Lead Member for Children's Services. The SSCB will receive regular progress reports from the Trust as part of the boards statutory duty to ensure that safeguarding arrangements within the Borough are effective. The Chair of the SSCB will report to the Chief Executive of the Local Authority on matters of performance.

Monitoring Performance and Quality

The culture in Sandwell will be one of support and challenge throughout all levels of the organisation.

The delivery of the programme of improvement will require rigorous scrutiny, monitoring and intelligence gathering to better understand the effectiveness of performance and quality of practice.

Progress against the Improvement Plan will be reported to the Improvement Board (IB), Sandwell Children's Trust Board and SSCB, with representation from the local authority and strategic partners at these boards.

Reporting will include but will not be limited to:

- A performance report including progress against key indicators linked to the Improvement Plan.
- Extensive feedback on innovative audit activity which goes 'beyond' traditional audit activity and will include themed and 'deep dive' audits and diagnostic activity. Audit activity will take place alongside practitioners on a team by team basis.
- A dedicated performance team will support quality assurance practitioners by examining practice and producing diagnostic reports which support a learning culture.
- A robust project management methodology whereby clear goals are set, and strategic leads are held to account monthly through Workstream monitoring, and the swift management of risks and issues.

Making a Difference for Children and Families

At Sandwell Children's Trust, we serve the purpose of Improving the Lives of Children and Young People. We do this by:

- Listening, learning and caring
- Acting with openness and transparency
- Being ambitious and confident
- Encouraging innovation.

In our relentless scrutiny of performance information and quality assurance activity, it is essential that children and young people support us and inform our improvement journey.

It is therefore imperative that the delivery of our improvements is underpinned by the engagement and involvement of children and young people via the corporate parenting board and other fora. Furthermore, updates to the various boards will include feedback from children, young people and their families.

Practitioners Improvement Board

The key to our success is the quality of our staff and we are determined to ensure they are engaged fully in this improvement journey. We will ensure a board is in place to support progress and provide a conduit which ensures the Improvement Board hears the voice of practitioners.

Part 3 – The Eight Priorities

Actions and recommendations from Ofsted 2017 Single Inspection Framework (SIF) alongside the recommendations made by the Children's Commissioner Malcolm Newsam CBE drive the eight key areas which shape the improvement plan.

The diagram below summarises the eight key areas of work which the Trust will focus on relentlessly.

We will develop strong and effective leadership and promote the conditions for a culture which is relentless at making a positive difference to children and young people's lives in Sandwell.

We will take steps to make sure that our workforce is stable, and ensure the people who work for us are committed, competent and confident and equipped with the appropriate level of support, skills and tools to make the difference.

We have high aspirations for our children and we will support them to aim high and achieve.

By doing this well we create the right conditions for success. However, our success will be judged by children and young people who will tell us if we are succeeding in our endeavours and will help us to focus our attentions. Our success will also be measured by whether we are making positive differences to children's lives and supporting them to feel optimistic and confident about their futures.

**Leadership
Management
Governance**



Part 3 – Progress Overview of Recommendations

This page gives a quick overview of the progress of each of the recommendations broken down into themes identified that group the areas for improvement: Practice Issues; Management oversight; Performance and quality; Workforce; Partnership; LSCB and RAG rates progress based on Phase 1 (P1 being actions completed and Phase 2 (P2) securing the evidence of impact through quality assurance.

Key		Complete and Signed off	Phase 1 (P1)	Actions completed
		In Progress	Phase 2 (P2)	Evidence of impact through quality assurance
		Delayed		
		Not started		

Themes	Leadership		Workforce		Practice		Children Looked After		CSE, Missing Trafficked		Performance and QA		Partnership		Voice and Experience of the child									
	Phase	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2	P 1	P 2							
Recommendations	OR1			C1			OR3			OR6			OR5			S14			O2			O17		
	O10			C2			OR4			OR7			S9			S15			S12			S11		
	C3			C7			OR8			O9			S10						S13					
	C6						C4			OR11														
							S3			OR12														
							S6			O13														
							S7			OR14														
							S8			O15														
										O16														
										S1														
										S2														
										S4														
										S5														

Priority 1 - Leadership

Strategic Responsibility: Frances Craven

Why are we focused on this?

Having strong leadership is pivotal in shaping and improving services for children and families and is the catalyst to transforming and delivering high quality services for children and young people, which is why we see this as priority 1; all priorities will have a focus upon leadership. This is echoed by Ofsted in their annual report 2016, which states that leadership remains the single most important factor in determining the standards of help, care and protection provided. Leaders, both professional and political are the drivers for continuous sustainable improvement in order that children's services are consistently effective as the lead agency for the protection and care of children and young people and as a corporate parent.

What we will achieve

- Establish a culture of practice improvement to ensure that key services are making a difference for children
- Significantly strengthen the strategic children's partnership and plan to ensure that there is a sufficient overview of children's services at a multi-agency level
- Continue to strengthen our approach to corporate parenting via tenacious scrutiny of practice and performance
- Ensure that the strategic framework is embedded
- A culture of support and challenge with robust management oversight

How we will do this

- Sandwell Children's Trust will take over the responsibility of delivering children's social care services in Sandwell
- Engage staff and key stakeholders in developing a shared culture, vision and values
- Strengthen governance arrangements ensuring a culture of listening to the views of children and young people
- Promote a culture of professional curiosity and challenge
- Implement a workforce strategy and culture of learning and development

What will good and better look like?

- Children receive timely support and interventions because of consistent high-quality practice
- Good practice and innovation is routinely shared
- Sustained improvements on key performance measures
- Stability within the workforce; Sandwell seen as a preferred employer
- There is a golden thread of oversight from top level to front line
- Feedback loops from children and staff are embedded and informs service delivery

PRIORITY 1: Leadership Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
OR1	Improve management oversight and decision-making across all services to ensure that needs and risks are fully addressed and that assessments, plans and interventions are appropriate.	To have an established culture of practice improvement overseen by leaders and managers to ensure that key services are making a difference for children in Sandwell Staff benefit from regular high-quality supervision (including group supervision) and appraisal which focusses on staff development and wellbeing.	Review current leadership and management structure to ensure that there is capacity within the system to drive and deliver strengthened practice and oversight.	May 18	SCT Chief Executive		Yellow	
			Implement any changes resulting from the review	Oct 18				
			Enable staff to understand their roles and responsibilities within the vision, how they connect and support the child's journey.	July 18				
			Ensure the workforce knows it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to improvement.	July 18				
			Develop a programme of mentoring, coaching and training for Sandwell's leaders.	Sep 18				
Review the current performance and QA framework.	Apr 18	Director of Quality and Performance	Green					
	Refreshed QA Framework is in operation across the service	June 18	Director of Quality and Performance	Yellow				
O10	Review commissioning documents to ensure that	Commissioning arrangements are robust and informed by service needs,	Develop a commissioning strategy to ensure services are commissioned efficiently	Oct 18	Director of Resources		Blue	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
	commissioning intentions are fully informed by detailed plans, to achieve those intentions.	JSNA information which leads to a strategic plan aimed at delivering cost effective services targeting areas of need.	against service need with an agreed framework.					
C3	Put in a sustainable solution to the front door to ensure that children and families receive timely assessments to the required quality, and responds appropriately to demand.	Thresholds are embedded and understood and children receive the right level of support at the right time. Assessments are timely and result in an offer of support commensurate with the identified level of need.	The Trust to undertake a review of the current model of practice in relation to the 'Front Door' including its current threshold application.	May 18	Director of Operations			
			Engage partners routinely on the application of thresholds and its contribution in managing demand.	Dec 18				
			Review to be undertaken to understand the delay in children receiving early help services to ensure that the thresholds for accessing services are appropriate.	Sep 18	Director of Operations			
			Engage with key local partners and agree a shared plan for improving consistency of threshold application.	Sep 18	Director of Operations and LSCB Chair			
C6	Put in place effective communication systems which connect senior management with practice and	Create a culture of high visibility of senior managers alongside staff benefitting from meaningful feedback	Strengthen the role of the Principal Social Worker in order that they can strengthen the link between senior management and practice	Oct 18	SCT Chief Executive			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
	ensure that staff concerns are swiftly addressed.	loops between staff and managers	Put in place a revised communication approach in consultation with the service	May 18	Partnership and Engagement Manager			
Establish a feedback and suggestion scheme			May 18	Partnership and Engagement Manager				
Increase visibility across the workforce to ensure the senior leadership team are connected to front line practice.			May 18	Senior Leadership Team				
			Put in place safeguarding visits by Trust CEO and Trust Chair	May 18	Chief Executive and Chair			

Priority 2 – Workforce

Strategic Lead: Dan Mortiboys

Why are we focused on this?

Having a highly committed, child focussed workforce is essential in creating an environment where social work can flourish. These values alongside a shared goal of improvement are vital to our improvement journey. The impact of systemic failures over many years has led to low staff morale, recruitment and retention issues which has led to the over reliance on high cost agency staffing. The impact of this is that for too long children have experienced frequent changes of social workers and delayed interventions. Change is needed, this means that we need to create and accelerate the conditions for success. This means offering high levels of support to staff via manageable caseloads alongside a commitment to ongoing professional development and career progression supported by a coordinated training and development strategy.

What we will achieve

- Improved morale, confidence and job satisfaction
- Stable, experienced staff group
- Reduced reliance on agency staff
- Increase the numbers of permanent managers to provide consistency of practice and support
- Increase management capacity and reduce case loads
- Promotion of Vision, values and practice standards which support children and families.
- Seek out and engage with research, methodologies and developments that create and develop best practice

How we will do this

- Review the role of the Principal Social Worker as a champion of research, practice and Social Work innovation
- Introduce a career development framework
- Attract and support the development of a skilled and competent workforce through:
 - A strong ASYE offer
 - Leadership Training
 - Creating a learning and environment culture
 - Succession planning
 - Promoting Sandwell as preferred employer
 - Meaningful feedback loops between staff and managers

What will good and better look like?

- Improved morale, confidence and skills of social workers and support staff
- Stable workforce with reduced reliance on agency staff
- Principal Social Worker ensures that in-practice development of staff is systematically delivered
- The workforce shares the same goals, visions and values, staff are ambitious for children
- Systematic audit and QA programme is seen by staff as a vehicle to support their learning and development.
- All staff have high aspirations for children and young people

PRIORITY 2 – Workforce Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
C1 C7	<p>Increase the social care workforce to ensure that caseloads are manageable across the service.</p> <p>Strengthen the approach to attraction, recruitment and retention to make Sandwell Council an employer of choice within the region and reduce the over dependence on agency and newly qualified staff.</p>	<p>Attract and support the development of a skilled and competent workforce through a revised workforce strategy.</p>	<p>The Trust to review the current volume of work within the service in order that there is sufficient social work capacity to meet these demands.</p> <p>The Trust to ensure clear workforce strategy is in place that promotes stability, through a range of recruitment and retention incentives.</p>	May 18	Director of Resources			
			<p>In consultation with staff, review staff support and working conditions</p> <p>Career and professional development framework to be developed in consultation with staff and managers</p>	Sep 18	Director of Resources			
C2 (also refer to P1 OR1)	<p>Ensure that there is the required management capacity for appropriate oversight and direction of casework and that all staff have supervision at the</p>	<p>Agree the Management Capacity required for the level of social worker numbers, to drive and deliver strengthened practice and oversight</p>	<p>Undertake organisational review of current leadership and management structure</p>	May 18	Director of Resources			
			<p>Implement any changes resulting from the Organisational Review</p>	Sep 18	Director of Resources			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
	required frequency.		Scrutinise practice in relation to supervision with regards to frequency, timeliness and quality.	July 18	Director of Quality and Performance			
			A programme of training will be put in place to address critical gaps in management oversight, practice and culture.	Sep 18	Director of Quality and Performance			

Priority 3 - Practice

Strategic responsibility: Steven Gauntley

Why are we focused on this?

The quality of practice is fundamental in improving the lives of children and their families in Sandwell. Good practice is fostered by strong leadership which develops a confident and competent workforce who place children at the centre of their work. Effective practice requires shared vision, values and goals supported by a theoretical model alongside a skilled and knowledgeable workforce who benefit from highly effective supervision.

What we will achieve

- Improved frontline practice in social work and early help
- Improved management oversight and supervision to support and improve front line practice
- Effective quality assurance processes which create an environment where practitioners can learn
- Improved staff and management confidence
- Improved multi-agency working in key areas of practice
- Consistent practice which is shaped by practice values and standards

How we will do this

- Develop, agree and implement a practice model, first phase concentrating on 'Doing basic things well', second, introduction of a theoretical, evidenced informed model of outcome focused practice
- Implement a training and support programme for staff
- Develop practical leadership and management programme for social work managers
- Review the current supervision model
- Implementing learning from audit, SCR's, Peer reviews alongside feedback from children and young people

What will good and better look like?

- Support and protection for children is timely, practice is consistently good and effectively reduces vulnerability and risk
- Audits will show increasing quality and timeliness of assessments.
- Multi-agency practice is effective at driving positive outcomes
- Children build positive relationships with their social workers and their experience is understood.
- Reduced caseloads given that children are receiving the right support at the right time

PRIORITY 3 – Practice Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
OR3	Ensure that assessments are regularly updated, and the authors rigorously consider risks and take account of children's histories, wishes and feelings, and diversity, to inform planning and provision of services.	Assessments are required to be of a consistently high quality and address risk rigorously, informed by research, social work methodologies and influenced by the child's voice.	In conjunction with the Principal Social Worker, develop training and development needed to improve the quality and consistency of assessments, particularly in relation to risk.	Sep 18	Principal Social Worker and Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
		Ensure that assessments and plans evidence and inform diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.	Training and action plan to be provided for partner agencies on thresholds, risks and contribution to assessments.	Oct 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance in conjunction with the SSCB		Blue	
		Staff are clear about their accountability in relation to adopting high professional standards	Assessment guidance linked into Sandwell's Trust service standards to be produced and agreed.	Aug 18	Principal Social Worker		Yellow	
			Robust quality assurance performance monitoring, including daily performance reporting, monitoring of review points and understanding of the themes, outcomes and actions from audits.	Apr 18	Performance and Systems Lead Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
			Ensure that performance reporting also includes length of time since last assessment & mechanism for alerts when out of agreed maximum timescales	Aug 18	Performance and Systems Lead		Yellow	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
OR4	Improve the quality, delivery and review of plans across all service areas to meet the needs of children and ensure that they are not subject to drift and delay.	Plans and decisions are reviewed and alternative action is taken where the circumstances for children do not change and the risk of harm or actual harm remains. Plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks.	Review the Liquid Logic Electronic Plan templates	June 18	Business Improvement and Change Manager in conjunction with the service area leads		Yellow	
			Ensure that plans are SMART in their design and drive timely intervention for children and young people and benefit from robust management oversight	July 18	Business Improvement and Change Manager in conjunction with the service area leads		Blue	
			Ensure that plans are shared with children and their families	Sep 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
			Training to be Implemented for all staff for ensure plans are routinely updated and are SMART in their design	Dec 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
C4	Ensure all children in need, children on a child protection plan and looked after children have an up to date plan focussed on outcomes and that children on caseload are visited at the required frequency by social workers.	Authoritative action is taken where change is not secured and the risk to children intensifies or remains. Children and young people experience timely and effective multi-agency help and protection through risk-based assessment, authoritative practice, planning and review that secures change.	Increased capacity within the IRO service will facilitate enhanced monitoring and challenge of plans by IRO's between reviews If appropriate, increase the number of IRO's to manage increases and fluctuation in demand.	July 18	Principal Social Worker and Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
			Plans guidance, linked into Sandwell's Trust service standards, to be produced and agreed	July 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
			Comprehensive review to be taken in relation to the	June 18	Group Head Safeguarding		Yellow	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
		Ensure that staff are clear about their accountability in relation to adopting high professional standards	significant rise in both CP and LAC plans.		and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
		Ensure that plans evidence and inform diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.	Ensure visits to children are routinely monitored for compliance and quality of recording.	Apr 18	Director of Quality and Performance		Yellow	
OR8	Ensure that multi-agency core groups and child in need meetings are held within timescales and drive plans forward.	Children and young people experience timely and effective multi-agency help and protection through risk-based multi-agency planning, authoritative practice, planning and review, to secure safe and effective change.	Implement deep dive audit for plans to be progressed which scrutinises multi-agency practice.	Dec 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Red	
			Develop tailored performance reporting systems which target this area of practice	Aug 18	Performance and Systems Lead		Yellow	
			Put in place a minimum practice standards policy for key areas of practice	June 18	Director of Quality and Assurance		Yellow	
			Implement a training and support programme for staff and partners on practice and planning of key multi-agency activities such as Children in Need meetings, CP conferences and Core Groups	Oct 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Yellow	
			Work with the SSCB in relation to raising practice standards in this area by strengthening multi-agency audit and clear routes for escalation	Nov 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Chair of SSCB multi agency		Blue	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
					auditing sub group			
SIF6	Ensure that case recording, chronologies and genogram are of a good standard, contemporaneous and used to understand the child experience and inform decision making	Ensure that case records evidence and inform diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Ensure that staff are clear about their accountability in relation to adopting high professional standards	Put in place a minimum practice standards policy in relation to improving contemporaneous recording, chronologies and genograms.	July 18	Director of Quality and Performance			
SIF7	Significantly strengthen the role of the LADO in order that risk is responded to in a timely way.	Ensure that the LADO service is fit for purpose and a timely multi-agency response is progressed when potential risks to children are known.	Immediately review the working model, procedures and protocols in order to ascertain if the current model of delivery is fit for purpose.	Aug 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
			Review the current capacity within the LADO role.	Oct 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
			Themed audit of LADO cases to further understand areas of practice that are proving a barrier to responding to risk appropriately.	Nov 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
SIF8	Ensure effective safeguarding arrangements are in place for children and young people at risk of Domestic Violence and people who are deemed to pose a risk to them	Ensure that actions developed at MARAC and MAPPA meetings result in timely and proportionate interventions.	Review multi-agency processes and governance for responding to and action on decisions from domestic violence MARAC and MAPPA meetings.	Oct 18	Front Door Services Group Head Police representative			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
SIF3	Address capacity within IRO caseloads to ensure that they can effectively challenge weak practice or delays in progressing good quality plans.	Independent Reviewing Officers are appropriately skilled and compliant with the IRO handbook in order that they are effective and challenging poor practice and advocating on behalf of the child and young person.	Review capacity and functionality of the IRO service in order that they are able to fulfil the role prescribed in the IRO handbook and manage demand flexibly.	July 18	Director of Quality and Performance			
			Enhanced training to be provided to all IRO's and CP Conference Chairs in relation to strengthening their role in effectively challenging deficits in planning and practice.	Sep 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			

Priority 4 – Children Looked After, Care Leavers and Permanence

Strategic Responsibility: Gerard Jones

Why are we focused on this?

This is a fundamental priority of our plan as we believe that as 'Corporate Parents' we have a duty to make sure that that decisions about our children and young people becoming looked after are based on robust social work practice supported by a rigorous framework which facilitate safe, stable permanent placements which support and drive positive, sustainable outcomes where our children thrive and achieve.

What we will achieve

- Improved Outcomes for children because of strengthened social work practice
- Improved speed and rigour of decision making and legal processes
- Children placed in family type settings and as close to their existing communities as possible
- Improved range of quality and cost-effective placements where children can thrive
- Increased support and rigour for children returning home safely
- Strengthened corporate parenting role

How we will do this

- Audit and review care planning model to ensure that the current mode is effectively addressing risk and timely interventions
- Develop a reunification strategy to ensure that the process is robust
- Training for staff in key areas to improve practice
- Implement a practice standards framework
- Review fostering service and external placement strategy
- Develop and agree a sufficiency needs led strategy
- IRO's to champion and advocate on behalf of children looked after

What will good and better look like?

- Decisions about children and young people becoming looked after are made using high-quality assessments
- Thresholds are clear and consistently applied appropriately
- Children and young people are listened to by social workers who know them well and drive planning
- Adults working with children help them to understand and manage their early childhood experiences
- Children are healthy and achieve
- Children return home when safe with the appropriate levels of support needed
- Children live in stable permanent homes
- Care plans are regularly reviewed to ensure children's developing needs continue to be met

PRIORITY 4 – Children Looked After, Care Leavers & Permanence Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
OR6	Ensure that permanence plans for all children looked after and those for whom adoption is being considered are clear, systematically tracked and monitored to reduce delay.	The care planning model of practice is robust at tracking and monitoring with tenacious oversight and challenge from managers and IRO's. Care plans comprehensively address the needs and experiences of children and young people. They are regularly and independently reviewed.	Audit and review care planning model to ensure that the current model is effectively addressing risk and delivers timely interventions. Rigorously tracking family finding to secure timely permanence	Aug 18	LAC Group Head			
		Children subject to permanency planning receive timely aspirational care planning which promote a permanent stable home life.	Review the tracking and monitoring arrangements for children subject to permanency planning and ensure timely actions drive improvement.	Aug 18	LAC Group Head			
		Strengthen management oversight for LAC processes to ensure that managers are effectively driving case progression.	Implement an approved decision-making governance to include a Gateway Panel and a Permanency Panel. Implement throughput and tracking arrangements to	Sep 18	Care Management Group Heads			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
			demonstrate timeliness in care planning.					
O15	Improve the quality of child permanence reports in order that children and adopters have a full and accurate picture of the child's birth family and history, and understand the reasons for adoption.	100% of permanency reports will be good or better quality in order that both children and adopters fully understand their life experiences.	Support and training for staff, managers and IRO's which promotes a model of robust care planning. Implement a Permanency Quality Assurance Panel to ensure the permanency arrangement (including the paperwork) are robust and timely	Oct 18 June 18	Provider Services Group Head			
OR14	Ensure that timely and good quality life story work is developed for children to help them to understand what has happened in their lives, and that life story books and later life letters are provided at a time when children move to their adoptive family.	All looked after children and young people will benefit from timely life story work, letters which help them understand their experiences as they are prepared for adoption and permanency	Review the process and delivery of Life Story work and later life letters.	Oct 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Support and training for staff, managers and carers which promotes high quality life story work.	Nov 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Utilise the support and influence of the Children Looked After Council to improve meaningful life story work	Nov 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Strengthen QA Processes in this area	Dec 18	Provider Services Group Head			
OR11	Encourage and promote education, employment and training to ensure that care leavers	The number of NEET care leavers will reduce in order that care leavers are equipped with the skills which	Work with the Local Authority, colleges, schools, providers/carers and employers to enable robust support and	Jan 19	LAC Group Head			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
	develop skills to assist in their independence.	assist and promote their independence	opportunities for care leavers who are NEET				Yellow	
			Work with partners to review governance procedures of NEET in order that there is rigorous oversight of this measure.	Nov 18	LAC Group Head		Red	
OR12	Develop links with adult mental health services to ensure that care leavers health needs continue to be met when they move from children's services.	Young people benefit from good multi-agency intervention and planning which address emotional health and wellbeing, Effective transition arrangements are in place for young people moving into adulthood.	Work in partnership with health commissioners and local NHS providers to review mental health needs of care leavers and implement improved access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and wider support	Mar 19	LAC Group Head Health representative Adults transitions service representative		Blue	
OR7	Ensure that 16 and 17-year-old homeless young people gain a full understanding of their options and the benefits of becoming looked after.	Robust joint assessments between housing and children's social care ensure result in a direct offer of support which is understood by the young person.	Analysis of 2017 – 18 cohorts to inform gaps in the service planning.	Aug 18	Front Door Services Group Head		Red	
			Review joint working protocols between social care and housing and other providers and put in place to appropriately assess 16 and 17-year-olds presenting as homeless. Including an information package so that young people are clear about their entitlements	Sep 18	Front Door Services Group Head Housing representative		Yellow	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
			Further develop support and training in order that staff are equipped with the skills to ensure that young people understand their options	Oct 18	Front Door Services Group Head Housing representative			
SIF1	Improve the educational attainment of looked after children supported by detailed and meaningful PEP's.	Children will benefit from high quality meaningful PEP's which improve educational attainment.	Undertake QA activity in relation to supporting a better understanding of the performance/quality of PEP's.	Nov 18	LAC Group Head Head of the Virtual School			
			Work with the virtual head in developing and promoting high quality PEP's	Nov 18	LAC Group Head Head of the Virtual School			
SIF2	Ensure that foster carers are clear about their delegated responsibilities and are furnished with sufficient, timely information about children in order that they can make informed decisions.	Foster carers are clear about their roles and delegated responsibilities and confidently make decisions based on detailed information about the child. 'Foster to Adopt' is considered by all social workers working with and supporting foster carers	The Fostering Service is to review its policies and where appropriate relaunch training to ensure that the Foster Service is compliant with all regulatory standards.	Nov 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			'Foster to adopt' policy to be reviewed and disseminated with a clear focus on increasing the number of 'foster to adopt' carers.	Nov 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Provide additional training to social workers and managers to ensure that they are clear about the importance of sharing key information with carers/providers.	Nov 18	Provider Services Group Head			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
O16	Ensure that the adoption panel meets its quality assurance function by regular feedback and meetings with the agency regarding the quality of social work reports and practice.	The adoption panel is made of experts at the right level of seniority who are able to challenge deficits in practice and confidently able to provide robust challenge and take action when deficits are identified.	The QA framework will be updated to include appropriate QA and audit processes are in place for the adoption panel.	June 18	Provider Services Group Head		Yellow	
			Review the membership of the adoption panel and provide training for members to support them in their QA role.	Sep 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Senior managers to agree the most appropriate ADM and ensure that they are equipped with the skills to fulfil this critical role and provide a robust QA function.	July 18	Provider Services Group Head			
O9	Increase the number of foster carers to meet the varied needs of children looked after.	Children are matched to carers which support them living with siblings and as close to their existing communities as possible	Review if there is an option to develop one or explore block contract arrangement with providers in the region – with linked step down foster carers	Nov 18	Provider Services Group Head		Red	
			Review and develop the current foster care sufficiency strategy and actions being taken to increase the number of foster carers.	July 18	Provider Services Group Head			
O13	Develop the provision of emergency accommodation to prevent care leavers and homeless young people's use of hotels.	Eradicate the use of hotel and B&B accommodation when needing to place a child or young person in emergency accommodation	Review the current provision of emergency accommodation and the escalation process	Sep 18	Provider Services Group Head		Red	
			Review current commissioning arrangements and put	Nov 18	Director of Resources			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
			in place a safe and sustainable alternative to hotel and B&B accommodation.					
SIF4	Review of all external placements and all placements with parents and S20 arrangements to ensure that children are living in homes which are safe and promote the best possible outcomes.	Ensure where possible that children and young people are placed in family type settings and are as close to their existing communities as possible Improved range of quality and cost-effective placements where children can thrive. Increased support and rigour for children returning home safely	Review children who are currently subject to Section 20 to ensure it is used as appropriate and reviewed through a gateway.	July 18	LAC Group Head			
			Senior managers to implement and ensure that robust tracking and monitoring systems are in place for children who are subject to external placements, PWP and subject to S20 arrangements.	July 18	LAC Group Head			
			Develop a reunification strategy to support safe and successful return to family and Kinship carers.	July 18	LAC Group Head			
SIF 5	Review the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Private Fostering arrangements.	Children where possible are placed in family type settings and as close to their existing communities as possible	Review SGO procedures to ensure that these are being considered as a permanent option for children.	July 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Provide further support and training for both IRO's and Social workers re SGO considerations.	Oct 18	Provider Services Group Head			
			Progress a multi-agency private fostering	Oct 18	Provider Services			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
			action plan which seeks to promote and develop the private fostering service.		Group Head alongside SSCB			
			Ensure that Private Fostering arrangements are robust and are a safe option for children and young people.	Oct 18	Provider Services Group Head			

Priority 5 – CSE, Exploitation, Missing and Trafficked

Strategic Responsibility: Gerard Jones

Why are we focused on this?

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse and child abuse is a crime. CSE destroys lives and affects all our communities; and is recognised nationally as one of the most important challenges facing local agencies today. It has a serious long term and lasting impact on every aspect of a child's life including their health, physical and emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, personal safety, relationships and future life opportunities. In Sandwell, we are committed along with our partners to ensure that children are protected from child sexual exploitation and feel safe in their communities.

What we will achieve

- Comprehensive records are held and shared between agencies to help and protect children and young people
- Together with key partners we will take steps to ensure that all children, including those who are excluded from school, are safe and that for those who are missing or often missing there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm

How we will do this

- Review the current CSE strategy and missing protocol
- Consult with key partners such as health and police in order that shared goals, vision and values can be achieved
- Agree and implement a training and development programme for practitioners supporting children and young people vulnerable to CSE, missing and trafficked
- Seek feedback from children and young people in relation to best models of practice
- Consult with and learn from other children's services providers who have a proven track record of success

What will good and better look like?

- Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education and those at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them
- Risks are well understood and minimised
- Local authorities, schools and local police are aware of, and implement in full, the requirements of the statutory guidance for children and young people who are missing

PRIORITY 5 – CSE, Exploitation, Missing and Trafficked Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
OR5	Ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview so that risks are analysed to inform future patterns and activity. Review with the current provider its approach to young people when arranging an interview, to ensure that refusals are kept to a minimum. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.	For those who are missing or often missing there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm	Undertake a themed audit of a sample of return interviews and actions carried out for Missing Children	July 18	Director of Operations Police representative			
		Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education and those at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them.	Review the current recording and performance monitoring of return interviews and ensure that these cover all children and young people who are reported missing. Review the baseline performance and standards of return interviews to ensure they are in line with the practice standards.	July 18	Director of Operations			
		Key partners take steps to ensure that all children, including those who are excluded from school, are safe and that for those who are missing or often missing there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect	Consult with the police and key stakeholders about how information from return interview is used to build intelligence which can be used for disruption activities.	Sep 18	Director of Operations			
			Review current commissioning arrangements in relation to the approach to young people when arranging and completing return interviews. Review the commissioning arrangement for young	Dec 18	Director of Operations			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
		them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.	people who go missing when outside of the borough.					
SIF9	Awareness raising about child sexual exploitation needs a more focused and coordinated approach.	Risks are well understood and minimised. Local authorities, schools and local police are aware of, and implement in full, the requirements of the statutory guidance for children and young people who are missing.	Alongside the SSCB, review CSE training for all staff and partners to promote their awareness of the process and protocol for children and young people who are missing from home, care or education, including robust multi-agency management of risk	Dec 18	Front Door Services Group Head Police representative			
		Partners effectively disrupt adults engaged in CSE	Consult with key partners such as health and police in order that shared goals, vision and values can be achieved	Oct 18	Front Door Services Group Head and Director of Operations			
SIF10	When children have been identified at risk of CSE, actions need to be progressed in a timely manner to ensure that planning is robust and risk addressed.	Comprehensive records are held and shared between agencies to help and protect children and young people. Staff are clear about their accountabilities in relation to adopting high professional standards in relation to supporting children vulnerable to the	CSE risk assessment tool is built into the Early Help Liquid Logic module.	Oct 18	Front Door Services Group Head			
			Put in place a minimum practice standards policy in relation to responding to children vulnerable to CSE, Missing and Trafficked.	June 18	Front Door Services Group Head			
			Ensure that staff are clear about their accountability in relation to adopting high professional standards	Sep 18	Front Door Services Group Head			
			Children experiencing or at risk of CSE receive support from an expert multi-agency team	Sep 18	Front Door Services Group Head in conjunction			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
		risks associated with CSE.			with police and health representatives		Yellow	
			Understand the local issues surrounding broader child exploitation and the strategic response to safeguarding	Sep 18	Front Door Services Group Head in conjunction with police representatives		Yellow	
			MASE arrangements effectively target the most vulnerable to CSE	Sep 18	Front Door Services Group Head in conjunction with police representatives		Red	

Priority 6 – Performance and Quality Assurance

Strategic Responsibility: Steven Gauntley

Why are we focused on this

The children and young people of Sandwell deserve the best quality support and interventions possible. The focus of any children's services must be to deliver high quality services which reduce risk and vulnerability and to offer support interventions which create opportunities for children and young people to thrive. In Sandwell we want to deliver excellent practice which firmly places children at the centre of everything we do. We will use our Quality and Assurance systems and frameworks to create a structure for improvement which enables a shift in culture to drive passion for high quality practice.

What we will achieve

- Develop a culture of improvement which creates opportunities for reflection, learning and improvement
- A system of high quality performance reporting at all levels
- Performance and QA information translating to front line practice
- Consistently good practice which ensures that children and young people experience better outcomes which are timely and aspirational

How we will do this

- Create a culture of high support high challenge
- Strengthen and develop a framework for performance and QA activity with a tenacious focus on learning and improvement
- Develop a 'Beyond Auditing' framework.
- Agree and implement a programme of scrutiny and analysis of performance and QA activity for key stakeholders
- Involve children and young people in QA activity
- Work with partners to understand their performance and QA information
- Review and update procedures which are accessible to workers and support their development

What will good and better look like

- QA and performance activity demonstrates that we are providing consistently good practice which promotes positive outcomes
- The child's voice and experience is clearly heard throughout practice and is driving planning and decision making
- Partners are confident in their roles and work effectively with social care staff
- Workers are highly skilled and knowledgeable which manifests itself in their practice
- Workers and partners are ambitious for children

PRIORITY 6 – Performance and Quality Assurance Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
SIF14	Managers to put in place and embed a framework for continual practice improvement.	Develop a culture of improvement which creates and facilitates a range of opportunities for reflection, learning and improvement.	Learning and development framework to be implemented	Dec 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Red	
			Review the current performance and quality assurance framework to ensure that there is a comprehensive approach to improving practice	June 18	Director of Quality and Performance		Yellow	
			'Beyond Auditing' Framework to be developed which will undertake team based auditing and diagnostics alongside workers and teams	May 18	Improvement Consultant		Green	
			Strengthen the role of the principal social worker whose fundamental role will be to champion and support the development needs of staff	Oct 18	Director of Quality and Performance		Yellow	
			Review and update procedures which are accessible to workers and support their development	Dec 18	Corporate Governance and Strategy Manager		Yellow	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
			Put in place a minimum practice standards policy for key areas of practice	May 18	Director of Quality and Performance		Yellow	
			Promote a culture and system which facilitates a multi-agency approach to scrutinising practice	Dec 18	Chair of SSCB L & D Sub Group		Red	
			Develop systems which involve children and young people in QA activity	Dec 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Red	
			Develop the safeguarding and quality assurance service as the engine which drives practice improvement via the coordination of QA activity, feedback from complaints and feedback from IRO activity	Dec 18	Director of Quality and Performance		Yellow	
			Develop and implement the seven features of practice and seven outcomes, based on findings drawn from the evaluation of Round One of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme.	Sep 18	Principal Social Worker and Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		Red	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
SIF15	Ensure that the wealth of performance data available is supporting in identifying and addressing practice deficits	Implement a system of high quality performance reporting at all levels Ensure that Performance and QA information translates to front line practice and is used as a critical tool in driving practice improvements	Agree an improved programme of regular performance reporting and analysis for key stakeholders to include, front line staff, front line and middle managers, senior managers, the local authority, Trust and Improvement board and SSCB.	July 18	Performance and Systems Lead			
			Provide training and support for managers in navigating and scrutinising performance information which supports in challenging practice deficits.	Dec 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
			Agree and implement a programme of scrutiny and analysis of performance and QA activity for staff and key stakeholders	July 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			

Priority 7 – Partnership

Strategic Responsibility: Tara Malik

Why are we focused on this?

Strong and effective partnerships are critical when transforming and improving children's services. Shared visions and values alongside a joined-up approach to tackling issues is fundamental if partnership approaches are to succeed. Many of the issues that were identified by Ofsted during their inspection involved the effectiveness of partnership working. Therefore, partners will need to commit to working with children's services in making the necessary improvements that seek to drive significant improvements in practice.

What we will achieve

- Agreed shared priorities and strategy across Sandwell's children's services.
- Shared vision, values and goals
- A clear commitment to making the necessary improvements identified within the improvement plan.
- Improved multi-agency understanding, confidence and skills in critical areas of safeguarding
- The co-ordination and sharing of key information and intelligence to facilitate a better understanding of critical issues, e.g. CSE
- Collective investment across services in shared priorities and planning

How we will do this

- Engage key partners and stakeholders in developing a shared culture, vision, values and strategy for the children of Sandwell.
- Work with partners in better understanding thresholds/application to promote a clear understanding of the levels of support and response required
- Agree and implement the required level of support required by partners to drive the improvement plan
- Review/develop a multi-agency training programme that seeks to strengthen safeguarding practices

What will good and better look like?

- Audits evidence rigour in multi-agency working arrangements which significantly reduce risk and vulnerability to children
- The local profile of communities is well understood, targeted support initiatives are deployed by partners when risks emerge
- Increased confidence in local safeguarding policies and procedures
- Thresholds are understood and embedded and children receive the appropriate level of support

PRIORITY 7 – Partnership Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
O2	Work with the Council to support the establishment of a strategic children's partnership across Sandwell to better inform all agencies about the needs of the most vulnerable children, including those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, so that agencies work effectively with these children.	Partners and key stakeholders are engaged and confident in joint working arrangements and protocols	Establish with partners a Children's Strategic Partnership chaired by the Council	Nov 18	Director of Children Services		Blue	
			Multi-agency improvement board to be relaunched and chaired by the CSA	Apr 18	SCT Chief Executive			
			Review of the JSNA and commissioning arrangements in order that strategic partners are informed about the needs of the most vulnerable children in Sandwell and that interventions appropriately target identified areas of need.	Apr 19	Director of Children Services			
			Work with the SSCB in relation to agreeing partnership safeguarding priorities	Sep 18	SCT Chief Executive Chair SSCB		Yellow	
SIF12	Address with partners the issue in relation to threshold application when accessing CAMHS provision resulting	Children and Young people receive timely support from key professionals when concerns are being raised about their emotional wellbeing.	Work in partnership with health commissioners and local NHS providers to review mental health needs of care	Apr 19	Director of Children Services		Blue	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
	delays in accessing therapeutic support.		leavers and implement improved access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and wider support					
SIF13	Work with partners to improve referral information to ensure that it is clear and sufficiently detailed and that Thresholds are understood and firmly embedded.	Partners better understand thresholds/application and support to promote a clear understanding of the levels of support and response required	Work with the SSCB to review the current threshold document and better understand its application, and relaunch with partners.	Sep 18	Group Head Quality Assurance and Safeguarding			
		Improved multi-agency understanding, confidence and skills in critical areas of safeguarding	Agree policy and practice with health partners to address issues in relation to late or absent referrals resulting in delayed interventions.	Sep 18	Front Door Services Group Head in conjunction with the SSCB			

Priority 8 – Voice and Experience of the Child

Strategic Responsibility: Steven Gauntley

Why are we focused on this?

This priority is central to the improvement plan given that the child's voice should thread through all the priorities. The importance of capturing and understanding the child's voice and experience is fundamental in ensuring that children are effectively supported and safeguarded. It is critical that services working with children create an environment of trust to enable them to articulate their views in order that they are instrumental in informing and influencing decision making and planning. Furthermore, feedback from children and young people is essential in shaping services and is a shared value across the partnerships and a central element of practice. By putting children at the heart of everything we do this will facilitate better services, better outcomes and better futures for the children of Sandwell.

What we will achieve

- We will be tenacious at improving arrangements for involving and empowering children and young people across children's services
- Learning from children's complaints and commendations will support us in improving services
- Promote a strong culture of engagement with and feedback from Children and Young people through a range of forums such as children in care councils, strategic boards and directly
- Strengthen the role of young people in Sandwell's partnership arrangements

How we will do this

- Undertake a review led by children and young people in relation to how we can better capture the voice of the child in practice and strategic planning
- As part of the practice training and development programme, provide bespoke training on capturing children's voices and experiences in social work practice
- Develop tools for direct work with children
- Strengthen the role of the IRO in order that they are instrumental in ensuring that the voice of the child is heard
- Strengthen reflective supervision in order that the child is centrally placed

What will good and better look like ?

- Mechanisms which seek to better understand the child's voice and experience inform decision making, planning and strategic thinking
- Learning from complaints supports the improvement of practice and the reshaping of service delivery
- Children are firmly placed at the centre of everyone's work
- Children benefit from a stable workforce which supports workers to build relationships through innovative direct work
- All staff promote a culture of high aspirations and ambition for children
- Increased effective children's participation across all areas of work

PRIORITY 8 - Voice and experience of the Child Action Plan

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
O17	The analysis of complaints should include those made by children and a log should be kept of informal resolutions of issues of concern to children to better inform the local authority of themes and trends.	We will be tenacious at improving arrangements for involving and empowering children and young people across children's services. Learning from children's complaints and commendations will support us in improving services.	The monitoring and tracking of complaints to be reviewed and processes put in place which ensure complaints are appropriately recorded and monitored.	June 18	Director of Strategy and Transformation		Yellow	
			Actions and resolution from children's complaints will be analysed with clear learning outcomes.	July18	Complaints Manager		Yellow	
			Learning from complaints to be discussed at monthly learning and development meetings where learning from QA activity and complaints information informing staff learning and development.	Sep 18	Complaints Manager		Red	
			The complaints team to provide a monthly report to senior managers with analysis on the themes and resolutions to children complaints. This will be	June 18	Complaints Manager		Yellow	

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
			disseminated across all services in order to inform service delivery.					
			Strengthen the role of the IRO to ensure that they are advocating and promoting feedback and challenge supporting children and young people in resolving complaints.	Sep 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
			Mapping exercise to be undertaken to understand how feedback is currently captured across the service.	July 18	Complaints Manager			
			Undertake a review led by children and young people in relation to how we can improve and better capture the voice of the child in practice and strategic planning.	Sep 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
SIF11	Children need to be seen and seen alone during visits and social workers and key professionals to be equipped with the skills to undertake meaningful direct work with children	Ensure that children and young people can participate in and lead their meetings where appropriate and are directly involved in their assessment and	Review the support, research, training and tools available for staff, (particularly ASYE's) in relation to supporting them to deliver high quality direct work with children.	Aug 18	Workforce Development Manager			

Ref	Area of Improvement	Improvement Target	Action	Target Date	By Who	Progress Update (P1) Evidence of Impact (P2)	RAG P1	RAG P2
	and young people and participate in their reviews.	care planning arrangements.	Following the review ensure that there is a robust plan in place to address the training needs of workers undertaking direct work with children	Sept 18	Workforce Development Manager			
IRO Service in conjunction with children and young people to produce a protocol on how they will actively engage children and young people in the CP/LAC review process			Oct 18	Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance				
Ensure that staff working with disabled children are equipped with the skills to effectively communicate with children in innovative ways.			Sep 18	Care Management Group Head				

Part 4 – Additional Information

Appendix 1 - Ofsted Recommendations / Progress of Ofsted Recommendations

Ref	Ofsted Recommendation SIF 2017
OR1	Improve management oversight and decision-making across all services to ensure that needs and risks are fully addressed and that assessments, plans and interventions are appropriate. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O2	Ensure the establishment of a strategic children's partnership across Sandwell to better inform all agencies about the needs of the most vulnerable children, including those who are at risk of sexual exploitation, so that agencies work effectively with these children.
OR3	Ensure that assessments are regularly updated, and the authors rigorously consider risks and take account of children's histories, wishes and feelings, and diversity to inform planning and provision of services. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR4	Improve the quality, delivery and review of plans across all service areas to meet the needs of children and ensure that they are not subject to drift or delay. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR5	Ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview so that risks are analysed to inform future plans and identify wider patterns and activity. Review with the current provider its approach to young people when arranging an interview, to ensure that refusals are kept to a minimum. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR6	Ensure that permanence plans for all children looked after and those for whom adoption is being considered are clear, systematically tracked and monitored in order to reduce delay. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR7	Ensure that 16- and 17-year-old homeless young people gain a full understanding of their options and the benefits of becoming looked after. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR8	Ensure that multi-agency core groups and child in need meetings are held within timescales and drive plans forward. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O9	Increase the number of foster carers to meet the varied needs of children looked after.
O10	Review commissioning documents to ensure that commissioning intentions are fully informed by detailed plans, in order to achieve those intentions.
OR11	Encourage and promote education, employment and training to ensure that care leavers develop skills to assist in their independence. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
OR12	Develop links with adult mental health services to ensure that care leavers' health needs continue to be met when they move from children's services. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O13	Develop the provision of emergency accommodation to prevent care leavers' use of hotels.
OR14	Ensure that timely and good-quality life story work is developed for children to help them to understand what has happened in their lives, and that life story books and later life letters are provided at the time when a child moves to their adoptive family. This was a recommendation at the last inspection.
O15	Improve the quality of child permanence reports in order that children and adopters have a full and accurate picture of the child's birth family and history, and understand the reasons for adoption.
O16	Ensure that the adoption panel meets its quality assurance function by regular feedback and meetings with the agency regarding the quality of social work reports and practice.

O17	The analysis of complaints should include those made by children and a log should be kept of informal resolutions of issues of concern to children to better inform the local authority of themes and trends.
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Children's Commissioner Recommendations

C1	Increase the social care workforce to ensure that caseloads are manageable across the service.
C2	Ensure that there is the required management capacity for appropriate oversight and direction of casework and that all staff have supervision at the required frequency.
C3	Put in a sustainable solution to the front door to ensure that children and families receive timely assessments to the required quality.
C4	Ensure all children in need, children on a child protection plan and looked after children have an up to date plan focussed on outcomes and that children on caseload are visited at the required frequency by social workers.
C5	Address the deficits in the provision of computer equipment, business support and accommodation so that social workers are appropriately supported in high quality practice (Completed therefore no further actions required)
C6	Put in place effective communication systems which connect senior management with practice and ensure that staff concerns are swiftly addressed.
C7	Strengthen the approach to attraction, recruitment and retention to make Sandwell Council an employer of choice within the region and reduce the over dependence on agency and newly qualified staff.

Single Inspection Framework 2017 – Service Recommendations

S1	Improve the educational attainment of looked after children supported by detailed and meaningful PEP's.
S2	Ensure that fosters carers are clear about their delegated responsibilities and are furnished with sufficient, timely information about children in order that they can make informed decisions.
S3	Address capacity within IRO caseloads to ensure that they can effectively challenge weak practice or delays in progressing good quality plans.
S4	Review of all external placements and all placements with parents, S20 arrangements to ensure that children are living in homes which are safe and promote the best possible outcomes.
S5	Review the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Private Fostering Arrangements.
S6	Ensure that case recording, chronologies and genogram are of a good standard, contemporaneous and used to understand the child experience and inform decision making
S7	Significantly strengthen the role of the LADO role in order that risk is responded to in a timely way.
S8	Ensure that actions developed at MARAC and MAPPA meetings result in timely and proportionate interventions.
S9	Awareness raising about child sexual exploitation needs a more focused and coordinated approach.
S10	When children have been identified at risk of CSE, actions need to be progressed in a timely manner to ensure that planning is robust and risk addressed.
S11	Children need to be seen and seen alone during visits and social workers to be equipped with the skills to undertake meaningful direct work with children and young people.
S12	Address with partners the issue in relation to threshold application when accessing CAMHS provision resulting delays in accessing therapeutic support.
S13	Work with partners to improve referral information to ensure that it is clear and sufficiently detailed.
S14	Managers to put in place and embed a framework for continual practice improvement.
S15	Ensure that the wealth of performance data available is supporting in identifying and addressing practice deficits

Part 5 – Challenge Log

Recommendation Reference	Description of Challenge Faced	Impact	Agreed Resolution and Outcome	Signed off