



Sandwell

Children's Trust

Annual Review

2024-2025



sandwellchildrenstrust.org

Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction 7	
Section (a) The Improvement Plan	9
Section (b) The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year	16
Section (c) The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year	29
Section (d) The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections	33
Section (e) The Trust's Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year	38
Section (f) Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year	55
Section (f) Care Experienced Young People	56
Section (g) The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year	56
Section (h) Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure	56
Section (i) Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year	57
Section (j) The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)	58
Section (k) Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time	59

Foreword

Sandwell Children's Trust was created in 2018 with the clear purpose of improving the lives of children and young people. This ambition is shared by the Sandwell partnership, particularly our strategic partners Sandwell Council, with whom the Trust has a contract to deliver social care services to children, young people, and families.

This contract review document outlines the steps we have taken to deliver these improvements and the Trust's performance against key performance indicators. It is a detailed document that should be considered alongside the performance data in the appendices.

The Annual Review provides an opportunity to reflect on another year of progress and accomplishments for the Trust, amid ongoing financial challenges in the public sector and a placement market facing imminent crisis.

Our practice continues to improve, evidenced by practice reviews and observations. Social Workers benefit from comprehensive training, good supervision, and are encouraged to participate in reflective sessions and Practitioner Forums, which are well attended and foster mutual support and development. Over the last 12 months, we have seen a steady improvement in good practice. This trend continues and notable progress has been observed in several key areas which include improved decision-making processes through our Integrated Front Door; good quality assessments and plans for children, leading to more timely and targeted interventions; and improved grip and management oversight within Child Protection and Public Law Outline

We are committed to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion and to delivering the right services for our diverse community. We also celebrate diversity by encouraging staff to bring their whole selves to work and share their stories and experiences. Our ethos is brought to life daily through the words and actions of our staff, making us better equipped to support our families.

The Sandwell Deal, funded by the Council, and a thriving Social Worker Academy help attract and retain staff, fostering careers within the Trust. Our approach is evident in that we have become an 'employer of choice' across the Black Country and beyond.

The Trust is well positioned regarding the national reforms with strong revised governance arrangements in place across the partnership. There is an agreed strategic plan and statement of intent which outlines Sandwell's Family Help system, reflective of the Families First Partnership Programme. Recruitment is underway for key roles, for

example, a Programme Lead, with additional operational capacity being created to coordinate and drive forward the plan. In August 2025, the Trust will also be undertaking a pilot in one town to test out new ways of working and help inform our operating model.

We thank staff, leaders, and partners from across Sandwell for their contributions to the progress made since the creation of Sandwell Children’s Trust and look forward to continuing to work together to further improve our services.



Graham Archer
Chair
Sandwell Children’s Trust



Emma Taylor
Chief Executive
Sandwell Children’s Trust

Executive Summary

Creation of the Trust

The Trust was created following the Government’s Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996), in 2016, to set up a new arrangement in the form of a Children’s Trust to deliver children’s social care services. The statutory direction was issued in response to a long period of inadequate provision of children’s social care

services delivered by the council. The Statutory Direction set out the requirement to establish a new and distinct legal entity to provide children's social care services in Sandwell on behalf of the council. The Trust has day-to-day operational independence in the management and delivery of these services and is managed by a board of non-executive and executive directors. The council commissions the Trust to deliver statutory children's social care and targeted services, as specified in the Service Delivery Contract.

The Trust commenced operations on the 1 April 2018 with day-to-day operational management overseen by the Executive Management Team, who are accountable to the Trust Board.

The Trust Board

Chaired by Graham Archer, the Trust Board is both supportive and challenging. The Board is complemented by 4 committees: Finance and Infrastructure, Workforce, Remuneration and Audit and Risk, each focussing on key matters that impact on the day to day running of the Trust. There is a strong sense of the ambition for children amongst all members and there is good oversight of Trust activity, with regular, detailed reports that cover all aspects of the Trust, e.g. workforce, practice and performance, finance. The Chair is well sighted on strategic and relevant operational matters and key decisions are made swiftly after thorough scrutiny. The Chair regularly provides written reports to the Parliamentary Under- Secretary for Children on the Trust's performance and progress adding a further element of scrutiny and challenge.

Governance

Comprehensive governance arrangements are in place. The Trust and council officers meet at least monthly at the Operational Partnership Board (OPB), to consider performance and operational matters. The OPB is chaired by the Trust Chief Executive.

A Strategic Partnership Board (SPB) also meets quarterly to consider any strategic matters relating to the Service Delivery Contract. The SPB is chaired by SMBC's Chief Executive.

Living our purpose and ethos

To enable and support the Trust's purpose of improving the lives of children and young people, staff from across the Trust have collaborated to articulate and embed our ethos which sets out the ways in which we achieve this, with specific focus on our children and families, ourselves and partners.

Our Ethos

Children and families

- We have high aspirations for our children; we make a difference and change children's lives for the better.
- We place children at the heart of everything we do.
- We keep families safe, keeping them together where possible.
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs.
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family.
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand.
- We celebrate our children and enable them to smile, laugh, play, and succeed.

Ourselves and our partners

- We support and look after each other.
- We make meaningful connections and collaborate effectively with the wider Sandwell family.
- We share a common understanding of our responsibilities.
- We encourage each other to learn, develop and reflect.
- We embrace diversity and celebrate each other's differences.
- We promote the positives - we are advocates for the Trust.

Introduction

The Annual Review is a formal requirement of the Trust's contract with the council. The aim of the review is to look back over the previous 12 months and understand how far we have achieved our goals. The review is the first strategic document of the year, informing our business plan and our improvement plan.

The Service Delivery Contract allows for the Trust to be 'relieved of its obligations to provide its services as a result of a "Relief Event'. A Relief Event is an event such as a fire, storm, accidental loss or damage to the Trust premises, power failure, or the failure by the council to fulfil the council dependencies.

Schedule 3 of the Service Delivery Contract outlines the matters that are to be reported on as part of the Annual Review. These are addressed in the following sections:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Section (a) | The Improvement Plan |
| Section (b) | Performance of Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year |
| Section (c) | The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year |
| Section (d) | The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections |
| Section (e) | Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year |
| Section (f) | Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year |
| Section (g) | The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year |
| Section (h) | Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure |
| Section (i) | Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year |
| Section (j) | The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance) |
| Section (k) | Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time |

Overview of Sandwell and our children

Sandwell is an urban area in the centre of the West Midlands, made up of six towns. It ranks as the 12th most deprived area in the country for income deprivation that affects children, with deprivation spread across the borough.

Sandwell has an estimated population of 344,210, which has risen year on year since the 2011 census. 86,835 children and young people under the age of 18 live in Sandwell. This is 25.2% of the total population in the area. There has been a 14.98% increase in the number of children living in Sandwell since 2011, that has required the creation of 5,300 new primary school places and 3,915 secondary places.



Sandwell is a diverse borough with 52.1% White British (74.4% England) and 47.9% of the total population from black and minoritised ethnic groups (25.6% England). Children from minoritised ethnic groups account for 60.3% (33.2% England) of children aged 0-17, with 39.7% White British (66.8% England). The largest minoritised ethnic groups of children are of Indian (10,540) and Pakistani origin (8,232).

The number of children entitled to free school meals has increased by almost a third since March 2020 to 33.2% with 20,209 children currently in receipt of a free school meal. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary schools is 32.4% (the national average is 20.9%); in secondary schools it is 29.2% (the national average is 17.2%). Over 3,100 children are subject to an Education, Health and Care Plan.

As of 31 March 2025, there were 816 children we care for, with 353 children subject to a Child Protection Plan, 677 Children in Need, 546 children open to Strengthening Families and 390 Care Experienced young people aged 18-25.

The rate per 10,000 of children we care for has stabilised over the last 12 months and currently stands at 94, below statistical neighbour average (95.2 per 10,000). The rate of children per 10,000 on a Children Protection Plan has decreased from 453 over the previous 12 months.

Section (a)

The Improvement Plan

May 2022 was a significant turning point for the Trust when Children's Services were graded 'Requires Improvement' to be good in all areas. Following this, in December 2022, Adoption services were graded good overall; and more recently, in October 2024 Fostering Services retained good overall in its inspection. Youth Justices services are good with an inspection due in 2025.

The ambition children and young people in Sandwell is strong. The key purpose of the Trust is to improve children's lives, and our embedded ethos provides a strong foundation for service and practice development. Our ethos enables a positive and dynamic environment where all our staff know they are here to help children and families, irrespective of their role.

Governance arrangements are well established and embedded with the Trust Board overseeing all Trust activity. It is both supportive and challenging with a detailed level of scrutiny. There are high expectations and strong oversight of activity with regular, detailed reports on all aspects of the Trust and a relentless focus on improving children's outcomes. The Chair is well sighted on strategic and relevant operational matters and swift decisions are made after thorough scrutiny and challenge.

There is a strong collaborative relationship between the Trust and Council. Monthly operational partnership meetings and quarterly strategic partnership meetings enable regular and appropriate oversight and challenge across both organisations, helped through an agreed set of performance indicators that are tracked monthly.

Children are benefiting from a significantly stronger Children and Families Strategic Partnership and Sandwell Childrens Safeguarding Partnership, with the Executive Group overseeing strategic developments. Priorities are clear, reflecting where we need to focus improvement activity, for example, neglect. A new partnership neglect strategy was launched earlier this year, and a strategic subgroup is ensuring a more consistent approach to identifying and responding to neglect across the partnership. There is also better oversight of other priorities, for example, harm outside the home, our integrated front door and ST*R. With stronger governance arrangements in place, a whole system approach is now being taken to develop a Family Help System in Sandwell, underpinned by a shared vision and principles. These are supporting the shift to a more integrated approach to delivering children's services in Sandwell.

Our permanent Strategic Leadership Team is well embedded and stable, driving transformation and change across the Trust. It continues to develop an integrated approach, making best use of a range of skills.

Despite ongoing challenges, Sandwell Children's Trust has made meaningful progress. The Trust continues to navigate a complex landscape shaped by both historical and current pressures. We continue to be challenged by a national shortage of experienced social workers, financial pressures, a fragmented and costly placement market, and the increasing complexity of children's needs. Additionally, national reforms in children's social care demand. Nevertheless, the Trust has achieved notable improvements based on a clear strategic direction, underpinned by five priorities aimed to drive progress and strengthen Trust's stability.

Our Workforce Strategy

Irrespective of role, we all share one purpose in the Trust - to improve the lives of children - which is underpinned by our Ethos and ST*R Practice Model.

Nationally, there is a clear direction of travel with the landscape shifting in children's services and we must be able to respond to this positively. Therefore, through our new strategy we aim to build on our success so far, whilst preparing for the skills and roles we may need in the future ensuring we help and support children and their families consistently to a high standard.

There are a number of key considerations within the refreshed Workforce Strategy:

- Enhanced stability and recruiting and retaining the very best to Sandwell Childrens Trust
- Incorporating the Trust's Ethos and ST*R practice model
- Greater consideration on how we work with each other and our children and families driven by our Working Together Strategy
- The National reforms and system transformation

The strategy has been created in conjunction with our workforce, Trust Board, recognised Unions and our children, young people and families. It is closely aligned to our ED&I strategy because we want to maintain a diverse and empowered workforce by

respecting and celebrating our rich diversity. Together, we can embed inclusivity into every aspect of our organisation, ensuring better outcomes for our workforce and the children and families we support.

Our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) remains high profile across the Trust. Through strategic planning, dedicated resource allocation and engagement across all levels of the organisation, the Trust has established robust foundations for sustainable change and meaningful impact.

Following consultation through staff Marketplaces, the Trust successfully refreshed and launched our new ED&I strategy in April 2025. This collaborative approach ensured that staff feedback was not only gathered but meaningfully implemented, creating a strategy that reflects the lived experiences and aspirations of our workforce and community. The strategy represents a fundamental shift from equality to equity, introducing intersectionality as a theoretical framework, the vital role of allies throughout the Trust and Care Experienced as our 10th protected characteristic.

The successful recruitment of a dedicated ED&I Officer this year represents a significant commitment to embedding equity and inclusion practices throughout the Trust. This appointment provides the expertise necessary to drive the delivery of our agenda and ensure sustained progress. The Trust's comprehensive action plan ensures full alignment with The Equality Framework for Local Government and Public Sector Equality Duties (PSEDs), providing clear monitoring mechanisms to track progress and demonstrate accountability. This framework enables us to benchmark our progress while maintaining focus on the needs of our colleagues, children, young people and families.

Clear governance structures have been established to ensure ED&I work is embedded at every level of decision-making. The Trusts governance model creates a direct pathway from the wider workforce through to executive leadership, with staff support ED&I networks feeding into our ED&I Ambassador group, progressing to our ED&I Task Group chaired by the CEO and connecting to our Workforce Committee, which includes senior lead as well as non-executive board representation. The reinvigoration of the Trust's ED&I Ambassadors and working groups has created a network of champions across the organisation. With terms of references now in place, these ambassadors provide vital linkages between strategy and practice, ensuring that ED&I principles are embedded in day-to-day operations.

The Trust has developed a local calendar to ensure that communication is pre-planned and streamlined. The introduction of meaningful and engaging events demonstrates the Trust's commitment to fostering good relations as required by the PSEDs. These events create safe places for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration across different people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Trust's ED&I engagement with children and young people forums ensures that the voices of those we serve are central to our ED&I work. This also ensures that youth perspectives inform our policies and practices.

The development of anti-racism and discrimination practices, driven by a dedicated working group of colleagues, demonstrates our commitment to creating a workplace and service free from prejudice. In addition to new starters, ED&I training now forms a part of our mandatory online learning package which must be completed and refreshed every two years. This approach ensures all colleagues continually recognise and understand our role in supporting ED&I. This also ensures that policies and practices are informed by diverse perspectives and experiences.

The Trust's new coaching and mentoring plan provides structured support for all staff with the aspiration of increasing diversity across all grades and therefore providing development opportunities for minoritised groups. The inclusion of reverse mentoring as a pilot programme recognises the value of learning from colleagues with different backgrounds and experiences. This supports potential development opportunities and assists in creating a culture of learning and understanding.

The regular sharing of lived experiences has become embedded within the Trust's culture, ensuring that practice is informed by real-life current impacts. This approach humanises our work and ensures that interventions translate into meaningful change.

There is now a clear connection between ED&I and wellbeing initiatives, with ambassadors working in collaboration. The Trust recognises that inclusion and belonging are fundamental to staff wellbeing and organisational effectiveness. This integrated approach ensures that our support for colleagues addresses both professional development and personal wellbeing which will, in turn, improve the service that the Trust is providing to our children, families and community.

Significant improvements to our physical environment demonstrates the Trust's commitment to accessibility. This includes a dedicated first aid room, enhanced wheelchair accessibility and the creation of an additional prayer and contemplation

room within our Metsec building. This building work shows the Trust's recognition that inclusion must be embedded in our physical spaces as well as practices.

The integration of ED&I principles within our ST*R practice model ensures that ED&I considerations are embedded in the Trust's direct work with children and families. The development of community links expands our reach and ensure that our services are culturally responsive and informed by the community that we serve.

Comprehensive analysis of children, family and colleague data has commenced to enable the Trust to identify disproportionality, address inequities and improve outcomes for all. This analysis is now presented in a more integrated way, which will support the development of the Trust's baselines and will allow us to compare temperature check results. Our adaptation of David Lammy's 'explain or reform' approach ensures that we are accountable for addressing disparities and can demonstrate progress through transparent and evidence-based reporting.

Transformation Programme

Over the past three years, the Trust's Transformation Programme has firmly established itself as a driving force for change, shaping a child- and family-focused, efficient, effective, and compassionate organisation. Through a series of ambitious projects, we continue to evolve, ensuring that our services reflect the needs of the families and communities we serve. Staff across the Trust remain actively engaged, familiar with the programme's priorities, and proud of their contributions to its many successes.

A successful transformation programme must be dynamic, responsive, and adaptable. Recognising this, the Chief Executive led the Strategic Leadership Team through a comprehensive review of the programme. This review was informed by key legislation, updated guidance, and the ambitions of the Strategic Partnership—ensuring alignment with the long-term vision developed during the Families First Pathfinder bid.

As a result, the Transformation Programme was refreshed 18 months ago, leveraging its strong foundations to establish higher aspirations. One of the most significant changes was the consolidation of the former Prevention and Partnership priorities into a single, unified focus: Partnerships – Families First. Over the past year, this priority has shaped the development of our Family Help offer, which continues to empower families to make informed decisions about their lives. Multi-agency teams have been working directly within communities, providing early, strength-based support to ensure families receive the help they need as soon as possible.

Looking forward, we remain committed to continuous improvement, collaboration, and innovation—ensuring that the Transformation Programme remains ambitious, adaptable, and impactful.

Transformation Programme



Members of the Executive Management Team (EMT), in their roles as Priority Sponsors, have taken a proactive and personal approach to ensuring the success of the Transformation Programme. By closely overseeing progress, they provide strategic leadership, guidance, and accountability—championing the vision while addressing challenges head-on. Their commitment goes beyond governance; they engage directly with teams, offering support and driving momentum to keep priorities on track. Through regular reviews, data-driven decision-making, and cross-sector collaboration, Priority Sponsors ensure that initiatives remain aligned with the organisation’s evolving needs. This hands-on involvement has been instrumental in delivering tangible outcomes, fostering a culture of ownership and continuous improvement across the Trust.

Priorities and their ambition statements



Priority 1 – People

“A place where our people are proud to be part of a skilled Sandwell family by being respected, supported, nurtured and empowered to thrive”



Priority 2 – Practice

“To improve the lives of children and young people through caring, compassionate support and proportionate high-quality interventions based on each child’s needs”



Priority 3 – Partnerships – Families First

“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”



Priority 4 – Integrated Approach to Care

“To recognise and understand the needs of the children and young people we support by ensuring services are designed to best meet those needs, enabling children and young people to fulfil their potential”



Priority 5 - Striving for Excellence

“To create the environment that transforms the Trust into an intelligence led, innovative, aspirational and confident organisation”

Section (b)

The Trust's performance of the Services against the Performance Targets in the preceding Contract Year

Over the course of the year, we have reported our key contract performance monthly and have maintained good performance in many areas.

Performance dipped in some areas during the financial year, but improvements were made towards the end of 2024 and up to 31st March 2025

As of 31 March 2025, the Trust met 10 of our KPI targets, a further 5 are within the contract tolerance and no indicators within failure zone.

Improvements have been made and include:

- Single Assessments completed within 45 working days (PI1)
- Children in Need visits within the last 4 weeks (PI2)
- Rate of Children on Child Protection Plans per 10,000 (PI4)
- % Children open to the trust CWD team with an updated assessment in the last 12 months (PI5)
- % Children with an updated permanency plan at the second CWCF review (PI6)
- % Children with a CP Plan for 2+ years (PI11)
- % CiN on a plan for 9+ months with senior management oversight (PI14)

Measures for further improvements:

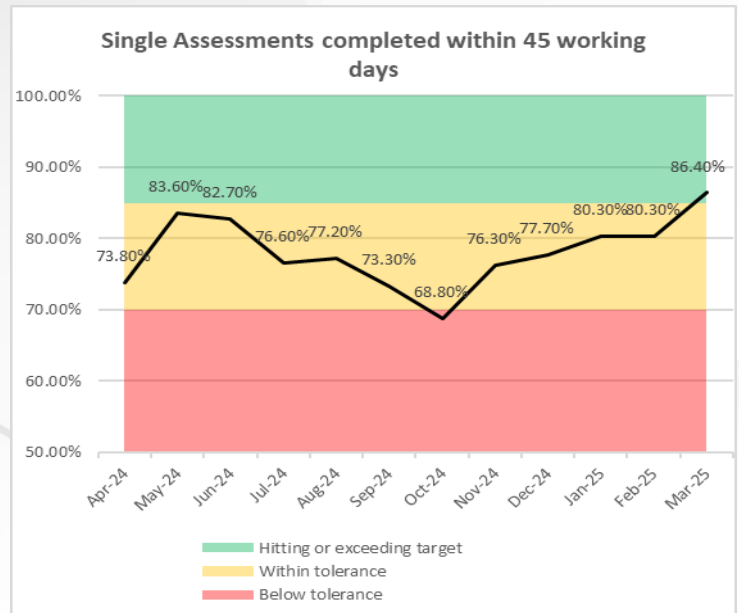
- For children in our care for over 2.5 years or more, the percentage which have been in same placement for 2 years.
- Children open for longer than 8 weeks that have been discussed in supervision in the last 8 weeks (PI13)

Below is the individual performance of the key performance indicators specified within the contract:

PI1 - The percentage of Single Assessments completed within 45 working days

Target: > 85% **Tolerance:> 70.01%-84.99%** **Failure: < 70%**

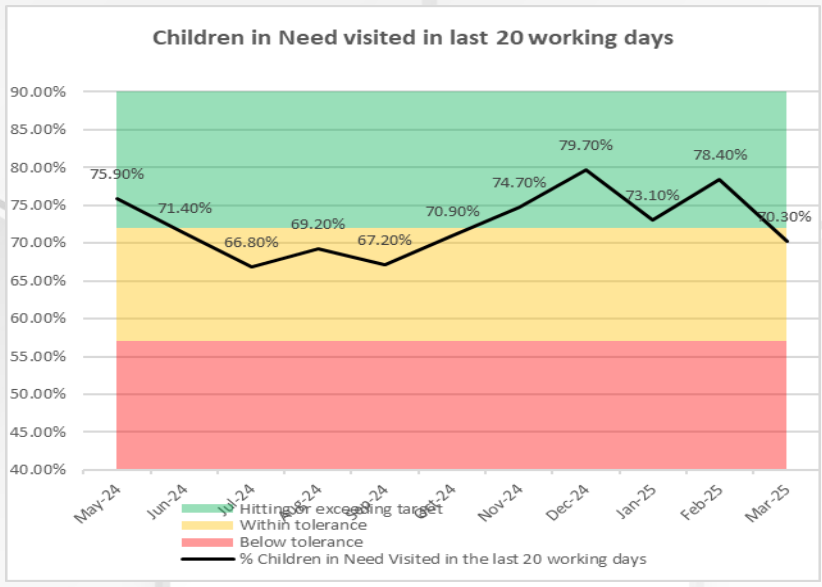
This measure shows how timely our Single Assessments are for children (in line with the statutory maximum expectation of 45 working days). Most Single Assessments are completed by Social Workers within Locality Services, but a significant amount are completed across other service areas as part of updating/reviewing assessments for children.



Throughout financial year 2024-25, performance fluctuated between 68.8% in October 2024 up to 86.4% in March 2025, with an average of 78.1% throughout the financial year (performance was above target for one reporting period, within tolerance for 10 reporting periods and within failure for one reporting period).

PI2 - The percentage of Children subject to a Children in Need Plan visited within the previous four weeks

Target: >73% Tolerance:>57% Failure: <57%



This measure provides part of our understanding of how well we are interacting with children and families under Child in Need.

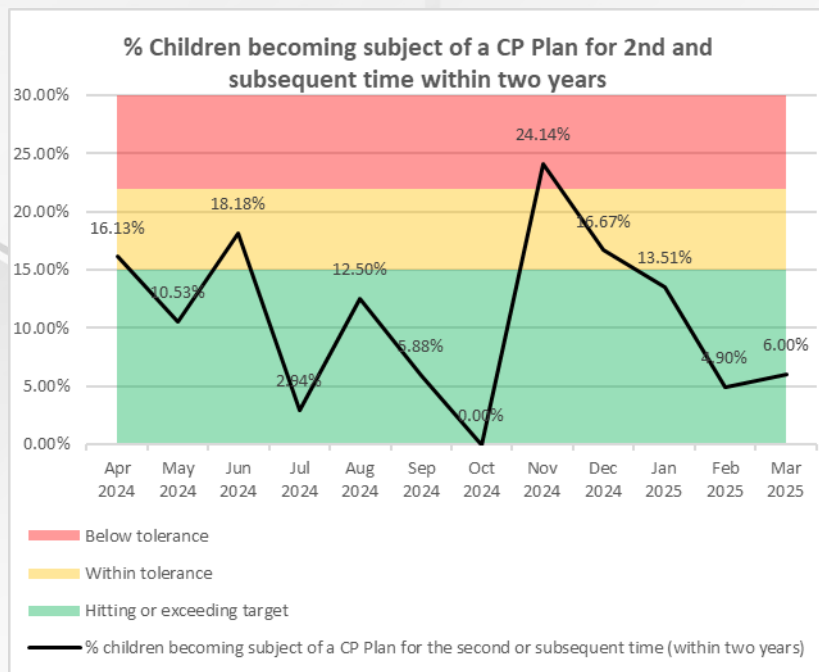
The frequency of visiting children under these circumstances is locally defined and in Sandwell we expect social workers to visit children subject to a Child in Need Plan at least every 4 weeks.

Alongside this measure, it is important to understand the quality of these interventions through practice reviews and management oversight.

Performance in relation to Children in Need visits ranged between 66.8% and 79.7%, this has been maintained above target over 6 reporting periods, with 6 reporting periods within tolerance.

PI3 – Children become subject to a Child Protection Plan for the second and subsequent time within two years

Target: <15% Tolerance: < 22% Failure: > 22%



This measure gives an understanding of thresholds for closure of children on Child Protection Plans and tests support we have given to children and families during previous intervention periods.

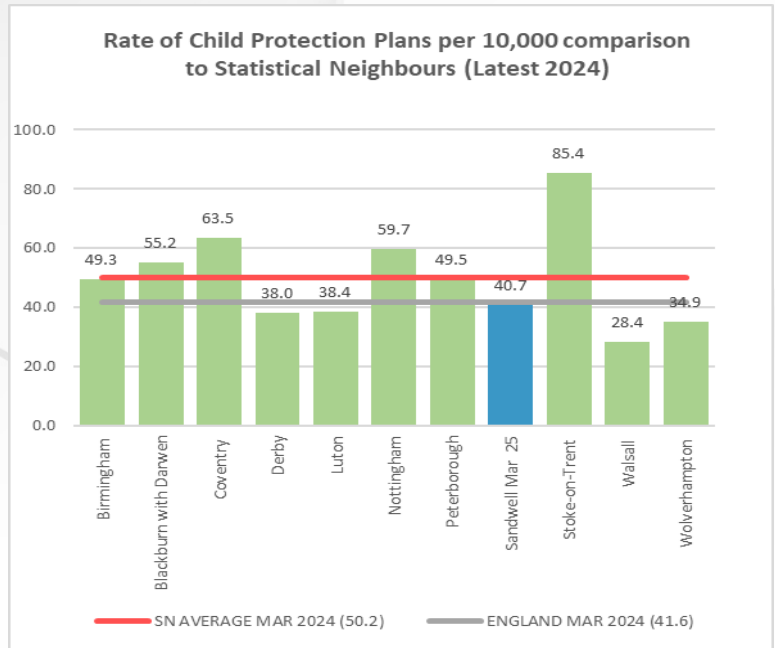
This measure is locally defined and looks at the number of children who enter a CP Plan each month who had a previous CP Plan in the last two years. The cohort is quite small and performance fluctuates each month. Over the previous 12 reporting periods, performance has exceeded target for 8 months, was within tolerance for three months and below target tolerance for one month in November 2024.

PI4 - The rate of Children who are the subject to a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000) of our child population

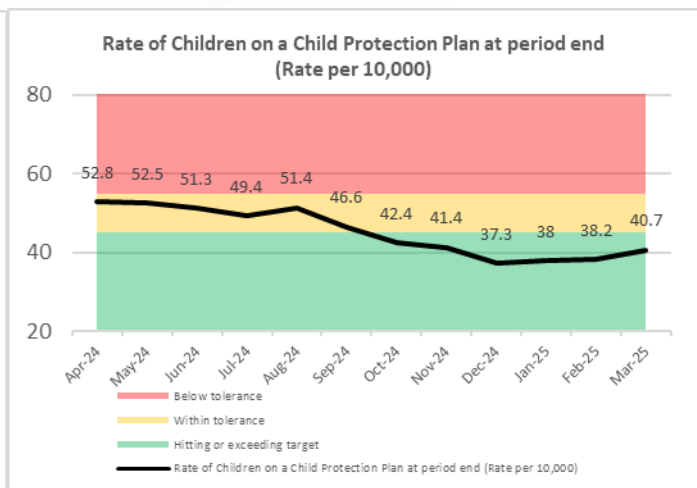
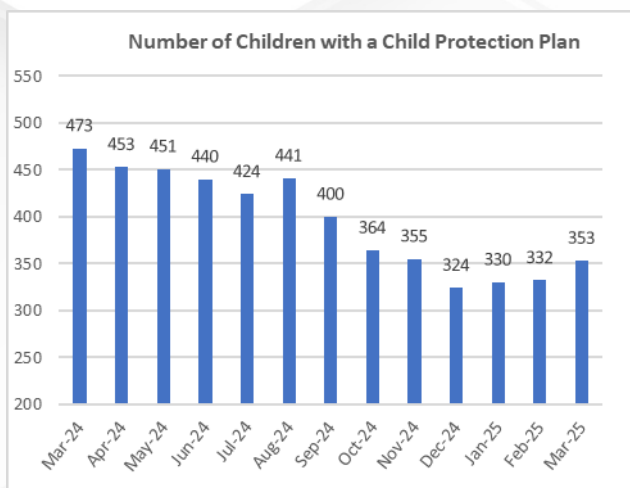
Target: <45 Children per 10,000 Tolerance: < 55 Children Failure: > 55 Children

This measure gives us a sense of demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds for children where there are child protection concerns.

Our statistical neighbour average is 50.2 and the England average is 41.6 (measured at March 2024).

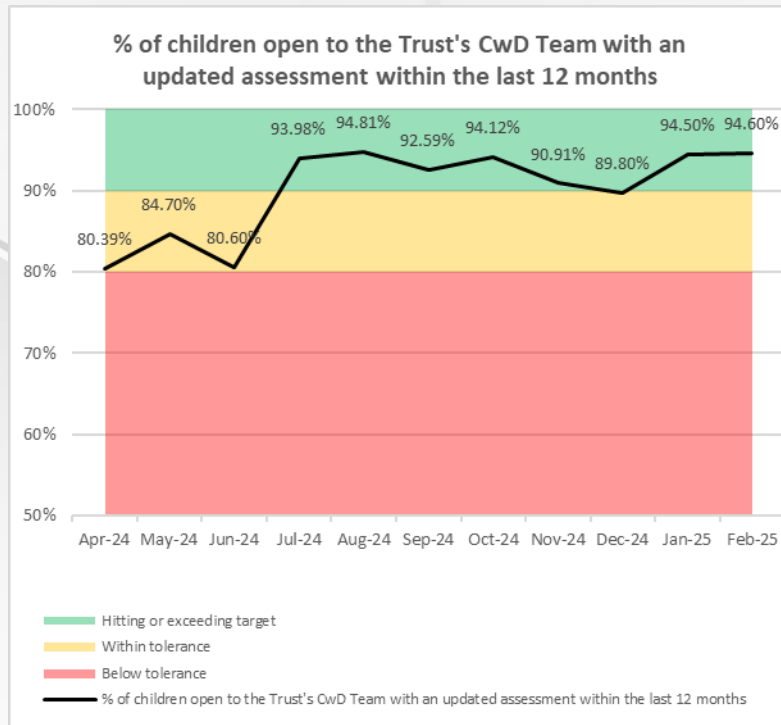


Throughout the year we have continued to work hard to ensure that the threshold for child protection has been applied consistently and with the stark increase last financial year. We continue to monitor and sample children on CP plans for 12+ months, alongside fluctuations in demand and thresholds for S47 enquiries and Initial Child Protection conferences. Following the work undertaken, CP plans have been on a downward trajectory throughout 2024-25 (although a slight increase in March 2025). We are now below statistical neighbour average of 50.2 and England average of 41.6, the rate of children on a Child Protection Plan as of 31st March 2025 was 40.7 (353 children on a Plan). Performance in this measure has achieved target in last 6 reporting periods, and was in tolerance between April and September 2024)



PI5 – The % of children open to the Trust's CwD Team with an updated assessment within the last 12 months

Target: > 90% Tolerance:> 80% Failure: < 80%

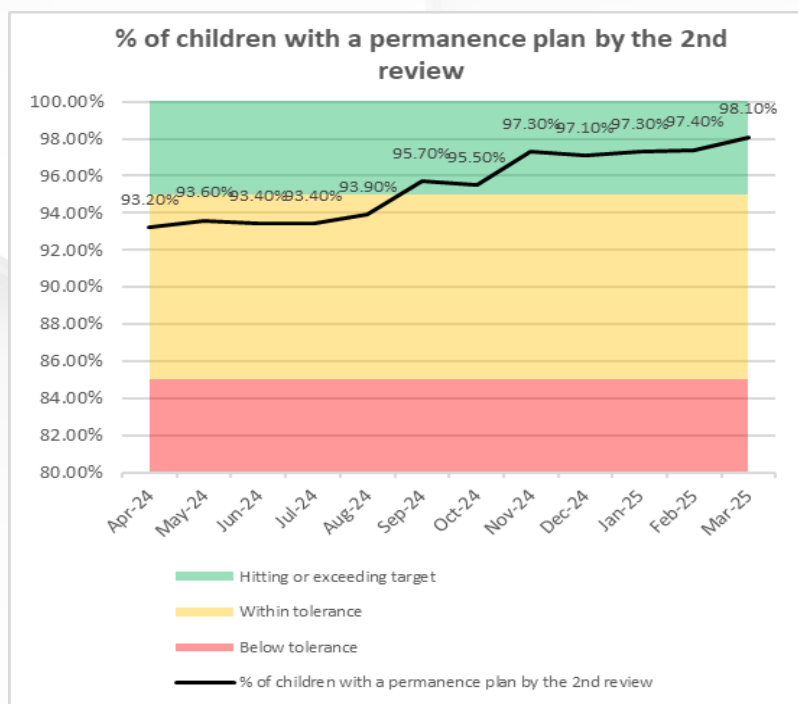


This is a locally defined measure and gives an understanding of how regularly children with a disability are reviewed to understand the support and needs of them and their families.

Performance has been strong throughout 2024/25 with 8 reporting periods above target and 4 months within tolerance, ranging from 80.39% in April 2024 to 94.8% in August 2024.

PI6 - % of children with a permanence plan by the second review

Target: > 95% Tolerance:> 85% Failure: < 85%



This is a locally defined measure which looks at quick and efficient decision making for Children we Care for, in relation to their permanent home arrangements whilst in our care and potential reunification.

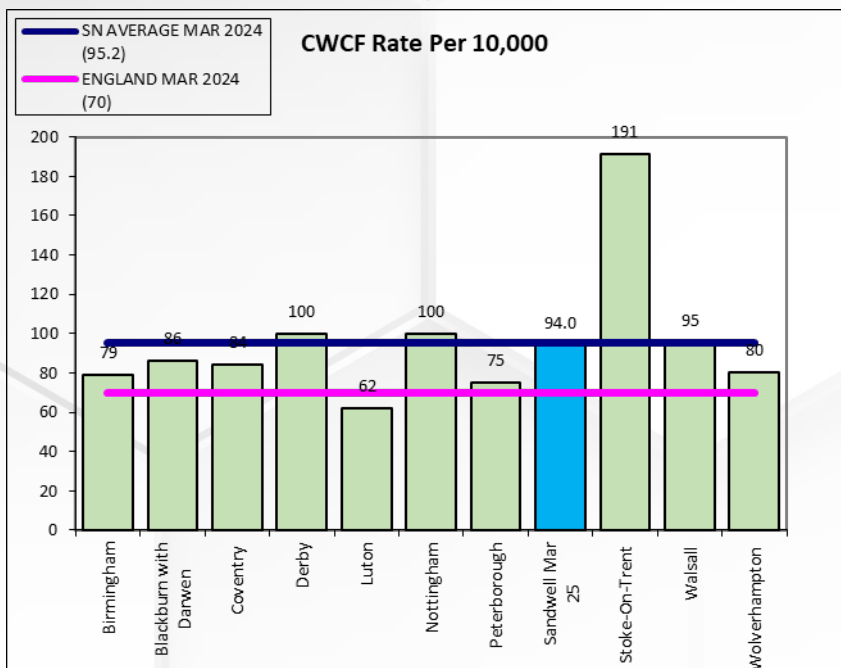
Performance has been strong throughout 2024/25 with 7 reporting periods above target and 5 months within tolerance, ranging from 93.2% in April 2024 to 98.1% in March 2025.

PI7 - Rate of Children we Care for at period end (Rate per 10,000)

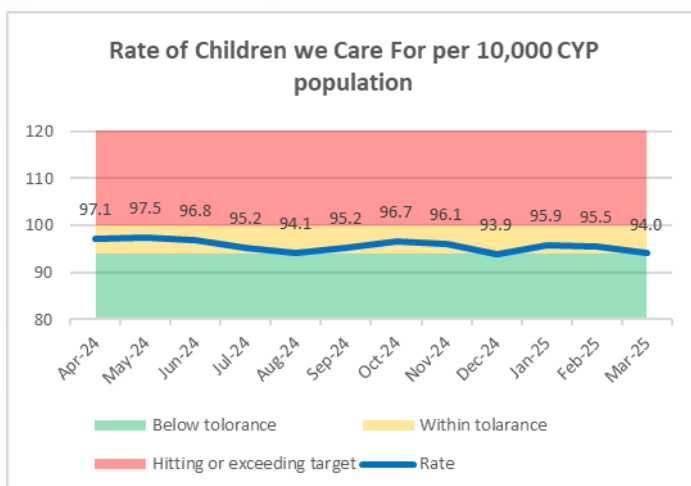
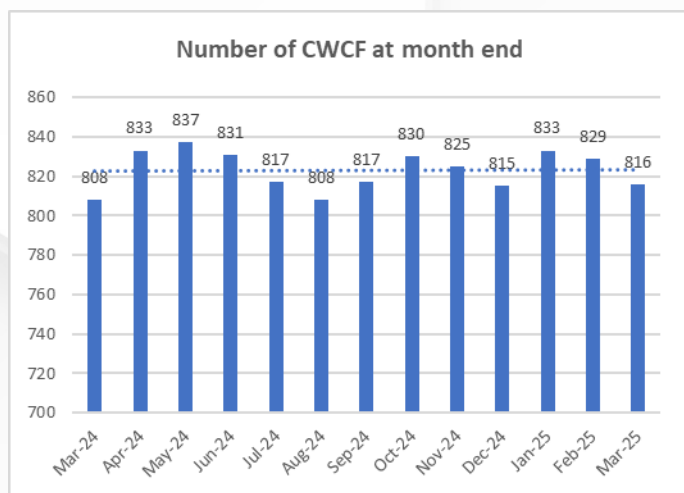
Target: <94 per 10,000 Children Tolerance:< 100 Failure: >100

This measure gives us a sense of demand, how we are handling this demand and how we are applying our thresholds for children we care for including entrants into our care and exits from our care

Our statistical neighbour average is 95.2 and the England average is 70 (measured at March 2024).

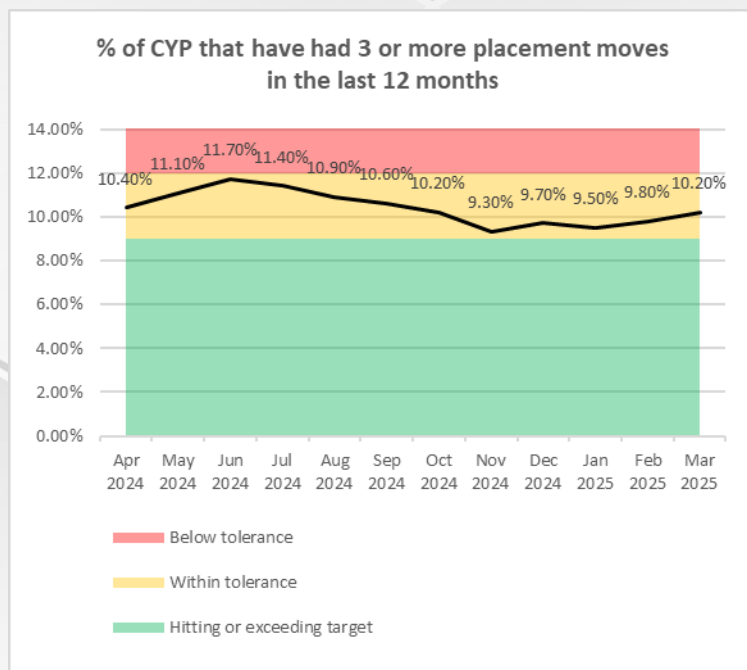


We continue to ensure children enter our care and exit care safely. We are now slightly below statistical neighbour average of 95.2 although above England average of 70. The rate of Children we Care for as of 31st March 2025 was 94 (816 Children we Care for), excluding Separated Children and Young People this reduces to 89.6 per 10,000 (778 CWCF). Performance in this measure has primarily remained within tolerance for the previous 12 months (10 months) and exceeded target for two months.



PI8 - % of CYP that have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months

Target:<9% Tolerance:<12% Failure: >12%



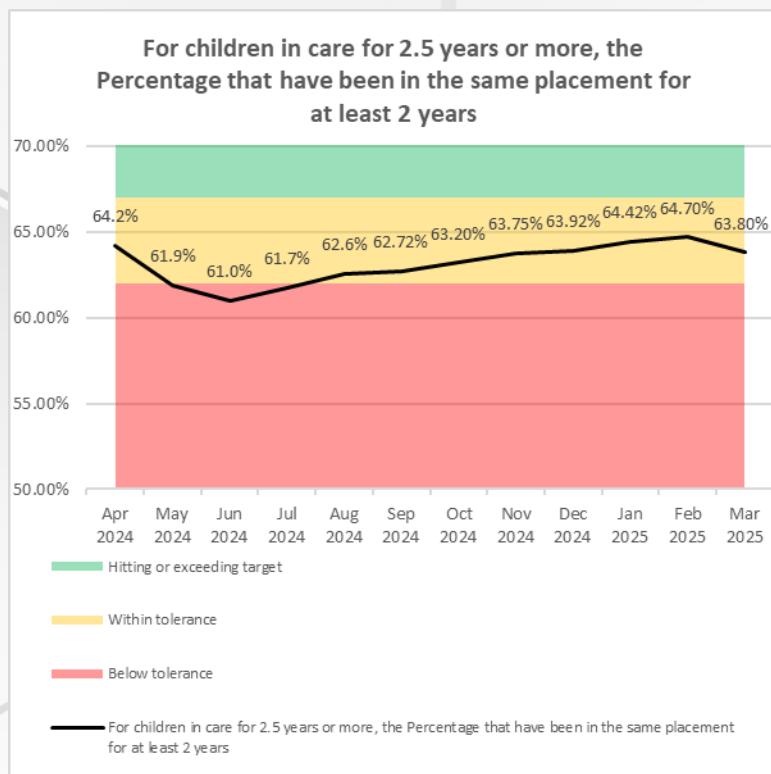
This is a national measure which gives us an understanding of Children we Care for who have instability within their home environment and have had 3+ home moves in the previous 12 months. Although home moves can be positive, they can also be due to disruptions and a number of factors leading to moves into other accommodation.

From April 2024-March 2025, performance has remained within tolerance, ranging from 9.3% in November 2024 up to 11.7% in June 2024. There has been a downward trajectory during the year. Performance as of 31st March 2025 was 10.2%; in line with all three comparators below;

- Statistical neighbour – 9.8%
- England average – 10%
- West Midlands average – 10%

PI9- For children in care for 2.5 years or more, the Percentage that have been in the same placement for at least 2 years (aged under 16 only)

Target: between 67% to 75% Tolerance between 62-67% and >75% Failure: <62%
 (Targets revised in February 2025)



This is a national measure looking at children who have been in our care for over 2.5 years and have remained in a stable home for over 2 years. This gives us an understanding of Children we Care for who have moved from a longer-term stable home due to a positive move or disruption.

Targets for this measure were revised in February 2025 after discussions between SMBC and SCT, with support from the Improvement Board Chair.

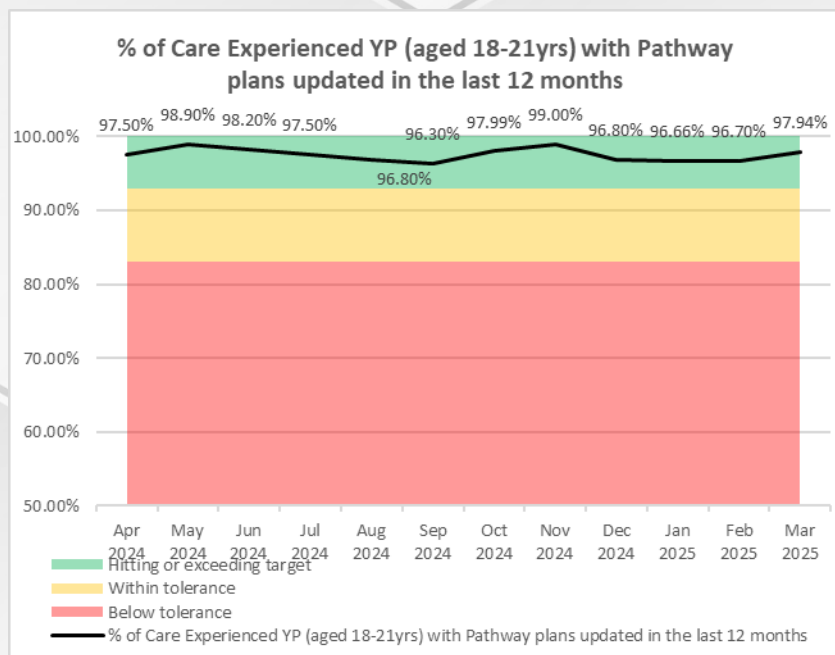
Over the course of April 2024-March 2025, performance has remained within tolerance for 9 months and below target and tolerance for 3 months, ranging from 61% in June 2024 up to 64.7% in February 2025.

There has been an upward trajectory during the year. Performance as of 31st March 2025 was 63.8%; slightly below all three comparators.

- Statistical neighbour – 67.3%
- England average – 68%
- West Midlands average – 68%

PI10 – % of Care Experienced YP (aged 18-21yrs) with Pathway plans updated in the last 12 months

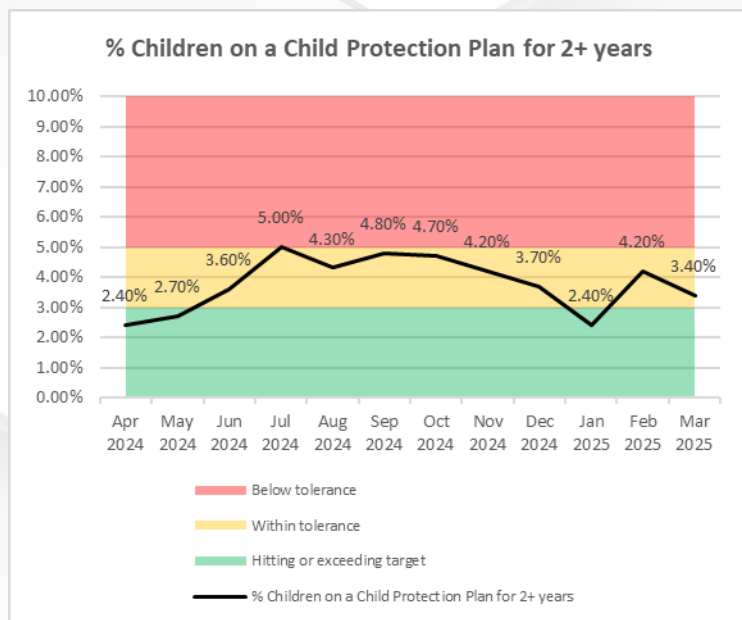
Target: >93% Tolerance:>83% Failure: <83%



This measure is locally defined but ensures strong planning and oversight of the needs and wishes of our Care Experienced Young People preparing for adulthood, supporting them with a stable home, plus employment, further education and training opportunities. Performance in this KPI has exceeded target over the previous 12 months, ranging from the lowest point of 96.3% in September 2024, up to 99% in November 2024.

PI11 – The % of children on a Child Protection plan for over 2 years

Target: <3% Tolerance:<5% Failure: >5%



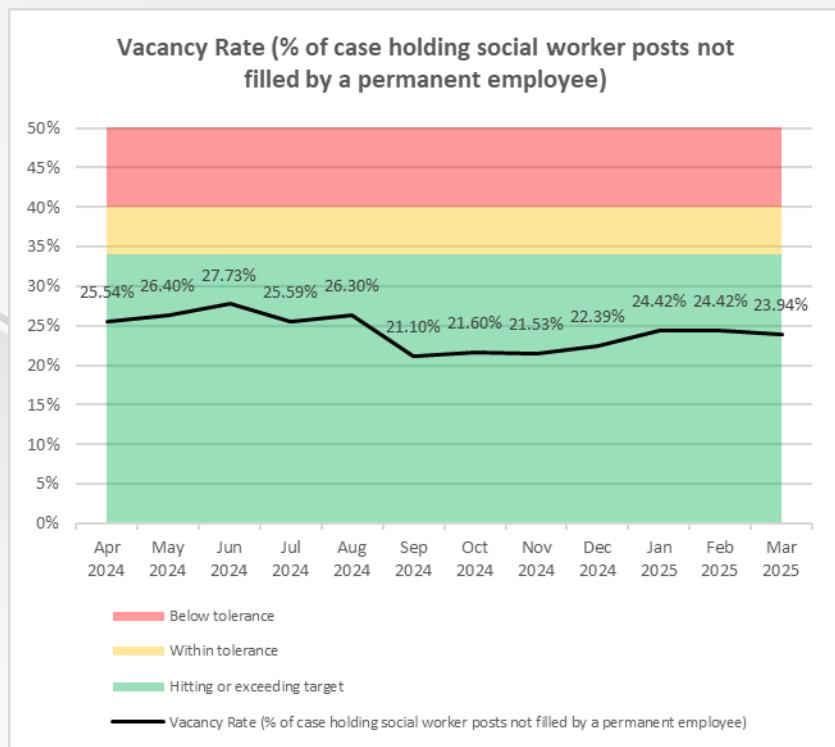
This is a national measure which looks at drift and delay of children on Child Protection Plans. The measure monitors the number of children on a Child Protection Plan for longer than two years. The Quality Assurance and Operational Services regularly review children on Child Protection Plans to ensure decisions are made swiftly and effectively. During 2024-25, the measure has ranged from 2.4% to 5%. 8 months within contract tolerance, three months exceeding target and one

month above contract target and tolerance. As of 31st March 2025, at 3.4% is slightly above comparators.

- Statistical neighbour – 2.8%
- England – 2.6%
- West Midlands – 2.4%

PI12 - Vacancy Rate (% of case holding social worker posts not filled by a permanent employee)

Target: <34% Tolerance:<40% Failure: >40%



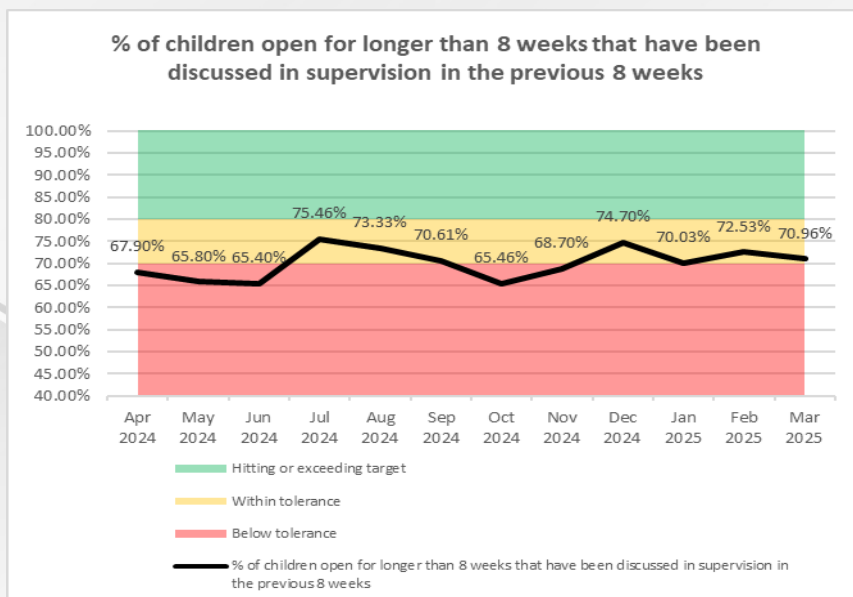
This measure helps us to determine the stability of our case holding workforce.

Whilst agency social workers are essential for an organisation to quickly meet fluctuations in demand, a stable, permanent workforce is also critical for long term improvement.

During the financial year 2024-25, we remained comfortably within target for our permanent workforce. Permanent vacancy rates ranged from 21.1% to 27.73%. Greater focus is on permanent workforce within the CP and Court Teams to ensure further improvements are made.

PI13 – % of children open for longer than 8 weeks that have been discussed in supervision in the previous 8 weeks

Target: >80% Tolerance:>70% Failure: <70%

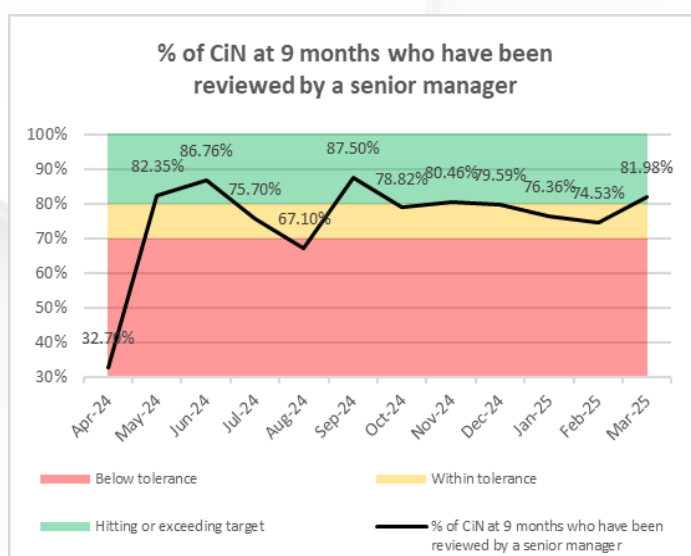


This measure is locally defined to monitor child progression supervision, aligning to our Supervision Policy. This ensures robust decision making and that plans are progressed to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and families open to our services. During the financial year, performance has primarily ranged from 65.46% to 75.46%, within tolerance for 7 months and below target and tolerance for 5 months. This is an area of focus within the new action plan to improve more regular child progression supervision.

for 5 months. This is an area of focus within the new action plan to improve more regular child progression supervision.

PI14 – % of CiN at 9 months who have been reviewed by a senior manager

Target: >80% Tolerance:>70% Failure: <70%



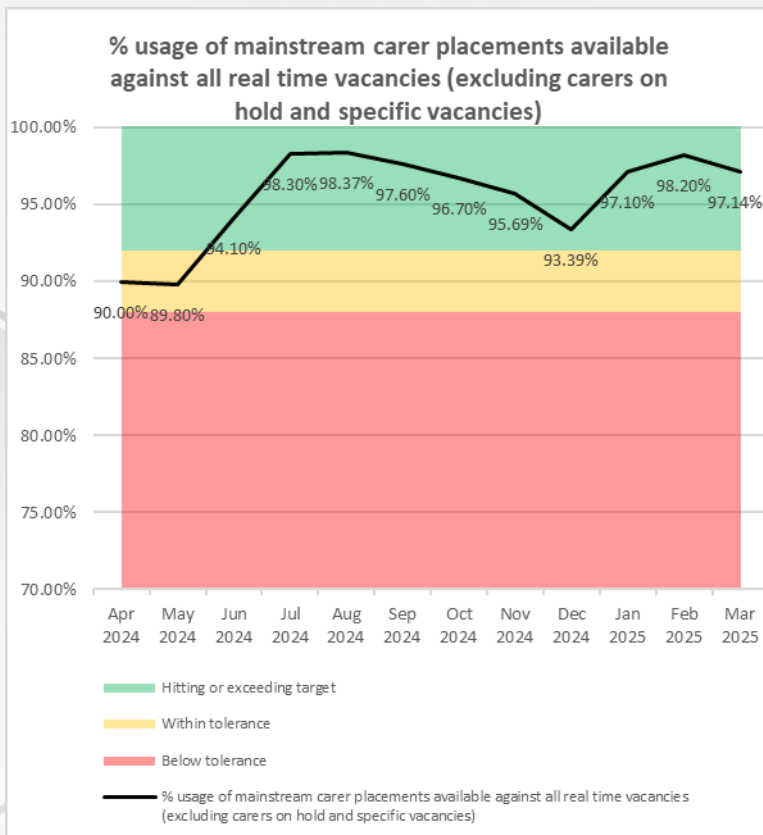
This measure is locally defined to monitor Children in Need at 9+ months who have been reviewed by a senior manager, ensuring that their plans are progressed and that decision making provides quick and effective outcomes.

Performance fluctuated throughout 2024-25 from 32.7% in April 2025 to 87.5% in September 2024; above target for 5 months, within tolerance for 5 months and below contract tolerance and target for 2

months. this KPI is discussed regularly in locality management teams to ensure Children in Need who are on plans for longer than 9+ months are progressed swiftly, safely and effectively.

PI15 - % usage of mainstream carer placements available against all real time vacancies (excluding carers on hold and specific vacancies)

Target: >92% Tolerance:>88% Failure: <88%



This measure is locally defined to monitor recruitment and ensure all internal vacancies of our mainstream carers, where possible, are at capacity and supports bringing Children we Care for into our mainstream foster placements rather than using external provisions (both fostering and residential settings). It excludes any mainstream carers on hold and specific child vacancies.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, this measure exceeded target for 10 of the 12 months, two were within tolerance. The registered fostering manager regularly reviews capacity and vacancies to ensure, where possible, all mainstream vacancies are filled.

Section (c)

The thematic findings of any Audits and Surveys carried out by the Trust during the previous Contract Year

Over the past year, the Trust's approach to quality assurance has become increasingly embedded, refined, and mature. The revised Quality Assurance (QA) Framework is now consistently applied across the organisation, fostering a more reflective and impactful approach to evaluating practice.

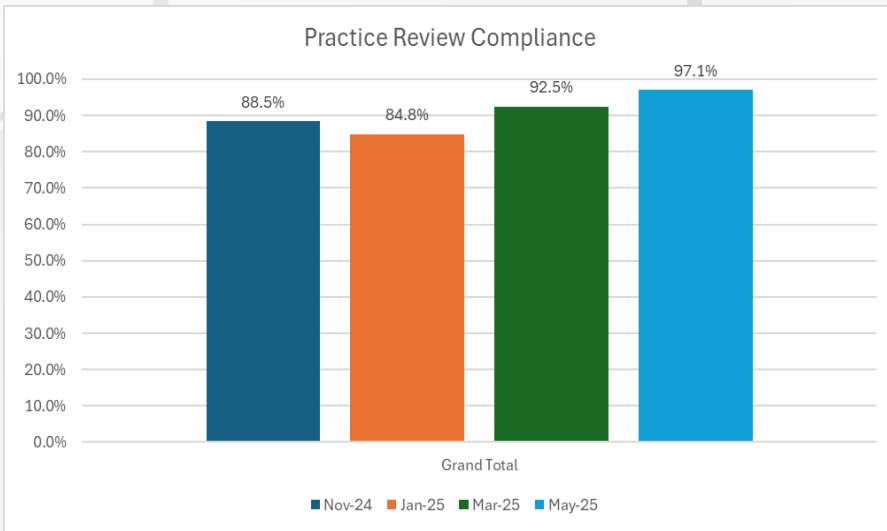
As a result, there has been notable improvement in compliance with Practice and Thematic Reviews, alongside strengthened moderation processes and encouraging progress in the timeliness of 'Closing the Loop' activity. Since the launch of the revised framework in November 2024, there is clear evidence of more timely completion of reviews and improved adherence to the methodology. This includes more frequent and meaningful feedback from children and families, as well as reflective dialogue with practitioners to shape and inform Practice Reviews.

These developments have contributed to greater accuracy, confidence, and assurance in reported findings, enabling a more reliable and reflective picture of practice across the Trust.

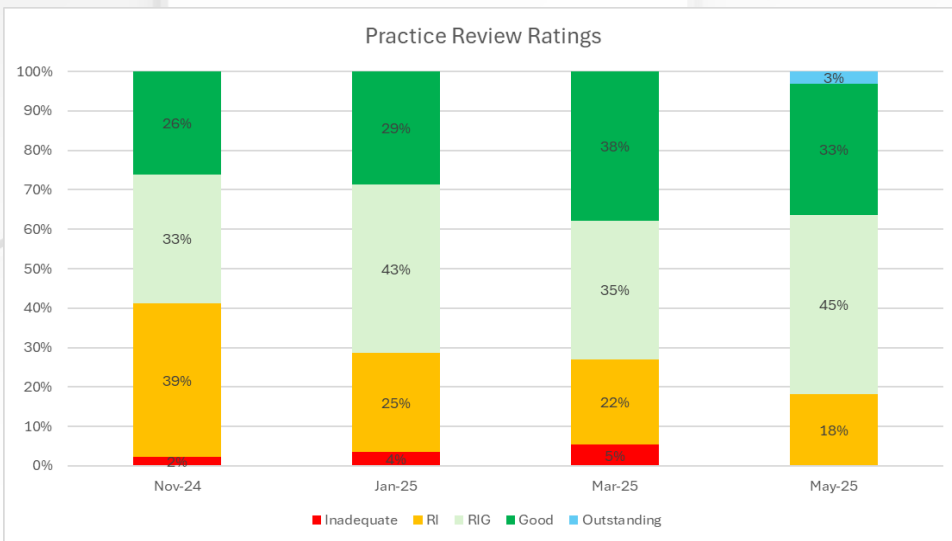
There is growing evidence that the ethos of our ST*R partnership practice model- strengths based, trauma informed and relationship-based practice- is becoming embedded, not just in documentation, but in practitioners' everyday engagement with children, families, and professionals. Moderators and reviewers increasingly reflect the same values in how they approach their work.

Over the past 12 months, three benchmarking sessions have taken place, with further sessions planned. In parallel, the introduction of the Enabler Report, which highlights improvement activities not previously captured through reviews or audits, has enhanced our reporting landscape. We have also launched "QA on a Page," offering an accessible overview of our QA position across the Trust. These resources are now available via the newly established QA intranet space.

The collective efforts have contributed to a promising trajectory of improvement. Practice Review compliance rose from 88.5% in November 2024 to 97.1% in May 2025, as shown in the graph below:



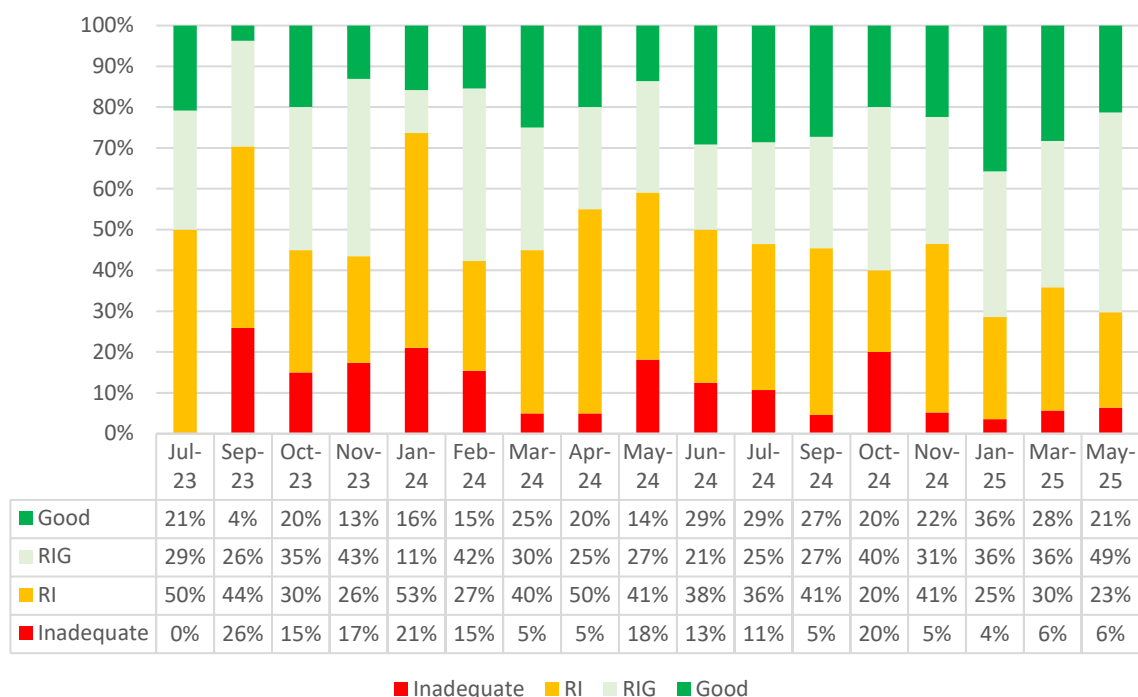
Practice Review ratings have similarly improved: from 59% rated as Good or Requires Improvement with elements of Good in November 2024, to 82% rated as Outstanding, Good or Requires Improvement with elements of Good in May 2025, with no reviews rated Inadequate:



A further overview of Practice and Thematic ratings is captured below, demonstrating increasing consistency in quality assurance:

Practice & Thematic Review Ratings

Jul 23 - May 25



To sustain and build on this progress, a number of ongoing and planned actions are in place:

- **Targeted workshops** for reviewers and moderators, with early cohorts prioritised for those requiring further development, to promote consistency in the quality and impact of Practice Reviews.
- **Clarified roles and responsibilities** for reviewers and moderators. Moderators will offer both support and challenge, ensuring high-quality, reflective reviews. All practice and thematic review templates will now require confirmation that a learning-focused discussion has occurred between the reviewer and moderator.
- **A strengthened 'Closing the Loop' methodology**, including a QA-led evaluation of the impact of Practice Reviews on children's outcomes.
- **Enhanced communication** with team managers and practitioners through inclusion in review allocation emails. This ensures children's files can be fully updated prior to review completion and promotes more cohesive planning for achieving a comprehensive 360-degree review process.

Key Themes Identified from Practice and Thematic Reviews (July 2024 – May 2025)

During the review period, analysis of practice and thematic reviews across the Trust identified several recurring themes that have informed our understanding of current strengths and areas for development.

Areas of strength	Areas for development
Continued embedding of the ST*R practice model in practice as well as in written work.	Enhance recording of reflective supervision.
Practitioners and managers know our children, young people and their families well, supporting strong and consistent relationship-based practice.	More planned, purposeful direct work with children and young people, alongside increased recording and capturing of life and memory work.
Improved consistency in the quality of children and young people's assessments and plans.	Use of evidence-based tools into our assessments, including DARAC, GCP2, and impact chronologies.
Increased evidence of wrap around support being offered and delivered during assessing periods.	Cultural competence in our work, such as the completion and use of cultural genograms.
Improved landscape in relation to Independent Chair footprint on children's files, for example, IRO writing letters to children after each review.	More children and young people attending their reviews

Section (d)

The outcome of any Ofsted monitoring visits and/or Ofsted inspections

The table below outlines the outcome of Ofsted’s Visits and Inspections from 2024 to 2025:

Inspection / Visit	Date	Judgement
Ofsted Fostering Inspection	14 th -18 th October 2024	Good Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted
Ofsted Focussed Visit – Front Door	30 and 31 October 2024	No judgement. Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted
LGA Review – Children We Care For and Care Experienced	14th-17th January 2025	No judgement, findings helped to inform planning and focus for next Ofsted inspection or visit.
Ofsted Focussed Visit – PLO and Children at risk of family breakdown	15 and 16 April 2025	No judgement. Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted

Ofsted Fostering inspection

Judgement	Grade
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires Improvement to be Good
Overall Judgement	Good

Ofsted reported that:

Safeguarding is a high priority in this agency. Managers have an operational overview of all issues that affect the safety and well-being of children, and they monitor actions taken and progress made. They understand the circumstances of individual children and the risks identified, ensuring that there are strong and effective responses. Managers, staff and foster carers understand each other's roles and responsibilities and the remits of safeguarding agencies. Managers make sure that children are protected during any investigation and provide foster carers with access to independent support in recognition of the emotional impact that this has on them. Managers take robust action when there are concerns about foster carers' practice. Post-allegation reviews are conducted, and foster carers return to panel and the agency decision-maker to review their approval status. This independent oversight ensures that foster carers remain suitable to provide care for children.

There have been periods since the last inspection when this agency has operated without a permanent manager who is registered with Ofsted. There have also been changes to the interim managers appointed. The senior leadership team has continued to advertise for a permanent registered manager and taken action to promote stability. These interim arrangements and changes have resulted in a small number of foster carers and a minority of staff voicing concerns about the inconsistency of the manager role and the impact this has on the service.

Managers are successfully supporting many areas of improvement and development. These include the timely completion of foster carer annual reviews and supervision; diversity, stability and permanence within the staff teams and at team manager level; regular reflective staff supervisions and appraisals; and the continuing development of the partnership practice model of care and the staff leadership programme.

Inspection recommendations:

- The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.
- In particular, the registered person must take all necessary steps to ensure that there is a consistent and stable manager in post and that they are registered with Ofsted.
- The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster

parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority).

- The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.
- The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations.
- In particular, this relates to operating an out of hours service that meets the needs of the foster carers; ensuring children receive their passports in a timely manner; ensuring access to financial allowances for children and foster carers are transparent and equitable; ensuring that any recommendations made through the use of monitoring tools are addressed in a timely manner.
- The registered person should ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster.

Ofsted Focussed Visit-Front Door

The inspection took place on 30th and 31st October 2024, with headline findings being:

'Front door' and early help arrangements for children in Sandwell have improved since the last inspection in May 2022. This is positive for children and families, who receive timely and appropriate responses to initial identified needs and concerns. Children who need help and protection are correctly identified within the MASH and are directed to an appropriate level of service. For most children, their needs are met by accurate assessment and effective interventions. Leaders have a good understanding of their services and are strongly focused on developing them to further improve outcomes for children. Partners are supported to contribute to this work, and to make referrals only when necessary, an area which has improved significantly. New workflow management systems have been developed, some of which will take time to embed, and there is early evidence of positive impact following the phased implementation. There is some inconsistency in the regularity and quality of supervision for social workers, which impacts on progress for a small number of children.

A recommended improvement was in relation to ‘the regularity and quality of supervision of social workers, and oversight of children’s casework’.

LGA Review – Children We Care For and Care Experienced

The review took place from 14th to 17th January 2025, with headline findings being:

Leaders in Sandwell Children’s Trust have a determined focus on improving the lives of children they care for and those who are care experienced and this is shared by the Council. There is a real sense that everyone at all levels in the Trust understands the focus and this is underpinned by effective financial and commissioning arrangements.

There is a strong corporate parenting partnership developed in Sandwell and the Corporate Parenting Board is well attended by a range of key stakeholders. There is an ambitious plan which supports improved opportunities and outcomes for children who are cared for and those who are care experienced. The effectiveness of the Board would be further strengthened by representation from Adult Social Care as well as other adult services to ensure that the transition to adulthood is seamless.

There is strong scaffolding in place to support effective social work practice with children who are cared for and those who are care experienced. There are clear policies and procedures in place to govern expected practice and a strong learning and development programme which supports progression. Staff feel well supported and valued. Some staff report that their caseloads are high which impacts upon their ability to complete some aspects of their work and the case reviews also highlight instances where plans for permanence were delayed. The Trust may wish to consider creative ways to use resources to free up social work capacity. We spoke to some fantastic young people who were positive about their experiences; they saw their social worker or Personal Adviser (PA) regularly and felt that their views were heard and acted upon.

There are a range of high-quality interventions and resources delivered by the Trust and we saw several examples of interventions which are having a positive impact on the lives of children and families. Further work with adult social care and other adult services should be expedited to drive forward improvements on transitional safeguarding and other issues (e.g. mental health, autism.) A focus is needed on the importance of recording for those who are care experienced. This includes shifting the culture to one where recording is integral to young person-centred planning and practice.

Improvement areas following the peer review visit focused on:

- Increasing opportunities to improve the lead members line of sight to practice
- Continued rigor within the Trust on addressing the recommendations from the previous ILAC's Inspection
- Making sure the Trust makes best use of their existing resources to creatively free up social work time for more direct work
- Embedding our STAR practice model including quality recording
- Continuing to progress special guardianship where this is the child's permanence plan
- Working with adult social care regarding timely and effective preparation for adulthood for our care experienced young people.
- Ensuring children benefit from their PA from the age of 16 and more EET opportunities.

Ofsted Focussed Visit – PLO and Children at risk of family breakdown

The inspection took place on the 15th and 16th April 2025, with headline findings being:

Leaders are ambitious for vulnerable children in Sandwell, which is reflected in their refreshed child-focused strategies and improvement plans. Since the last inspection, some areas of the service that needed to improve have seen strengthened practice, such as the approach to the Public Law Outline (PLO) for those children who continue to be at risk of significant harm, the creation of an intervention hub and the implementation of the strengths, relationship and trauma-informed practice model which is well embedded across much of the service. Leaders understand through their own self-evaluation that there remains some inconsistent practice in the areas we considered in this focused visit. They understand which areas of the service have not improved sufficiently and have plans in place to further improve. The trust's quality assurance framework (QAF) is comprehensive but variability in the quality of audits completed at times limits the depth of their insight into practice quality to improve work with children.

The majority of children in need and who are on a child protection plan receive a proportionate and timely response which enables their parents and wider family to meet their needs. A significant minority of children in some teams experience support which is less effective. This means they do not receive the right support soon enough and some children's cases are closed without their needs being met. This is due to changes of social workers, higher caseloads and weaker management oversight in some teams. The consistent quality and timeliness of management oversight remains an area for improvement from the last inspection.

Recommended improvements were noted as:

- Consistent practice to ensure timely and effective support to children and their families irrespective of locality team.
- Regularity and quality of supervision of social workers, and oversight of children's casework.
- The quality and focus on children when decisions to step down or end child in need intervention.
- The consistent quality of practice reviews to ensure they provide an accurate overview of practice and inform its improvement.

Section (e)

The Trust's Performance against budgets in the preceding Contract Year

Financial Context

The finances provided to the Trust consists of funding from SMBC (the Contract Sum) and contributions from third parties. The basic contract sum was £80,800,000, and the 'third party' income was £9,617,630 which consisted of:

- ICB health contribution Education funding for placements
- Supporting Families claims
- DfE funding
- Ministry of Justice funding
- Home Office funding
- Hardship funding

We also had an opening deficit of £10,919,317. The deficit for 2024/25 is subject to audit but provisionally stands at £8,788,115 making the cumulative deficit £19,707,432 at year end.

Contract Sum

A Contract Sum settlement for 2025/26 has yet to be agreed between the Trust and SMBC. Contract Sum funding for 2025/26 is currently being based on a roll-forward of the Contract Sum for 2024/25. The 2024/25 Sum would leave the Trust with an in-year deficit of c. £12m. The Trust and SMBC continue to actively engage in order to agree a mutually acceptable Contract Sum. The Trust aims to deliver cost savings totalling £2,340,090 in 2025/26.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The Medium-Term Financial Plan is a rolling three-year strategy to manage the Trust's finances whilst addressing the deficit. The Trust and SMBC are planning to complete a strategic review of the MTFP over the next few months.

The key aspects of the Medium-Term Financial Plan are:

- Introducing more efficient ways of working
- Ensuring that we manage the demand for our work as efficiently as possible
- Ensuring we get best value for services

- Ensuring we take advantage of invest-to-save initiatives Delivery of savings aligned to our Transformation programme.
- Opportunities for the repayment of the Trust's cumulative deficit.

The Trust has linked the delivery of a Medium-Term Financial Plan to the wider delivery of the Trust's Strategic Transformation Programme. The Trust's Cost Saving Programme which is an integral constituent part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan contains specific, defined actions which are all closely associated with the five strategic priorities that make up the Transformation Programme. This enables enhanced governance around the delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Year End Position

Income totalling £90,417,630 was received for 2024/25, expenditure was £99,205,745, resulting in a provisional deficit of £8,788,115. This was due to continued cost and demand pressures on residential and supported accommodation placements.

The number of residential placements has increased from an MTFP assumption of 62 in April 2024 to 79 in March 2025. This has created an in-year pressure of £6.3m. Increases in the number of young people being housed in supported accommodation partially driven by an increase in UASC, a further £2.7m of budget pressure has crystallised although this has been offset by an increase in contributions from the Home Office of £1.4m. The Trust has also had to spend £1.9m on third party wrap around support of complex placements, this was not budgeted for as this is a new pressure for 2024/25. The Trust has been able to make cost savings of £2.9m in year to reduce the full impact of these pressures.

This Trust is working closely with SMBC on planning to mitigate this deficit throughout the course of the remaining contractual period. This plan will consider the development of a well governed strategy tackling demand, supplier management and staffing permanence.

The Trust has undertaken work together with a third-party consultancy to understand the comparative position of a number of other Children's Trusts. This has shown that Sandwell has demonstrated a comparatively strong level of spend control in terms of absolute value of care costs and also in terms of managing increasing care costs per head of population in the Children's Services sector.

The below table highlights the provisional full-year outturn for - 2024/25.

Provisional full-year outturn	24/25
Income	£90,417,630
Expenditure;	(£99,205,745)
Staffing	(£33,647,039)
Placements	(£57,798,488)
Overheads	(£7,760,219)
Deficit for the Financial Year	(£8,788,115)

Section (f)

Demand analysis in respect of the Services against assumptions and models in respect of the preceding Contract Year

3.1 Workforce and Child Workloads

3.1.1 Workforce

It is important to acknowledge that Sandwell Children’s Trust employs over 600 staff, of which around 30% are social workers. If not for the range of specialist and support staff within the Trust, social workers would not have the foundation, infrastructure and intelligence to work effectively with children and their families. Nevertheless, our focus continues to be to ensure we have a stable ‘work holding’ workforce, as it is the consistency and skill of this workforce that will bring about the improved outcomes we expect for our children and families.

There are a range of models we can use to determine how many social workers we need to work with our families, some more complex than others. However, we continue to have a very simple calculation for this, which is:

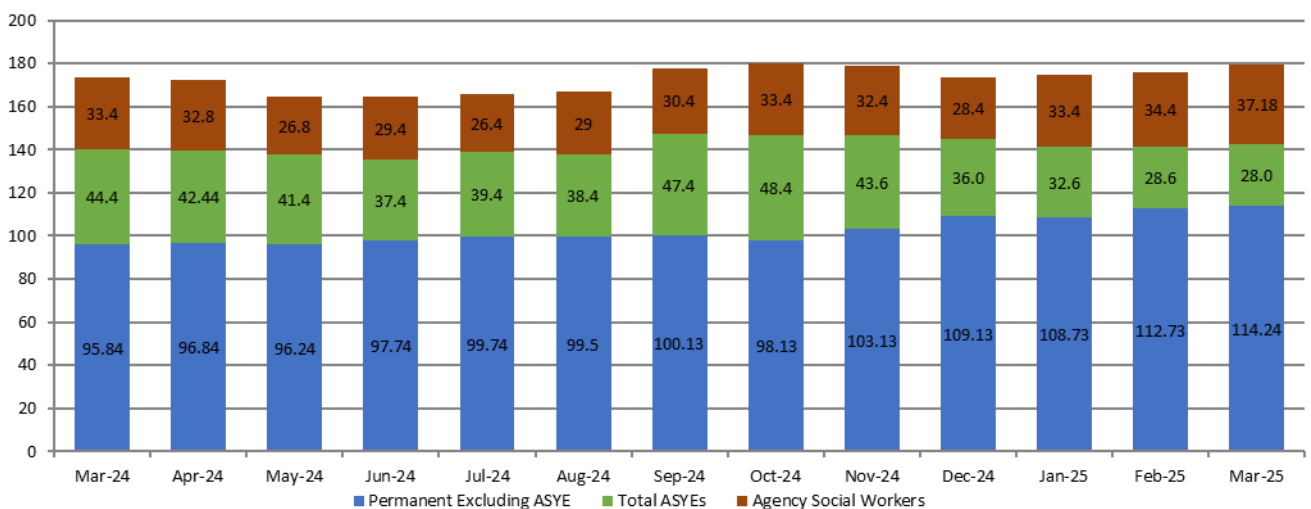
1. For Social Workers within Assessment and Intervention service (locality service areas), an average of 22 Children
2. For Social Workers within Court and Child Protection service (locality service areas), an average of 15 Children
3. For Social Workers within Children we Care for Service, an average of 15 Children
4. For Social Workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE), there is a reduction of 20% within these average caseloads (although this is profiled across the year).

Work-holding Social Workers

We have an agreed establishment of 187 Full Time Equivalent social workers, based upon our current demand, and considerations within the Medium-Term Financial Plan. This is made up of senior permanent social workers, agency social workers and those within their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASyEs) who are permanent staff.

	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25
Total Workforce - Level Needed	187	187	187	187	187	187	187	187	187	187	187	187	187
Total Social Workers	173.64	172.04	164.44	164.54	165.54	166.9	177.93	179.93	179.13	173.53	174.73	175.73	179.42
No of permanent Social Workers	140.24	139.24	137.64	135.14	139.14	137.90	147.53	146.53	146.73	145.13	141.33	141.33	142.24
Permanent Excluding ASYE	95.84	96.84	96.24	97.74	99.74	99.5	100.13	98.13	103.13	109.13	108.73	112.73	114.24
% Permanent (Excl ASYE)	55.2%	56.3%	58.5%	59.4%	60.3%	59.6%	56.3%	54.5%	57.6%	62.9%	62.2%	64.1%	63.7%
Total ASyEs	44.4	42.44	41.4	37.4	39.4	38.4	47.4	48.4	43.6	36.0	32.6	28.6	28.0
% Total ASyEs	25.6%	24.7%	25.2%	22.7%	23.8%	23.0%	26.6%	26.9%	24.3%	20.7%	18.7%	16.3%	15.6%
Agency Social Workers	33.4	32.8	26.8	29.4	26.4	29	30.4	33.4	32.4	28.4	33.4	34.4	37.18
% Agency SWs	19.2%	19.1%	16.3%	17.9%	15.9%	17.4%	17.1%	18.6%	18.1%	16.4%	19.1%	19.6%	20.7%

Staffing Levels (Permanent SWs, ASYE and Agency)



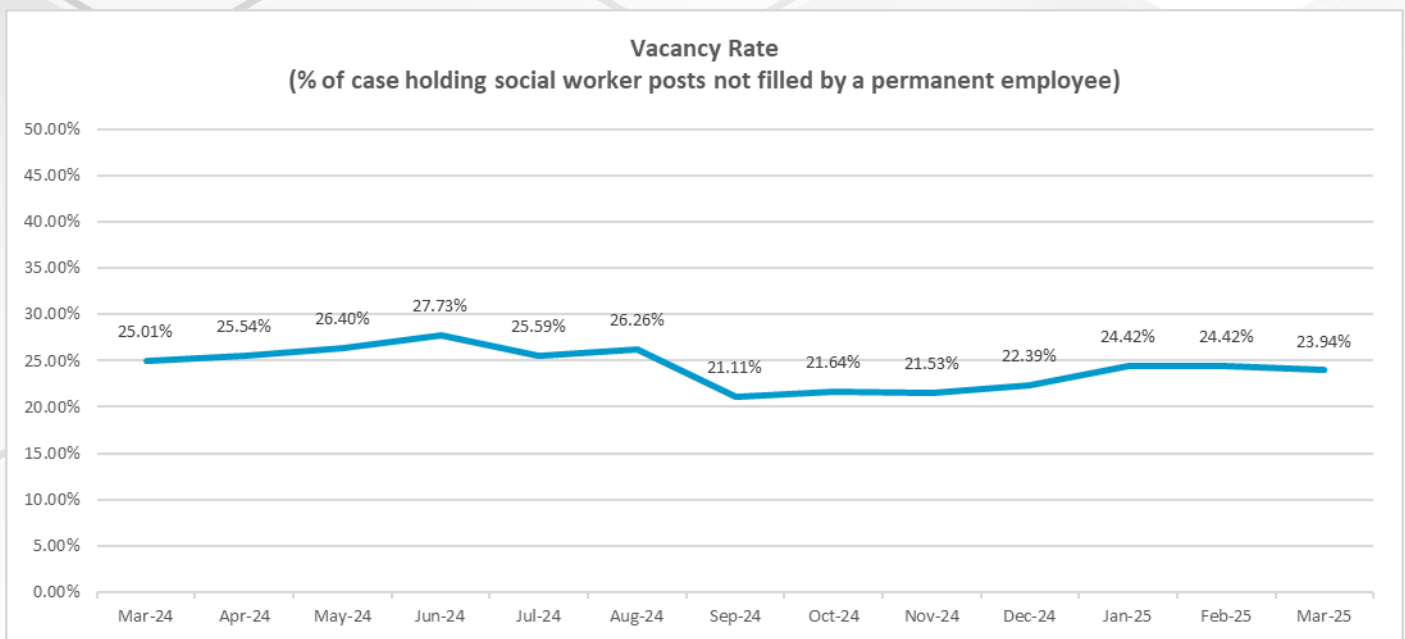
Our Social Work establishment, following throughput analysis, reduced from 203 to 187 in July 2023. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 there has been a net increase of 5.78 Social Workers from 173.64 to 179.42, the breakdown is as follows over the period (144.54 in April 2023);

- Permanent Social Workers (including ASyEs) has increased from 140.24 to 142.24 (net increase of 2) – 116.54 in April 2023
- Permanent Social Workers – increase from 95.84 to 114.24 (net increase of 18.4)

– 81.94 in April 2023

- Permanent ASYEs – decreased from 44.4 to 28 (net decrease of 16.4 workers) – 34.6 April 2023
- Agency workers have increased from 33.4 to 37.18 (net increase of 3.78 workers) – 28 in April 2023

“PI13 Vacancy Rates of Permanent Social Workers” as stated above, SCT has (at 31 March 2024) 142.24 permanent workers, compared to an establishment of 187. This number has increased significantly since April 2023 (116.54) with our permanent vacancy rate sitting now at 23.9% (44.76 permanent vacancies).



Our real time vacancy rate, including agency social workers, as of 31 March 2025 was 4.06% with 179.42 workers in post, against an establishment of 187 (7.58 real time vacancies). This has increased from 144.54 (22.7%) in April 2023 (vacancy rates have decreased significantly over the last 24 months).

Current Background- National and Regional Context

Background- National and Regional Context

- The Trust continues to face challenges in the recruitment and retention of permanent and agency social work staff due to the national workforce crisis.
- The independent review of Children’s Social Care (May 2022) recognised the staffing pressures faced and recommended that investment is made in the social care workforce to address high vacancy and turnover rates
- ADCS and NCAS conferences raised national pressures on resources within social care and confirmed that this is being felt nationwide by all local authorities

and Trusts.

- The significant area of concern falls within the Court and CP activity
- Following a review of terms and conditions, the Sandwell Deal has been launched which includes market supplements and retention payments for social workers and team managers.

Our Strategic Approach

Transformation Programme – Priority 1 is People Recruitment, retention and career development. Progress against this priority is regularly reviewed by the Director sponsor.

Creating a safe working environment and embedding a culture of staff wellbeing. Refocused and improved activity in relation to ED&I.

In April 2025 the Workforce Strategy 2025-2028 was released. Progress against this is reviewed quarterly by the Workforce Committee.

The Workforce Strategy provides a road map for ensuring the Trust can recruit, retain and develop the best staff and managers, while ensuring a safe environment.

In April 2025, the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2025-2028 was released alongside a comprehensive action plan for both employees and the wider community. The Workforce Committee also provides progress oversight and challenge to the Trust's ED&I activity.

Key activities FY24/25

- The stability of the management team within the Operational Directorate and significant reduction in vacancies and usage of agency staff
- The implementation of the Sandwell Deal and analysis of the effects on the social care workforce in terms of stability.
- The Trust has created a leadership hub that is driven by all managers and leaders across the Trust, supporting the Trust's ethos and culture
- Ongoing work to reduce the cost and increase the quality of agency staff, in line with the statutory guidance for local authorities on the use of agency child and family social workers

Key Areas of Focus

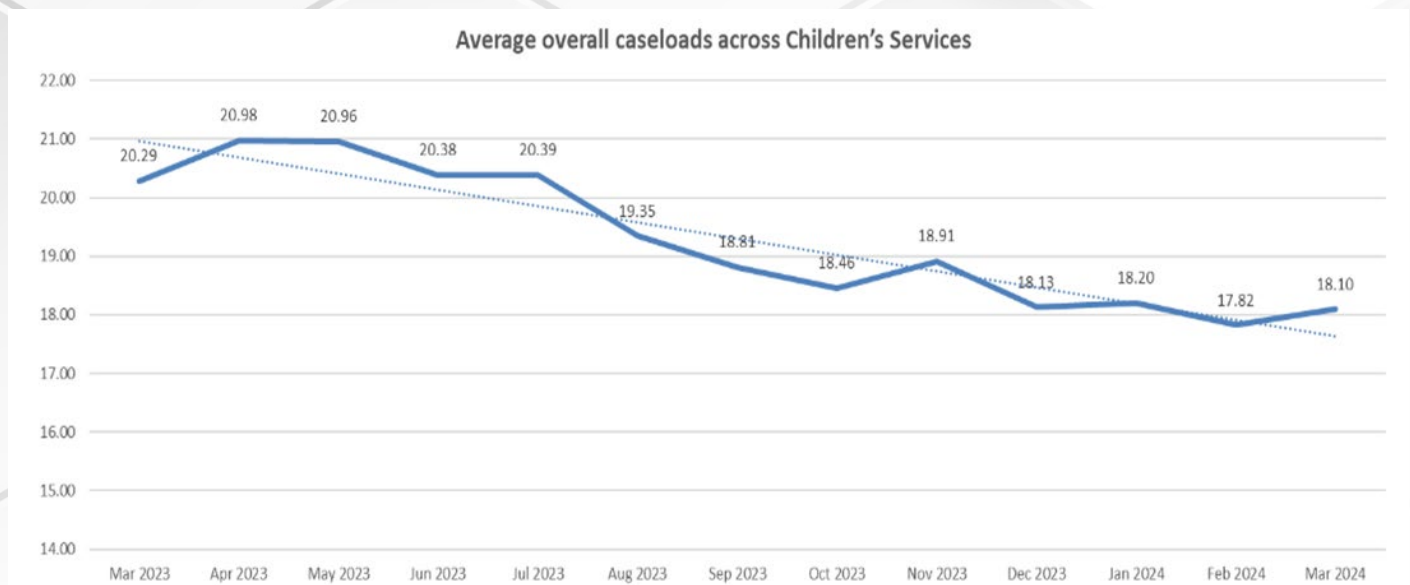
The Trust has refreshed and relaunched its Workforce Strategy 2025-2028 and Equity Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028.

The Trust has recognised the importance and impact of managers and leaders and so has developed an in-house management programme for existing and aspiring managers, supplemented by HR Masterclasses.

The Trust continues with our ‘grow our own’ programmes, of which newly qualified social workers are a key part. The Social Work Academy has recruited 32 ASYE Social Workers to commence in September 2024. This is in addition to 4 hubs of Approach Social Work students which will be in the pipeline of talent for September 2025.

The newly qualified staff are supported by the SWA and a ‘hammock of support’ is also engaged to ensure the service is supported while newly qualified staff are on reduced caseloads

3.1.1 Workloads



SCT SW workload average 31 March 2025	17.75/per SW
Statistical Neighbour average	15.4/per SW
England average	15.4/per SW

The concern remains the high workloads held by some localities’ Senior Social Workers, primarily within Tipton & Rowley and Wednesbury & West Bromwich locality areas. This issue, in conjunction with the difficulties to recruit experienced SW in locality Court and CP teams, contributes to the Trust’s vulnerability.

3.2 Our Children

Since March 2018, we have seen a decrease of 221 Children open to Sandwell Children's Trust (primarily due to the decrease in Children on Child Protection and Child in Need Plans). In relation to early intervention and targeted early help there has been an increase of 69 Children open to the Strengthening Families Service*

The Trust have reduced the number of children and young people open to Children’s Social Care from a total of 3,203 (including Care Leavers) to 2,919, which is a reduction of 290. This is due to our continued focus on progressing children’s plans where there has been historic drift; and ensuring that more children are appropriately in the social care system when they need to be.

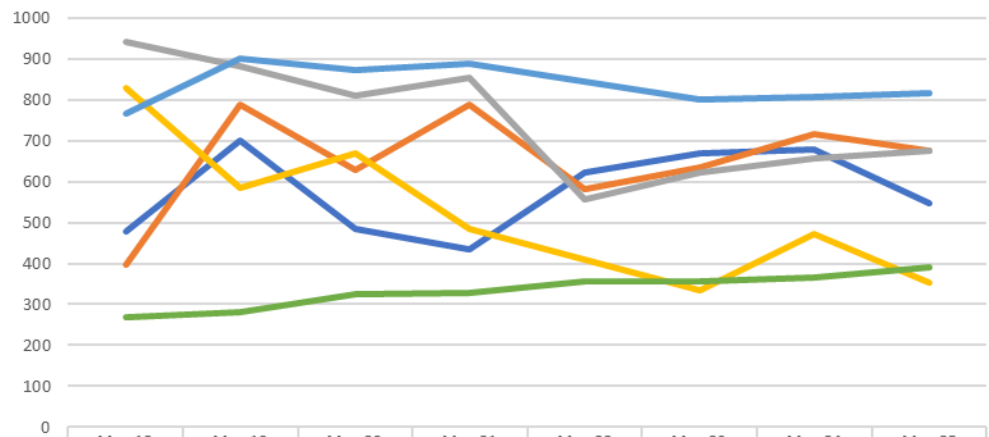
Breakdown of children and care leavers 2018 – 2024

	Mar-18	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25	Difference Mar 2018 to Mar 2024
Children open to Targeted Early Help teams	477	702	486	436	624	670	679	546	69
Children undergoing an assessment	398	788	630	789	582	635	718	677	279
Children in Need with an active CIN Plan	941	883	810	856	558	624	658	677	-264
Children with an active CP Plan	829	584	671	485	409	333	473	353	-476
Children we Care for	767	901	874	888	844	802	808	816	49
Care Experienced Young People	268	282	324	328	355	356	366	390	122
Total	3680	4140	3795	3782	3372	3420	3702	3459	-221

* Strengthening Families is a non-statutory service providing support and advice to families in order to prevent the need for statutory intervention.

As of 31 March 2025, we had 677 children with a Child in Need Plan, 353 children with a Child Protection Plan and 816 Children we Care for. We have less Children on Child Protection Plans than our Statistical Neighbour comparators and in line with Children we Care for

Children Open to Sandwell Childrens Trust



	Mar-18	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23	Mar-24	Mar-25
Children open to Targeted Early Help teams	477	702	486	436	624	670	679	546
Children undergoing an assessment	398	788	630	789	582	635	718	677
Children in Need with an active CIN Plan	941	883	810	856	558	624	658	677
Children with an active CP Plan	829	584	671	485	409	333	473	353
Children we Care for	767	901	874	888	844	802	808	816
Care Experienced Young People	268	282	324	328	355	356	366	390

Comparison with Statistical Neighbours

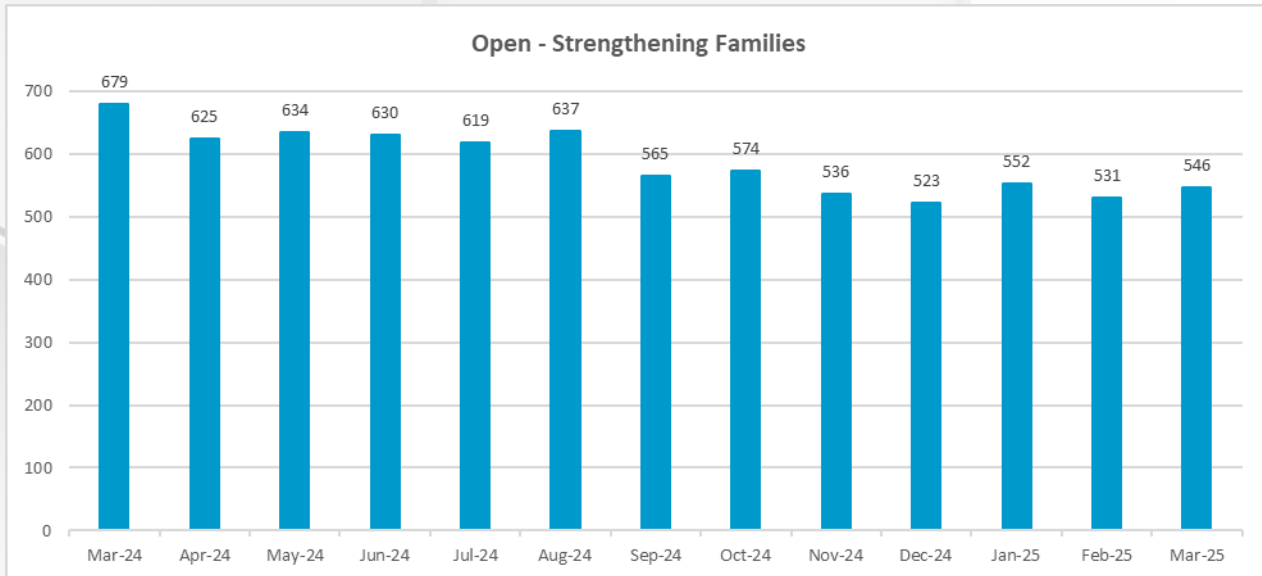
	Sandwell (31 March 2025)	Statistical Neighbour Average March 2024	England Average March 2024
Children with a Child Protection Plan	40.7 per 10,000	50.2 per 10,000	41.6 per 10,000
Children we Care for	94.0 per 10,000	95.2 per 10,000	70 per 10,000

Referrals, S47s and ICPCs

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024	2024- 2025
Referrals	6,364	6,381	5,397	4,454	4,205	4,497	3,728
Referrals Rates Per 10,000	758	753	633	525	491	506	429.3

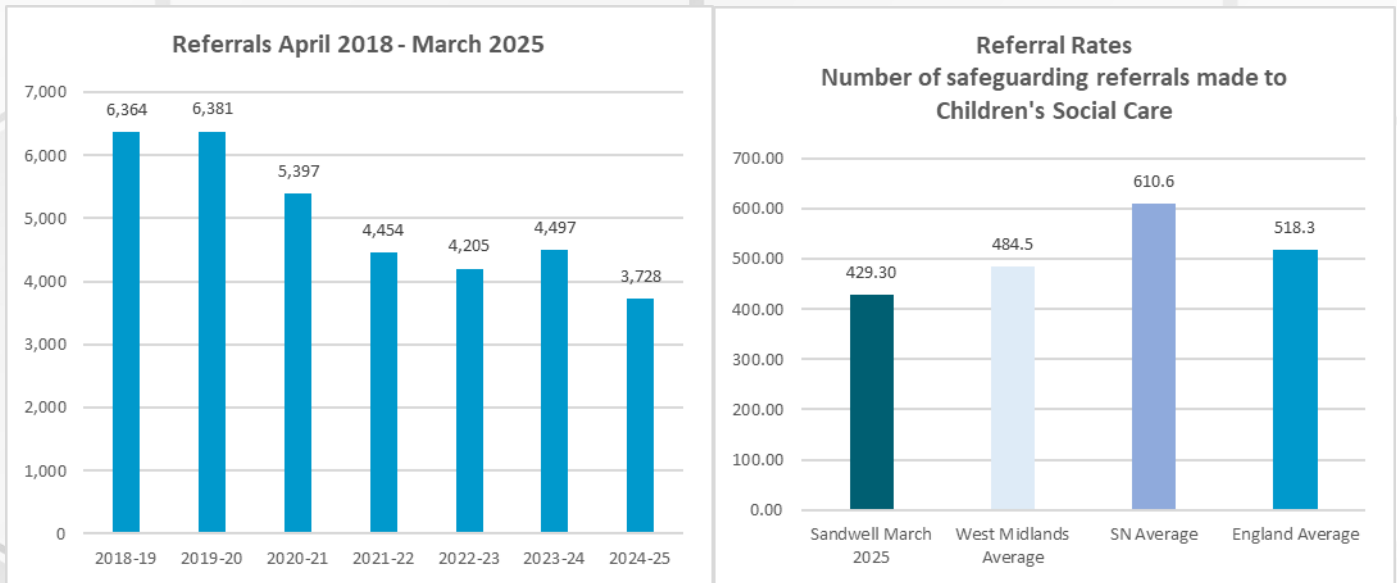
The increased referral rate to the Trust in 2018/19 (758 per 10,000 children) continued throughout the first two years at 753 at end March 2020. The last five years has seen a downward trajectory to 429.3 per 10,000 as at the end March 2025 this is below our Statistical Neighbour and England averages of 610.6 and 518.3 per 10,000 and is also lower than West Midlands Average of 484.5 per 10,000. The reduction is primarily due to workers and partners better applying threshold criteria for statutory services and managing risk more confidently.

We are seeing more children stepping down to targeted family support and our Strengthening Families Service over the last 3 years in comparison to previous years, in addition we have more Children supported by Strengthening Families as both a shared service 154 last year to 166 this year. There is still more work to do in relation to thresholds for referrals and single assessment outcomes of no further action (NFA) although this has reduced from 37.1% in 2023-24 to 33.8% this year.



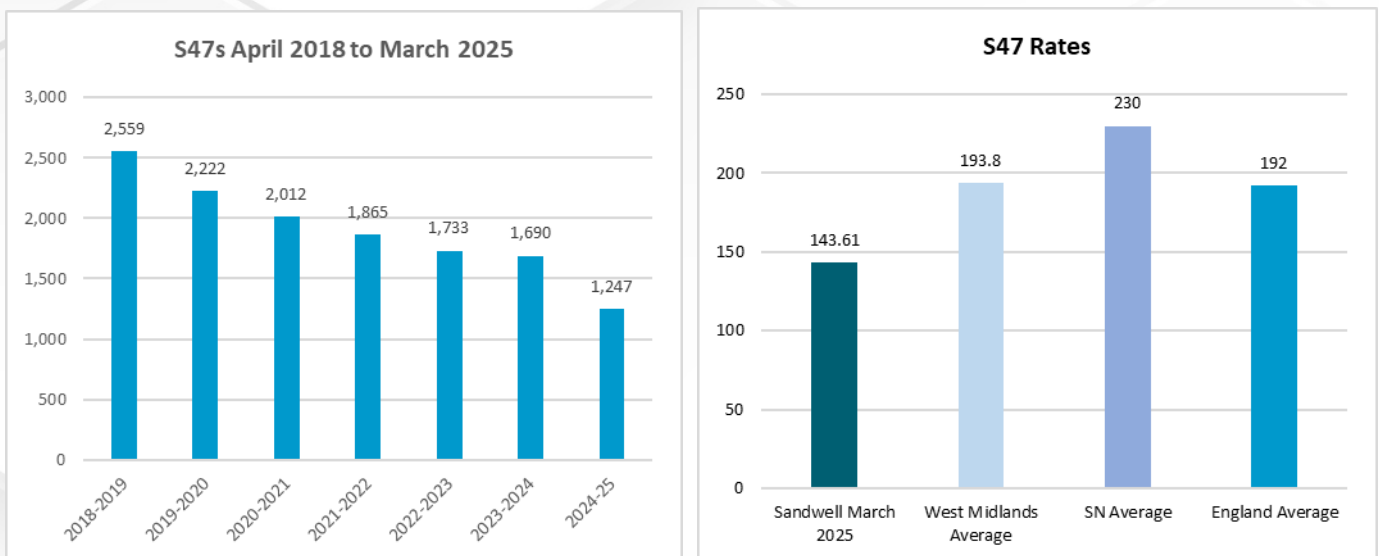
22.9% of children have been re-referred within the previous 12 months, this has increased since March 2024 (20.9%), although the increase this is only now slightly higher against our comparators (22.4%). Analysis and dip sampling by Heads of Service indicates re-referral rates have increased due to specific teams within locality service areas.

The rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 has reduced from a rate of 305 in March 2019 to a rate of 143.61 per 10,000 in March 2025 (195 last year), this is now lower than our Statistical Neighbours and in line with England and West Midlands averages. This shows that the Trust continues to consistently purposeful when we are faced with deciding whether to proceed with S47 enquiries. Decision making and application of thresholds (including threshold discussions) within operational and safeguarding unit are more robust in this area to ensure that risk is assessed and Children and Families have the right outcome needed.



Summary of S47s 2018 - 2025

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024	2024 - 2025
S47s	2,559	2,222	2,012	1,865	1,733	1,690	1,247
S47 Rates Per 10,000	305	262	236	220	202	195	143.61



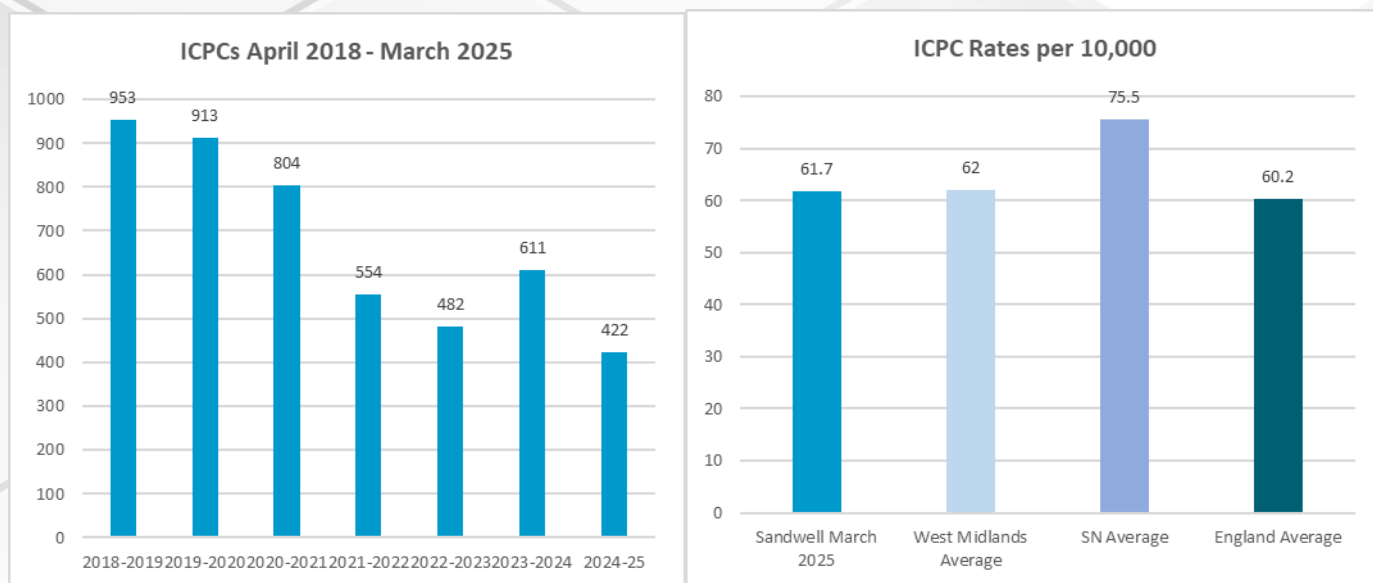
The rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences per 10,000 has also reduced from 114 in March 2019 to a rate of 61.7 per 10,000 in March 2025. Current ICPC rate is now below Statistical Neighbour although slightly above England and West Midlands Average. The conversion rate from S47 to ICPC is much improved from 34.8% in March 2024 to 48.5% in March 2025. In addition, the latest conversion rate from ICPC to CP

Plan is healthier and has improved to 83% over the last financial year in comparison to 68% in 2020

The threshold discussions between Conference Chairs and Social Workers are ensuring that the right Children are going into conference and onto CP Plans.

Summary of ICPC and ICPC rates per 10,000

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024	2024-25
ICPCs	953	913	804	554	482	611	422
ICPC Rates Per 10,000	114	108	94	65	56	70	61.7



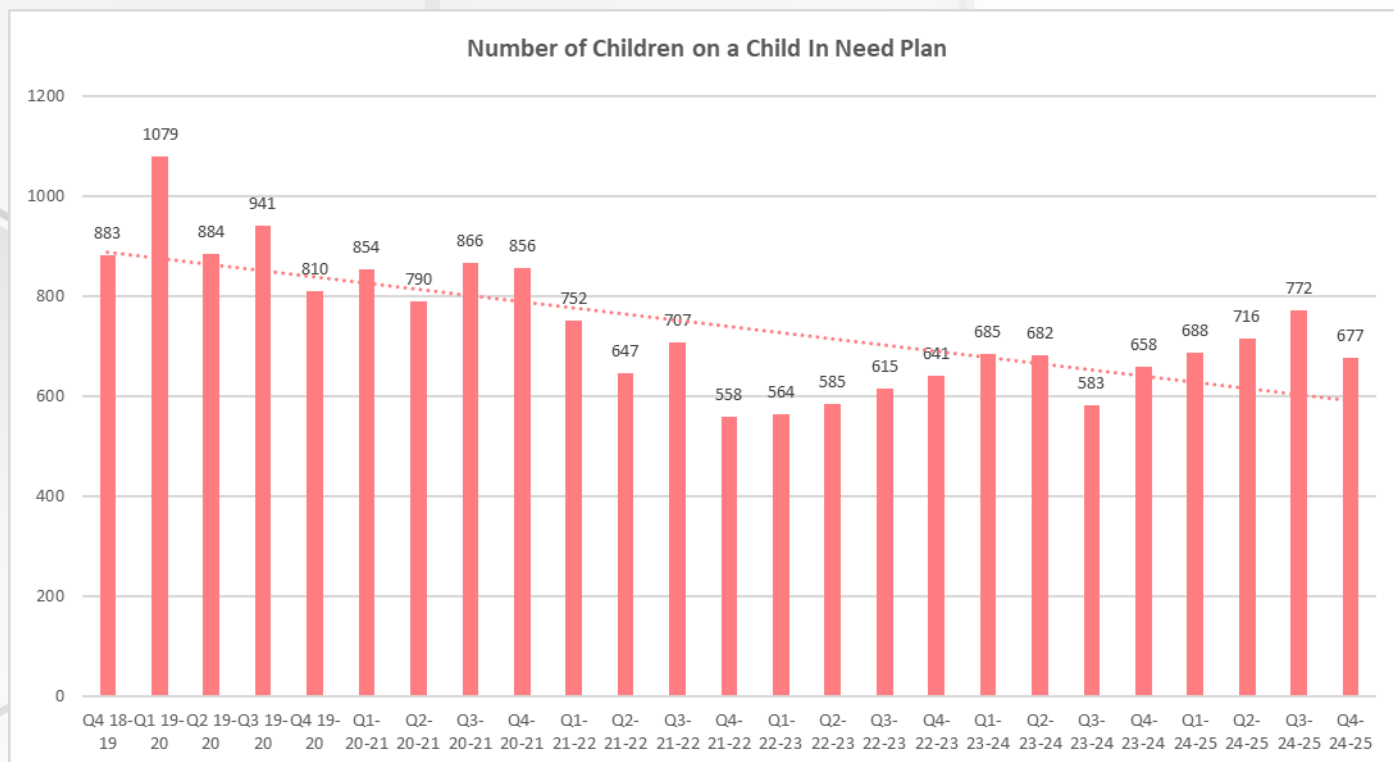
Overall, alongside the continued dip sampling of assessments, S47's and ICPC's the above measures provide clear evidence that we are acting more confidently and consistently when applying thresholds for our services and working in a more timely and consistent manner.

Children in Need

We began the contract on 1 April 2018 with 941 children in need and quickly recognised that this was an area to better understand and reduce drift and delay in progressing children's plans. Following a short review of these children, it was clear that some of the children did not require a statutory service. As a consequence, there was a clear focus on progressing case closures. Since December 2018 the service robustly monitors and reviews Children on Child in Need Plans at 9 months to ensure a safe step down to targeted early help or universal services regular updating of assessments takes place and support to reduce drift and delay with better decision making for our

Child in Need cohort. As of 31st March 2025, we had 111 (16.4% on a CiN Plan for 9+ months)

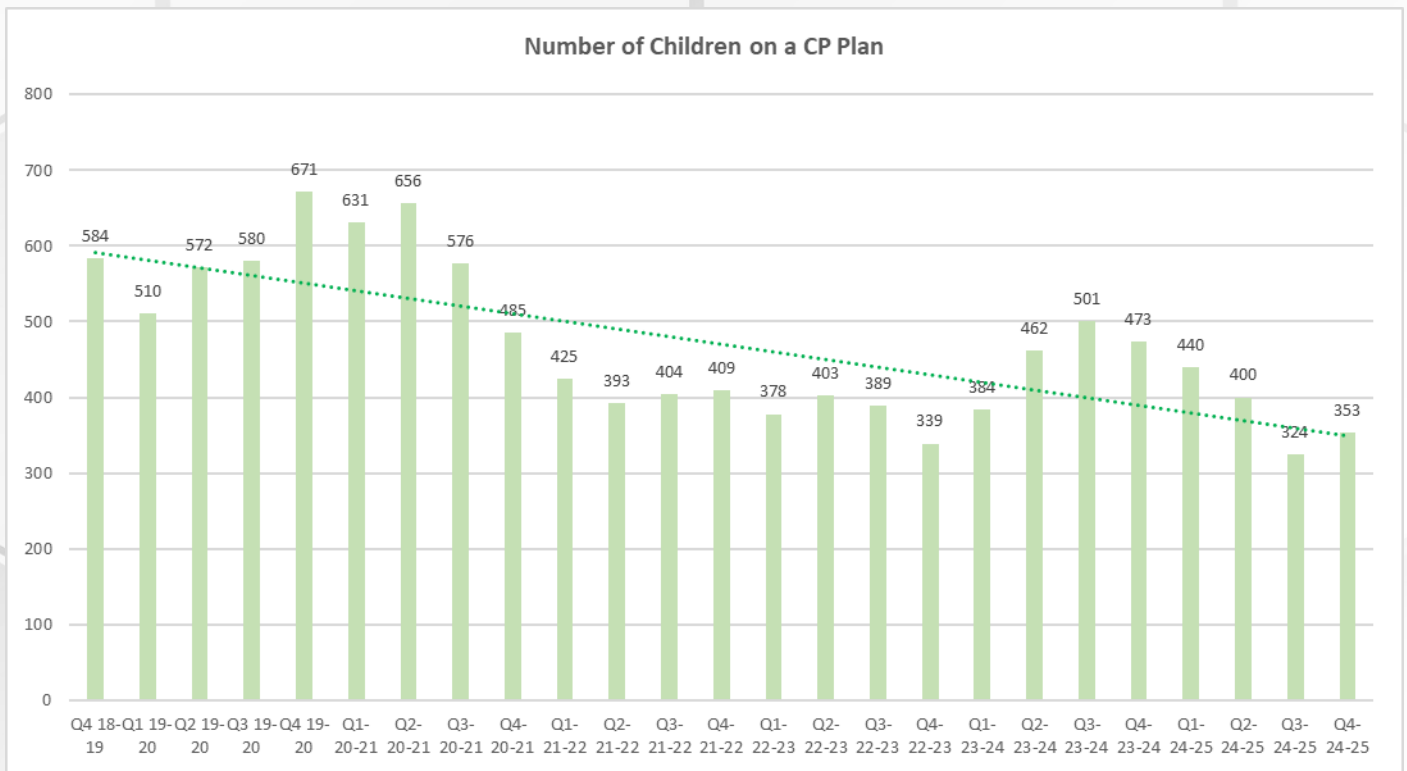
The graph below demonstrates a significant reduction of Children on Child in Need plans from a high point in June 2019 of 1,079 Children to 677 in March 2025 (reduction of 402 Children since June 2019). This is an area kept under constant review and reviewing Children on Child in Need



Children with a Child Protection Plan

In April 2018, the Trust had 798 children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan, and across the course of the seven years the number has reduced to 353 (40.7 per 10,000), this number, which is now below SN Average of 50.2 per 10,000 and in line with England Average.

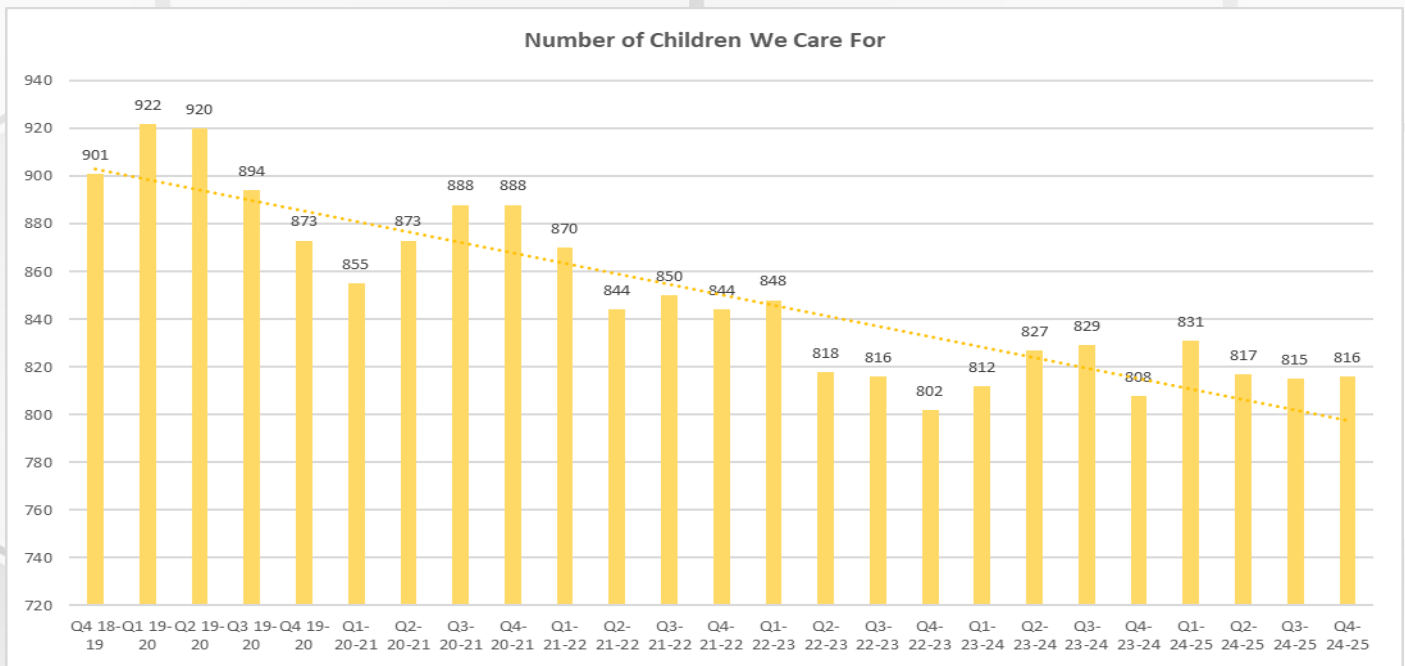
The service is regularly reviewing Children on Child Protection Plans for longer than 12 months to reduce the risk of drift and delay and to ensure Children’s plans are progressed safely and robustly. As of 31 March 2025, we currently have 23.5% of our Children on a Plan for 12+ months which is now more in line with our Statistical Neighbour and National averages and 3.4% on a plan for 2+ years (12 Children, in line with SN Average of 3%). The below graph shows the downward trajectory of Children on a Child Protection plan over last 5 years (although an increase in 2023-24)



Children we Care for

We began the financial year 2018/19 with 778 children in care and saw a sharp increase in the first 18 months up to 937 mid July 2019.

As of 31 March 2025, the number of children we care for has increased slightly from 808 to 816 over the last 12 months. The current rate of children we care for is now at 94 per 10,000 which is in line with SN Average of 95.2 (updated to March 2024), this includes 38 Separated Young People



Based on our latest Statistical Neighbour Average at 95.2 per 10,000, Sandwell are currently 1.1 per 10,000 lower than our comparator group, although we continue to be higher than England Average of 70 per 10,000.

Children we Care for March 2024 Statistical Neighbour Rates per 10,000

	Rates
Birmingham	79
Blackburn with Darwen	86
Coventry	84
Derby	100
Luton	62
Nottingham	100

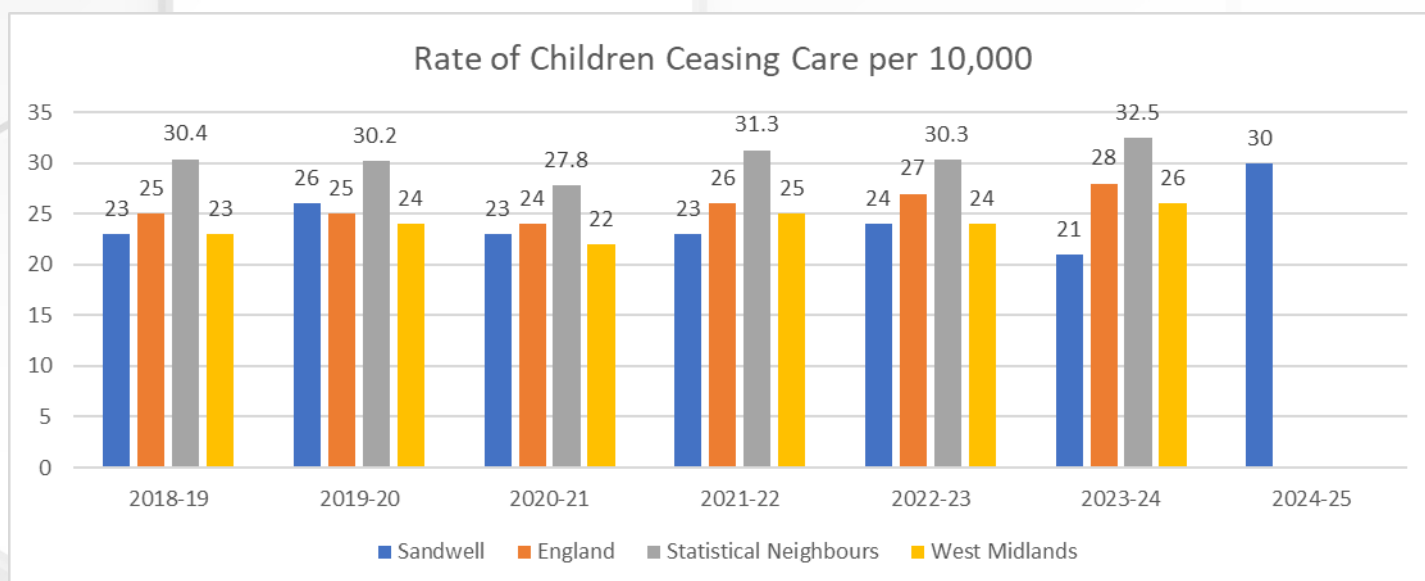
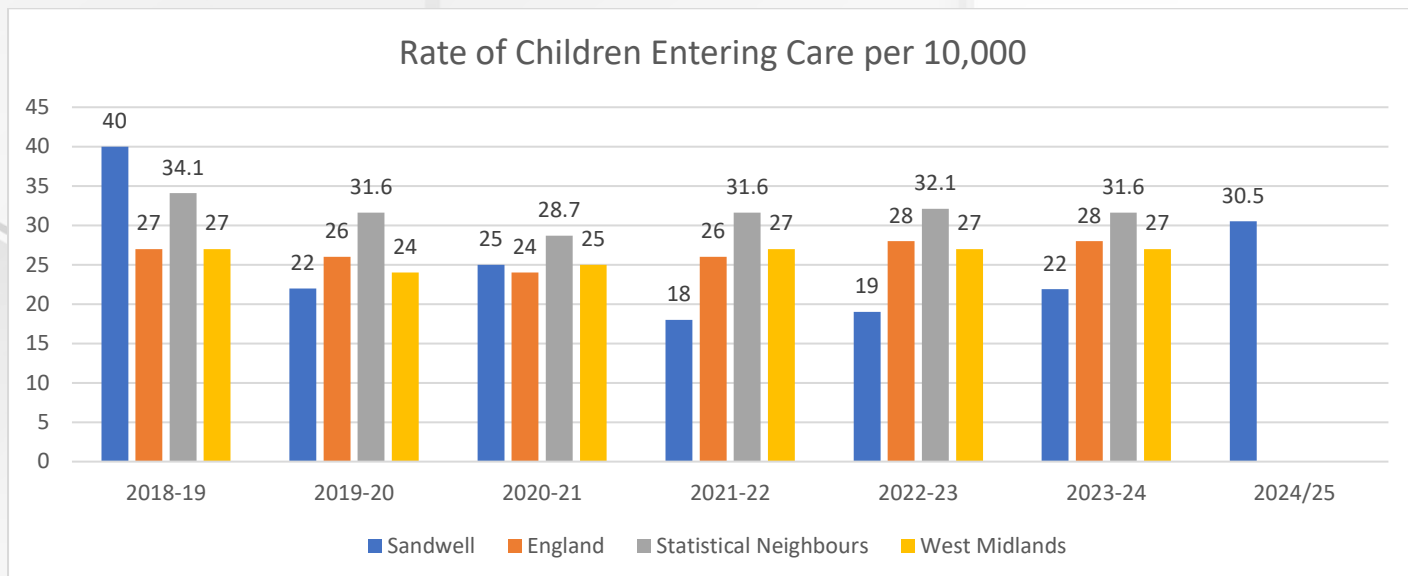
	Rates
Peterborough	75
Sandwell March 25	93.9
Stoke-On-Trent	191
Walsall	95
Wolverhampton	80
SN Average	95.2

Children Entering and Ceasing Care

Between the 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the number of Children Entering Care was 265 with 260 Children Ceasing Care.

Summary of Becoming Looked After (BLA) and Ceasing Care by year

	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024	2024- 2025
BLA by year	330	184	214	154	160	188	265
Ceasing Care by Year	195	217	194	198	210	173	260



The tables below compare our number of Children Entering and Ceasing Care against our latest Statistical Neighbour, West Midlands and England comparator data. Apart from April 2018-March 2019 you can see that the number of Children entering care is below our Statistical Neighbour comparators (this year a rate of 30.5 Children per 10,000 have entered Care has increased on last year and highest since 2018-19), this is also the case for Children exiting care (this year rate of 30 per 10,000 exiting care is highest in last 7 years). Work in relation to exiting care plan has improved the number of Children exiting

care to 260 Children, although we have seen an increase in Children entering care to 265, we need to factor in the increase of separated young people.

Table 9: Summary of Becoming Looked After and Rates per 10,000

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Latest SN Average	Latest England Average
BLA by year	330	184	214	154	160	188	265		
Rates per 10,000	40	22	25	18	19	22	30.5	31.6	28

Table 10: Summary of Ceasing Care and Rates per 10,000

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2023-24	Latest SN Average	Latest England Average
Ceasing by year	195	217	194	198	210	173	260		
Rates per 10,000	23	26	23	23	24	20	30	32.5	28

Demand for Foster Placements for Children in Care (Internal and External)

The Fostering Service was inspected by Ofsted in October 2024 and assessed as providing a ‘Good’ Service overall, with requires improvement to be good for the effectiveness of leaders and managers. This was due to there being periods since the last previous inspection in 2021 where the agency had operated without a permanent manager who was registered with Ofsted. The independent fostering agency was stated as providing services that met the requirements for good. The report contained a lot of positive feedback. Foster carers and staff were considered as having high aspirations for the children they care for. Children form positive relationships with their foster carers and are valued member so their foster family. The Trust is proactive in supporting foster carers and connected carers to apply for special guardianship orders. Safeguarding is a high priority for all staff and foster carers. Roles and responsibilities are understood. There are safe recruitment processes in place for staff, panel members and fosters career to ensure the suitability of people working with children that we care for and managers are successfully supporting many areas of improvement and development.

The table shows the number of Children in Internal Foster Placements between 31 March 2024 and 31 March 2025, as you can see that there has been a decrease in Children Placed in Internal Mainstream/Connected carer placements from 285 to 266 (reduction of 19 Children), furthermore there has been a reduction but a smaller decrease of Children placed in External Foster Care Placements from 300 to 295 (reduction of 15 Children). Over the same period there has been an increase in Children placed in residential placements from 62 to 77.

Children in Internal and External Foster Care

	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25
Foster Placement Trust Carers	285	283	280	277	269	276	268	272	269	272	270	267	266
Foster Placement External	300	309	310	308	294	284	287	288	296	293	302	300	295

Recruitment Activity

Recruitment of foster carers continues to be a focus of the Trust, making use of a range of media and marketing opportunities. There were 92 new enquiries for 2024-25 (compared to 124 last year) 19 applications within the year and 14 foster carer mainstream approvals in 2024-25, up from 5 last year (application to approval rate of 31%).

Section (f)

There were 22 mainstream de-registrations over the same period so, in theory, a net decrease of 8 mainstream carers this financial year. There was a net decrease of 19 Children placed in Mainstream and Connected Placements. On 31 March 2025, we had 85 mainstream foster carer households and 79 connected carer households.

Our approach to residential care is progressing at pace in order that we can make better use of local residential provision for when this is the right option for children. Following a number of engagement events with private providers, relationships have improved, and the Trust and council are aiming to increase the number of beds used by Sandwell young people through local providers which should impact positively on children being placed in their own communities. The Trust aims to relaunch its Sandwell Provider Network and interactive portal in 2025/2026.

Care Experienced Young People

	Mar 18	Mar 19	Mar 20	Mar 21	Mar 22	Mar 23	Mar 24	Mar 25	Variance Mar 18 – Mar 25
Care Experienced Young People	268	282	324	328	355	356	366	390	122

Our care experienced young people service provides support to children who are 16 or over and are still in our care, with the expectation of a steady transition into the Care Experienced 18+ service. This cohort has steadily increased over seven years from 268 to 390 (an increase of 122 Care Experienced Young People) with a slight increase from March 2024-March 2025 (366-390). From April 2018, a change in legislation meant we have a statutory responsibility to support care leavers until the age of 25, which has resulted in a steady increase in the number of young people within this service area. Consequently, workloads have increased from approximately 18 young people per worker, to 21. Children in Care aged 16+ are allocated a Personal Advisor (PA) to provide support and ensure a robust transition into the Care Experienced service with the majority of 17-year-olds now co-allocated a PA.

The May 2022 Ofsted inspection observed that Care Leavers are well supported to find good-quality accommodation, that the Trust is focused on ensuring that Care Leavers receive the opportunities they are entitled to and that care leavers who become parents are well supported.

Section (g)

The outcome of any Agreed Action Plan and/or Rectification Plan that was agreed in the preceding Contract Year

There were no formal action plans or rectification plans in the Contract year 2024/25.

Section (h)

Any Changes to the Agreement agreed between the Parties in the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the Change Control Procedure.

Changes to Service Delivery Contract

- Amendment of KPI 9 Date of the Fast Track Change 1st April 2025
- Extension of SSA Schedule 2 – Part 19 (Transport) Commencement from 1st April 2025

- New Contractual Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) 2024 from 1st April 2024

Changes to Support Services Agreements

There were no changes to the support services agreements during the year, apart from extension for support level agreement for transport.

Other significant changes

On 6 July 2024 Rt.Hon Jacqui Smith resigned as Chair of the Trust Board and ceased to be a Company Director. Graham Archer was added as a Company Director and Chair of Trust Board on 13 November 2024. On 20 May 2025, Cllr Randhawa ceased as a Company Director and Cllr Chipliliro Kalebe-Nyamongo was added as a SCT Company Director.

Section (i)

Any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism and/or the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year

- LIAT changes to Statistical Neighbour Group from June 2025, new Statistical Neighbour group is below

E-code	Select local authority (LA)	Region
E08000028	Sandwell	West Midlands

LA Name	Proximity	Region
Wolverhampton	Very close	West Midlands
Kingston upon Hull, City of	Very close	Yorkshire and The Humber

Stoke-on-Trent	Close	West Midlands
Walsall	Close	West Midlands
Rochdale	Close	North West
Bradford	Close	Yorkshire and The Humber
Middlesbrough	Close	North East
Coventry	Close	West Midlands
Oldham	Close	North West
Luton	Close	East of England

Section (j)

The contractual governance arrangements set out in Schedule 19 (Governance)

KPI Changes

SCT and SMBC agreed new contract KPIs which went live in April 2024, full list is below including targets and tolerances (KPI 9 targets were revised in February 2025 with consultation between SMBC, SCT and the Chair of the Improvement Board).

Contract KPIs		Green	Amber	Red
1	Out of the total number of Single Assessments, the percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days	≥85.0%	>70.01%, <84.99%	≤70.0%
2	% of visits for CiN taking place within 20 working days	≥73.0%	>57.0%, <73.0	≤57.0%
3	% children becoming subject of a CP Plan for the second or subsequent time (within two years)	≤15.0%	<15.0%, >22.0%	≥22.0%
4	Rate of Children on a Child Protection Plan at period end (Rate per 10,000)	≤45.0	<55.0%, >45.0	≥55.0
5	% of children open to the Trust's CwD Team with an updated assessment within the last 12 months	≥90%	>80.0%, <90.0%	≤80.0%
6	% of children with a permanence plan by the 2nd review	≥95%	>85.0%, <95.0%	≤85.0%
7	Rate of Children we Care for at period end (Rate per 10,000)	≤94.0	<100.0, >94.0	≥100.0
8	% of CYP that have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months	≤9%	<12.0%, >9.0%	≥12.0%
9	For children in care for 2.5 years or more, the Percentage that have been in the same placement for at least 2 years (16 and under)	>-67-75%	>62% <67% >75.1% -100%	<62.0%
10	% of Care Experienced YP (aged 18-21yrs) with Pathway plans updated in the last 12 months	≥93%	>83.0%, <93.0%	≤83.0%
11	% of children on a Child Protection plan for over 2 years	≤3%	3% -5.0%	≥5.0%
12	Vacancy Rate (% of case holding social worker posts not filled by a permanent employee)	<34%	≥34% <40.0%	≥40.0%
13	% of children open for longer than 8 weeks that have been discussed in supervision in the previous 8 weeks	≥80%	>70.0%, <80.0%	≤70.0%
14	% of CiN at 9 months who have been reviewed by a senior manager	≥80.0%	>70.0%, <80.0	≤70.0%
15	% usage of mainstream carer placements available against all real time vacancies (excluding carers on hold and specific vacancies)	≥92%	>88.0%, <92.0%	≤88.0%

Section (k)

Such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

There are no additional matters in this report that have been agreed by both parties