

Sandwell Children and Families Strategic Partnership

Sandwell's Children and
Families Strategy 2025 - 2028



Foreword

On behalf of the Children and Families Strategic Partnership, we are delighted to introduce Sandwell's Children and Families Strategy, which represents our commitment to ensuring that every child and young person in Sandwell has the opportunity to thrive, reach their full potential, and enjoy a happy and healthy childhood.

This strategy is not just a set of words on paper; it is a blueprint for action, shaped by listening to the voices of children, young people, families, and professionals across our community. It outlines our key priorities and the steps we will take together to create a place where all our young people feel safe, supported, and empowered.

We believe that every child deserves the best start in life, access to excellent education, and the support they need to overcome challenges. Focusing on strengthening families, promoting well-being, ensuring high-quality learning opportunities, and providing targeted support for those who need it most.

Over the coming years, we will work with our partners to deliver on the ambitions set out in this strategy. We encourage you to read it, understand our shared goals, and join us in making Sandwell a truly great place for all our children and young people to grow and flourish. Your involvement and feedback are invaluable as we embark on this important journey together.



Councillor Jalal Uddin

Cabinet Member for
Children and Families



Sally Giles

Executive Director of Children
and Education Sandwell Council
Co-Chair of Children and Families
Strategic Partnership Board



Kim Madill

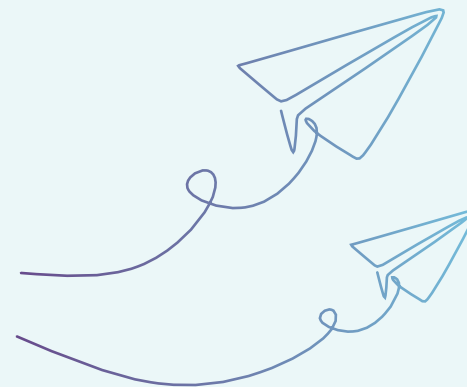
Chief Superintendent, Local Policing
Commander Sandwell – West Midlands Police
Co-Chair of Children and Families
Strategic Partnership Board

Introduction

This strategy outlines our commitment to ensuring all children and young people in Sandwell have the opportunity to thrive.

Developed in collaboration with children, young people, families, and key partners, it sets out our shared vision for a future where every child is safe, healthy as possible, happy, and achieves their full potential. It prioritises early intervention, strong family support, and accessible, high-quality services. By working together, we aim to create a nurturing environment where children and young people can flourish and contribute positively to their local communities.

Sandwell has a population of just under **330,000** and is the **34th biggest local authority** in England. The population grew by **11%** between 2011 and 2021, **faster than the England average**. Sandwell has a relatively young and diverse population, with over **40%** of residents **under 30** and nearly **40%** from **ethnic minority backgrounds**.



We are proud of our **heritage** and the **diversity** within our communities and **committed** to creating a culture of **respect** and **inclusion** for all children and young people by **upholding their rights** and placing them at the heart of the shared public realm.





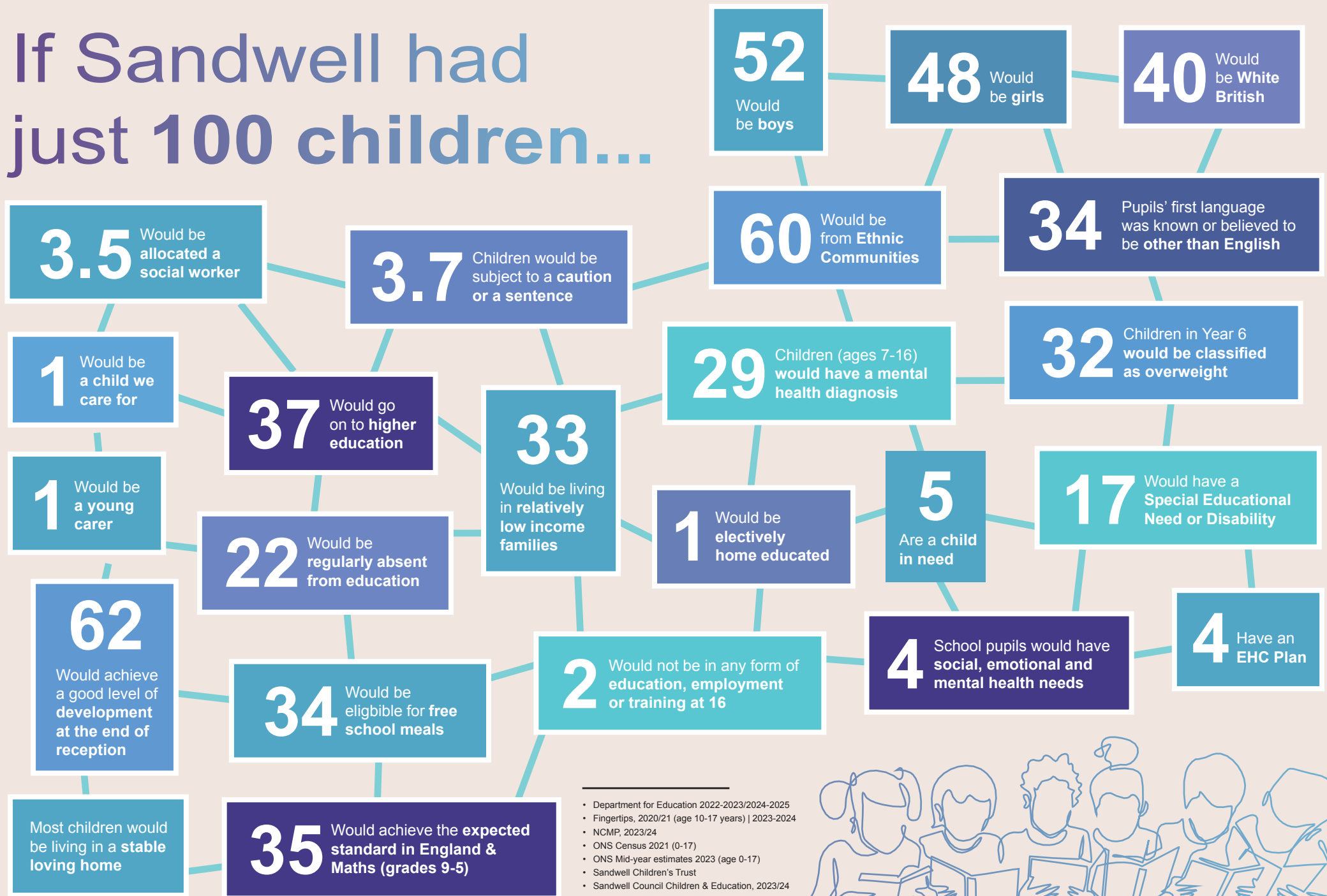
With a population of 86,835 children and young people under the age of 18 account for just over 25% of the resident population.

Sandwell faces significant challenges as one of the most deprived areas in the country. Many children and young people live in poverty, experiencing poor health outcomes and barriers to education and whilst the national picture identifies key areas for improving outcomes, our children and young people are telling us that growing up in Sandwell can be challenging. Their perception of Sandwell as a place remains negative, attributed to levels of crime and deprivation and the ongoing cost of living crisis impacting on them and their families' daily lives.

These are complex and interrelated issues that require a holistic and collaborative approach and a greater emphasis on the positives and ensuring services are responsive to the needs of the future generation.

We know that to keep children safe and supporting them to thrive and flourish is not the job of one organisation but can only be achieved by working together with children, young people, their families, communities and committed partners.

If Sandwell had just 100 children...



- Department for Education 2022-2023/2024-2025
- Fingertips, 2020/21 (age 10-17 years) | 2023-2024
- NCMP, 2023/24
- ONS Census 2021 (0-17)
- ONS Mid-year estimates 2023 (age 0-17)
- Sandwell Children's Trust
- Sandwell Council Children & Education, 2023/24



Our Vision

We are committed to creating a child-friendly Sandwell where children, young people and families feel safe, heard, and supported. Through community-driven support and partnerships, we will help families create safe, nurturing environments which inspire positive change and foster a love for learning.

Our aim is to make Sandwell a place where all children can thrive and access opportunities to achieve their full potential.



Our Approach

Sandwell Children and Families Strategic Partnership brings together senior representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies providing services for children, young people, and families.

Sandwell Children's Trust, Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, Black Country Integrated Care Board, and West Midlands Police all have a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people through a whole system approach.

Our Children and Families Strategy is an overarching strategy and the mechanism for delivering Sandwell's commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. It is informed by current legislation and statutory guidance and reflects the forthcoming national reform agendas across education, children's social care and health.

It has four priority areas that partners have agreed to work on collectively over the next three years and these are underpinned by four distinct, yet aligned delivery plans that will deliver on our intentions.

Family Help

Sandwell Family Help Plan

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Sandwell Local Area Partnership Plan for SEND and Alternative Provision

Early Years

Sandwell Early Years Plan

Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Emotional Health and Wellbeing Plan

Our strategy recognises that children and young people are central to many strategies, not those focused solely on them; they're a key part of both Council and partnership initiatives.

While education isn't one of the four main priority areas within the Children and Families Strategy, it will not be overlooked. The Children and Families Strategic Partnership will need to take account of the emerging Education Strategy, which will look to directly address the challenges which include attendance and attainment. Further strategies that contribute to improving outcomes include the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Community Safety Strategy and the Knife Crime and Serious Violence strategies., our Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Strengthening Skills and Employment Strategy 2024 – 2030.

Our strategy incorporates the Healthy Child Programme, a national framework for prevention and early intervention aimed at improving child health and wellbeing. The schedule of interventions within the Healthy Child Programme consolidates evidence, guidance, information, and resources to facilitate local preventive and early intervention initiatives. These include health promotion, early childhood development, and addressing health disparities among children and young people living in the borough.



Our strategy is underpinned by a shared approach to working with families within a trauma-informed way. Our ST*R practice model focuses on building trusted relationships with families, understanding the trauma they may have experienced and the impact this has had. Enabling them to confidently seek support when needed to achieve lasting, positive change and ensure more children and young people remain safely at home within their own families and communities.

Our commitment as a Child Friendly Borough aligns with our strategy, aiming to respect and promote children's rights according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will engage with children, young people, and their families, listen to their voices, and enable them to shape their future. This involves building on existing work with SHAPE, Voices of Sandwell (VoS), Forum for Independent Young People (FIYA), School Councils and children's forums and strengthening meaningful collaboration through our Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy.

¹ ST*R – Strengths based, Trauma informed and Relational

Priorities



Family Help

Our Sandwell Family Help Board vision is to develop integrated services for children and transform the way we help families in their communities at the earliest opportunity. With bespoke, community driven multi-agency services, we want to empower families, enabling them to improve their own lives underpinned by our six agreed shared priorities.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES AT THE HEART OF DRIVING CHANGE



Focusing on co-designing services that reflect local and individual needs.

INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY



Focusing on an inclusive and culturally sensitive approach; tackling structural inequalities and disproportionality; and families feeling confident in the services we deliver.

COMMUNITY FIRST



Focusing on encouraging community-led initiatives, so families are empowered to drive innovation that makes a difference to their lives.

WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH



Focusing on increasing interdependencies so there's swift access to a range of local support that families trust.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION AT EVERY LEVEL



Focusing on meeting the challenge of collectively intervening with families as early as possible to prevent needs increasing. When statutory services are required, we prevent the circumstances escalating wherever possible.

LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE



Focusing on enabling an accountable workforce to embrace the culture and practice change required for systemic change to succeed.

Through Sandwell's Family Help System these priorities aim to ensure the best outcomes for all our children, young people and families especially those facing challenges and when we get it right it will mean:

- Families will have access to a Universal and Community offer through Family Hubs in partnership with wider agencies delivering services that help make the transition to parenthood as smooth as possible.
- Families will benefit from an Additional Family Help multi-agency workforce committed to supporting families at the earliest possible stage, helping to resolve issues before they escalate.
- Early intervention will prevent crises from escalating, resulting in safer, healthier households. Families will feel heard, empowered, and equipped with the resources they need to build resilience and create lasting, positive change.

- Families facing complex challenges, such as severe mental health issues, substance misuse, or entrenched patterns of neglect, will experience timely and tailored support through our Specialist Family Help offer.
- Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams will respond swiftly, taking a joint approach to information sharing, decision-making, and risk management, involving skilled professionals who understand the unique dynamics of each family.
- Parents, carers, children and young people will be active partners in shaping all Family Help services that truly reflect their needs, supported and guided by the most suitable professionals.



Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Our Sandwell Local Area Partnership's vision for inclusion is based on the principle of providing the very best experiences leading to the best outcomes for all Sandwell children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and everyone who attends alternative education provision centred on six key priorities developed in collaboration with partners, parents, carers, and young people.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND TIMELY SUPPORT



Focusing on projects relating to early years, education health care (EHC) plans and timely assessment.

UNDERSTANDING AND INCORPORATING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, PARENTS AND CARERS



Focusing on projects that strengthen our approach to co-production.

IMPROVING DATA AND PLANNING FOR LOCAL PLACEMENTS



Focusing on projects that increase local sufficiency and joint commissioning.

EXPANDING SHORT BREAKS AND COMMUNICATION



Focusing on projects that broaden provision, enhance communication and improve the customer journey.

DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM



Focusing on projects which enable children and young people to remain within mainstream schools, close to their friends, families and communities wherever possible.

ENHANCING PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH ROBUST GOVERNANCE

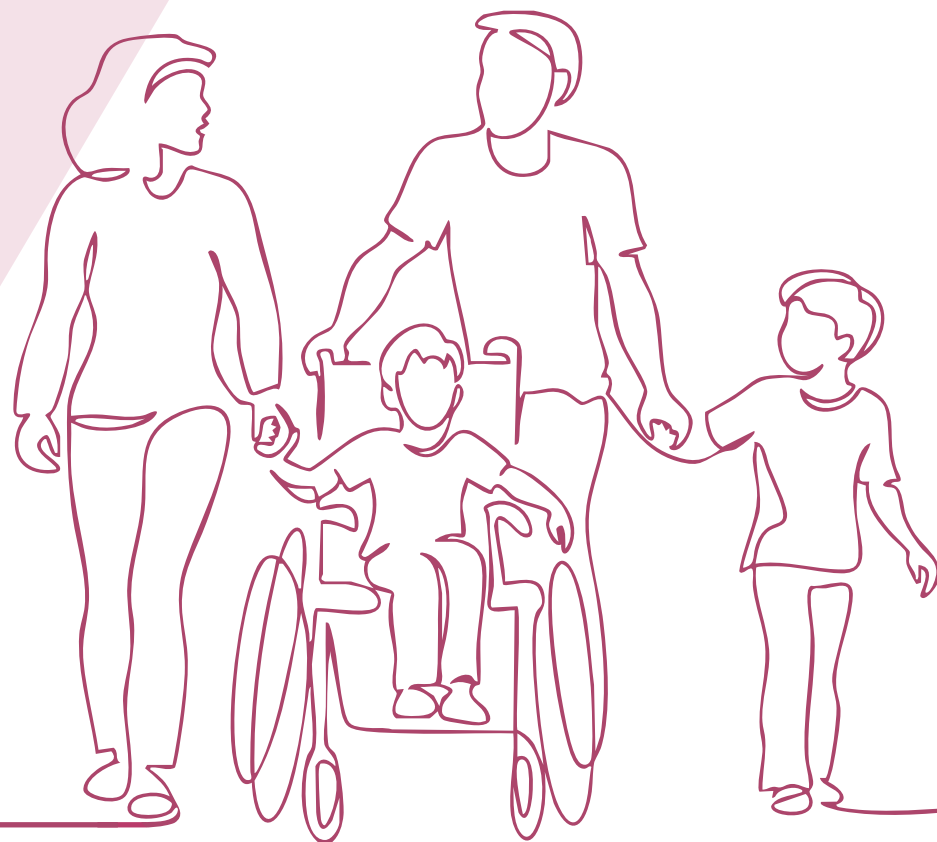


Focusing on projects that address data, governance and self-assessment.

These priorities aim to ensure the best outcomes for SEND children and young people and when we get it right it will mean:

- Children receive timely and adequate support, are placed in suitable educational settings and experience smooth transitions into formal education, with EHC assessments completed on time, reviewed annually, and resulting in high-quality plans that effectively prepare them for adulthood.
- Families and young people with SEND are actively involved in decision-making processes, ensuring their views are heard and acted upon to improve outcomes.
- Collaborative planning will have improved health, social care, and educational outcomes and there will be appropriate local support minimising out-of-borough placements unless necessary.
- Our SEND Local Offer will include accessible and helpful information for families and supports parent carers' wellbeing. Children and young people will have access to a range of activities locally and families will benefit from equitable, high-quality short breaks.
- Parents, carers, children, and young people in Sandwell will benefit from a clear SEND process. Local schools will have better access to training and will be working together to make fair decisions, ensuring resources are used where needed and offering more placement options within the community.

- The Preparing for Adulthood offer will support all young people in transitioning smoothly into adulthood with access to education, employment, independent living, and community participation. The decision-making process for children with complex needs will provide timely support to families through improved governance and information sharing and there will be a suitable education offer to all pupils needing alternative provision.
- The SEND Local Area Partnership plan will be successful in providing tailored support to children and young people while ensuring positive experiences for families and continually assessing and improving its impact in Sandwell through robust governance and self-assessment.



Early Years

Our Sandwell Early Years Partnership vision is to deliver an effective early year's system that empowers children and families to reach their full potential, reflecting a holistic approach to early childhood development and recognising the importance of coordinated, high-quality support systems that address both educational and family needs. Our strategy has five key priorities delivered within a multi- agency landscape.

DEVELOPING A COORDINATED EARLY YEARS SYSTEM



Focusing on formal school readiness, effective transitions, early identification of additional needs and maintaining high quality early years provision.

ACCESS TO POSITIVE EARLY YEARS EXPERIENCES IN OUR CHILDHOOD SETTINGS



Focusing on those at risk of negative outcomes and closing the gap between Sandwell's early years outcomes and the national average.

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE CHILDCARE



Focusing on ensuring sufficiency of high-quality childcare places which support both children's education and parents work needs.

FLOURISHING FAMILIES



Focusing on supporting a nurturing home learning environment, which complements formal early years education to enable families to reach their fullest potential.

A COLLABORATIVE MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH



Focusing on partnerships which connect families to the appropriate services at the right time, facilitating timely support with access to a network of resources.



These priorities aim to ensure the best outcomes for our early years children and lay a strong foundation for long term educational and health success and when we get it right it will mean:



- Children will benefit from a high-quality, skilled Early Years workforce and be equipped with the appropriate skills and abilities to support them into a formal school setting.
- All children in Sandwell will have access to good or outstanding and sustainable Early Years provision.
- Young children will be safe from harm, and benefit from a workforce which will know how to protect them and there will be timely and accurate referrals for young children to all support services, ensuring their health and happiness.
- Children will benefit from confident, informed parents who are knowledgeable about their children's development, aware of how they can support their learning, and knowing where to go for help if needed with all adults having high aspirations for our youngest children.
- At least 75% of children achieve a good level of development by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Children with additional needs are identified as early as possible and the appropriate assessments are undertaken and support provided.

Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Our vision is that every child and young person in Sandwell has access to timely, sensitive and effective emotional wellbeing and mental health support, enabling them to flourish, build resilience, and reach their full potential. We strive for a community where mental health is understood, stigma is eradicated and where every child, young person, caregiver and professional feels empowered to seek help and thrive, with five key priorities driving change.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SERVICES



Focusing on enhancing service uptake among our most vulnerable populations, further developing inclusive services, and removing barriers to service access.

MULTI-AGENCY AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE



Focusing on emotional wellbeing and mental health workforce development programs to provide professionals with the expertise, confidence, and skills necessary to effectively support children, young people, and families.

ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION



Focusing on creating clear and accessible multi-channel communication strategies and multi-agency collaborations to effectively convey information and provide timely guidance.

STRENGTHENING CO-PRODUCTION



Focusing on the co-design and delivery of mental health services with children, young people and families ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met.

SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIPS



Focusing on promoting whole-school approaches to wellbeing, building resilience, and early identification of need and timely interventions.



These priorities aim to enhance our emotional wellbeing and mental health offer and improve outcomes for all children, young people and families and when we get it right it will mean:

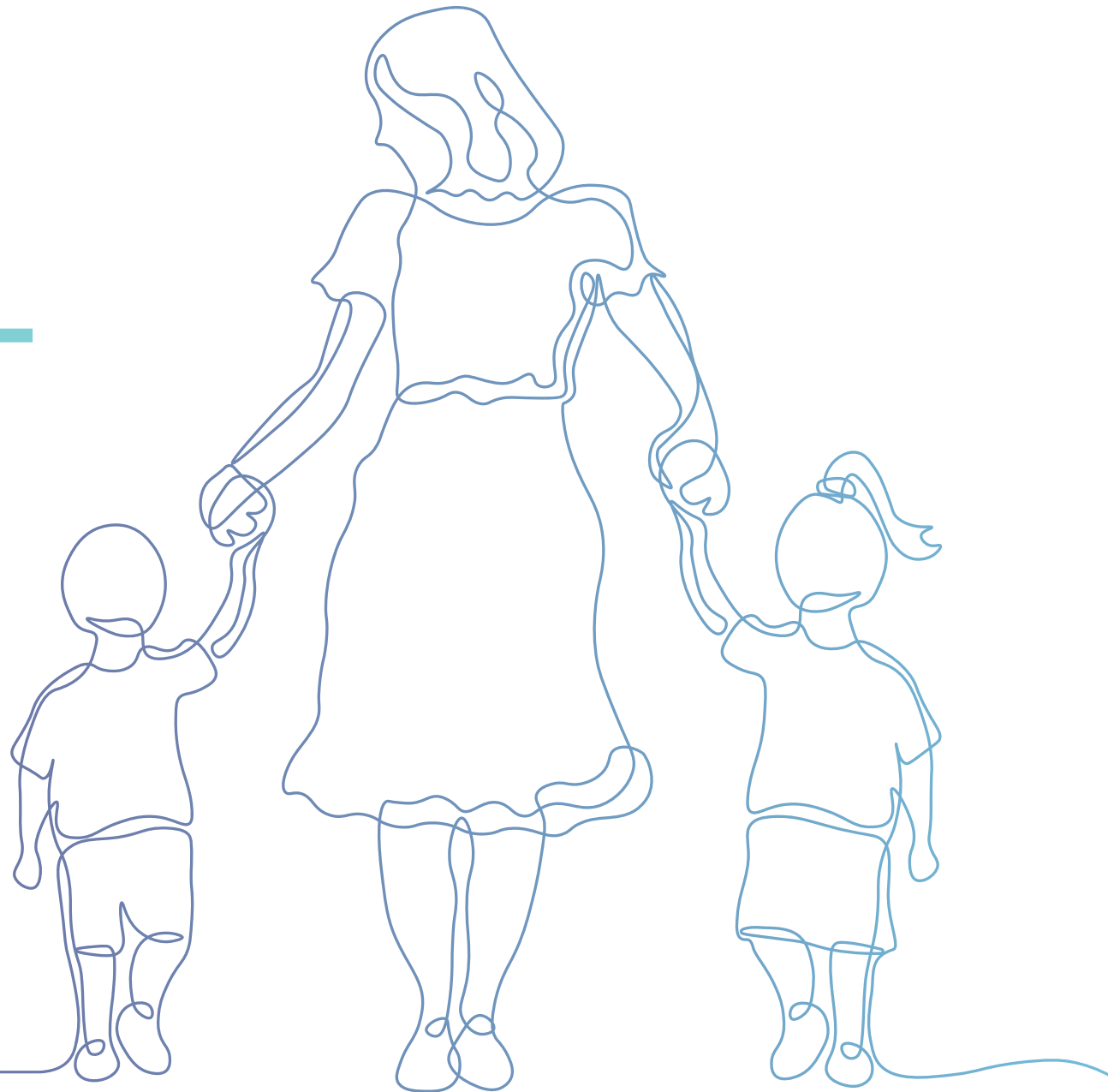
- Vulnerable groups will experience better mental health outcomes through timely and effective access to services.
- There will be clear, comprehensive, and up-to-date information available on emotional well-being and mental health provision, and children, young people, parents, carers, and professionals will know how and where to access the support locally.
- A framework will support schools in integrating emotional wellbeing and mental health into the school community, giving children, young people, and professionals the skills to ask for help at the earliest time.
- A programme of emotional wellbeing and mental health training across the multi agency workforce development programmes will be available that equips professionals with the awareness, knowledge, and skills and confidence needed to better support children, young people and families.
- Engagement with children, young people, and families will be maintained with established mechanisms to support co-produced, consultation and participation with children and young people's views utilised to develop and enhance services.



Outcomes Framework

Our aim as a partnership is to create a supportive environment where every child can thrive and reach their full potential .

In order to achieve this, we have established a shared outcomes framework working across our partnership and Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership, designed to align agencies and stakeholders towards an agreed set of common goals and metrics through clear benchmarks and collaborative strategies. Facilitating a unified effort to foster positive outcomes and addressing the diverse needs of children and young people, promoting equity and measuring progress through regular monitoring, ensuring transparent reporting across the children's system.



Children and young people are supported to achieve positive health outcomes and reach their developmental goals.



- Children are ready for formal school
- There is enough high quality early years places for families through the implementation of the extended entitlements offer and wraparound programme
- Children, and young people are safe, loved, and cared for and when neglect is identified effective interventions are accessible to support them to reach their full potential.

Children and young people are supported by quality inclusive education and early years provision



- All children in Sandwell have access to high quality early years and education provision.
- Educational attainment and acceptable levels of progress in key stage results are consistently achieved and the attainment gap has been effectively closed.
- Children and young people with SEND needs experience smooth transitions into formal education with access to education provision that meets their needs.
- Local schools work together to make fair decisions, ensuring resources are used where needed and offering more placement options within the community.

Children, young people and families are supported by services that promote their physical, emotional wellbeing and mental health.



- Children, young people, and families understand and are able to manage their emotional wellbeing and mental health more effectively.
- Children and young people have access to early intervention and preventative emotional wellbeing and mental health services and resources.

Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need



- Bespoke support is accessible through the Thriving Families Service which enables families to stay together.
- The Family Help Lead Practitioner role will be embedded within a multi-agency context and collaborative help is identified and actioned at the earliest opportunity

Children and young people are supported by their family network



- Families have access to a family hub offering universal services in their own community that can meet their needs.
- Family Group Conferences are held early to help families come together to support a family plan to address any vulnerabilities
- Families are knowledgeable about their children's development, how they can support their learning and where to go for help if they need it.
- Families, children and young people and professionals know of the emotional wellbeing and mental health community services and resources that are available and where to go for help if they need it.
- The Edge of Care Service and parenting support offered via family hubs is used by families and evidence positive outcomes.

Children are supported in a timely manner by a multi-agency children's system that is responsive to need.



- Schools feel confident and have the local knowledge to intervene and support families at the earliest opportunity with the right preventative measures.
- The Family Help Lead Practitioner role will be embedded within a multi-agency context and collaborative help is identified and actioned at the earliest opportunity
- Children and families that need our help, will receive the right help from the right service at the right time.
- Services are structured in such a manner to minimise disruption for children and families

Children, young people, and families are supported to make good choices and minimise risk-taking behaviours.



- Young people at risk of or being drawn into criminality have access to targeted interventions reducing the harm to them, their families and communities.

Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes



- Children are supported to live in safe, loving and stable homes in their own communities
- More children and young people attend school regularly and where persistent school absence and exclusions are identified agencies work together to address barriers.
- Children, young people and families are supported by a skilled workforce, who are confident in identifying all forms of neglect and action appropriate and proportionate intervention at the earliest opportunity.
- Young people who are exploited or experiencing harm outside the home are safeguarded in their own community and receive access to interventions addressing trauma at the earliest opportunity.
- Children and young people at risk of exploitation or harm outside the home are supported within the family help space avoiding progression to statutory services.

Families and young people are supported into education and training to improve employability and financial stability.



- Parents have access to affordable, high quality, inclusive early years provision and childcare which supports both children's education and parents work needs.
- Preparation for Adulthood pathways are in place which support timely and effective transition planning for young people with SEND.

Governance

Children and Families Strategic Partnership Governance

The Children and Families Strategic Partnership as the accountable body will oversee the implementation of this strategy within the four priority areas, reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

A review of existing partnerships and governance arrangements has been undertaken resulting in a series of workstreams who will take responsibility for development of delivery plans and actions specified within the strategy. Progress will be evaluated quarterly to inform a yearly strategy review against our shared outcomes framework ensuring partners remain accountable for improving outcomes for children and young people.



A special thank you

We would like to acknowledge everyone who contributed to the development of this strategy and who will now implement actions at a boroughwide level to benefit Sandwell's children, young people, and families.



