

Cabinet

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| Report Title | Extension of contract for a non-executive director (NED) of Sandwell Children's Trust board |
| Date of Meeting | Wednesday, 14 January 2026 |
| Report Author | Claire Tate Interim Commissioning Manager, Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvements |
| Lead Officer | Executive Director Children and Education Sally Giles |
| Lead Cabinet Member(s) | Cabinet Member for Children & Families Councillor Jalal Uddin |
| Why is this a key decision? | Decision that will have significant impact on those living or working in 2 or more wards in the borough. |
| Wards Affected | (All Wards); |
| Identify exempt information and exemption category | Open |
| Is the report urgent? | Yes |
| Reasons for urgency (only where applicable) | No |
| Appendices (if any) | None |

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report seeks approval for the extension of the contract for a Non-Executive Director on the Sandwell Children's Trust Board to ensure continued strategic oversight and governance continuity.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Cabinet, on behalf of the Council as the sole owner of Sandwell Children's Trust is recommended to:

- a) note the completed sequence of events that are contractually required to extend the contract of a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust board.
- b) note and take into account in its decision-making, the response from the Secretary of State for Education.
- c) agree the extension of contract of Jane Bleach as a non-executive director of Sandwell Children's Trust until 31 March 2028.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 The appointment of the non-Executive Director Jane Bleach took effect from 1 March 2023 and was for an initial term of 3 years. The board wishes to secure the continuity of a non-executive director who provides experience and expertise.
- 3.2 The Council has written to the Secretary of State to request consent to extend this appointment to the remaining period of the current contract with Sandwell Childrens Trust, which runs until up to 31 March 2028. At the time of writing this Cabinet report, DfE officials have confirmed by email that the Secretary of State for Education has not raised any objections to the extension.
- 3.3 Following the completion of the required process to consult the Secretary of State, and to take into account the response, the Cabinet is now recommended to agree the recommendations set out in this report.

4. Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2016, Cabinet was advised of the Government's Statutory Direction (under Section 479A of the Education Act 1996) to set up a new arrangement in the form of a children's trust to deliver children's social care services. As a result, Sandwell Children's Trust started operating on 1 April 2018.
- 4.2 On 22 March 2017, the Cabinet considered the types of decisions that would be of such strategic importance that they could not be decided at the board of the Trust but would be "reserved to" the owner of the Trust (the Council) for decision:
 - As the decision maker for the Council in its capacity as the body that is responsible and accountable for the discharge of the relevant children's social care services functions; and
 - As the decision maker for the Council in its capacity as owner of the Trust in relation primarily to the Reserved Matters, as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding, and other legally required decisions.
- 4.3 The Cabinet agreed that: "In order to fulfil the role as sole owner of the Trust, it is recommended that the full Cabinet itself operates as the decision-making body for matters in relation to the Trust." It also agreed that, in order to clearly differentiate between decisions which Cabinet is considering in its two roles (i.e. as owner of the Trust and as children's services authority), separate reports be prepared to set out clearly which role the Cabinet is undertaking at any time. In relation to decisions taken in its role as owner of the Trust, the Cabinet agreed that any recommendations should include authority for

officers then to formalise the decision in relation to any company law paperwork.

- 4.4 The Governance Side Agreement which the Council entered into with the Department for Education sets out the composition of the board of directors of the Trust as follows:
 - A Chair (non-executive director) as appointed by the Secretary of State in consultation with the Council;
 - Three executive directors comprising the Trust's Chief Executive and two other members of the executive management team;
 - Three non-executive directors with collective knowledge and expertise across children's services, public services;
 - Two additional non-executive directors appointed by the Council (e.g. members and /or officers).
- 4.5 Apart from the appointment of the Chair, all other appointments are required to be made in consultation with the Secretary of State for Education. The appointment of the two non-executive directors appointed by the Council is a 'Reserved Matter' and therefore a decision to be taken by the Cabinet.
- 4.6 Appointed individuals will, as executive and as non-executive directors of the Trust, have a fiduciary duty to the Trust board, meaning that they will act in good faith, and in the best interests of the Company.
- 4.7 The Council, as sole owner of the Company (Sandwell Children's Trust) is required to consult with the Secretary of State on certain 'Consultation Reserved Matters' prior to notifying the Company of its decisions in respect of that Consultation Reserved Matter. The Secretary of State is invited to: "make written representations to the Council within 10 working days of being notified of the matter.... In making its decision the Council must take into account the representations made by the Secretary of State."
- 4.8 The Consultation Reserved Matters relevant to the recommendations in this report are:
 - Approval of the registering of any new member of the Company.
 - Approval of any Additional Executive Director removals or appointments (including the approval of appointment terms for Additional Executive Directors and any amendments to such terms).
 - Approval of any Independent Non-Executive Director removals or appointments (including the approval of the appointment terms for Independent Non-Executive Directors and any amendments to such terms).
- 4.15 The terms and conditions of the NED's are a reserved matter, and any change would need to be confirmed by Cabinet.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The alternative option would be to reject the recommendation. However, in line with the Governance Side Agreement with the DfE and the Trust's Articles of Association there would be a vacancy on the board that would still need to be filled. An alternative candidate would need to be identified via a

competitive process and the process of consulting with the Secretary of State would need to be undertaken again. This would leave a potential gap in the governance arrangements of the Trust for a period.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with the Chair of the Board of Sandwell Children's Trust, senior officers within Children's Services, and representatives from the Department for Education. This provides appropriate oversight and agreement regarding the proposed extension to the Non-Executive Director appointment.
- 5.2 The Secretary of State has been consulted and approved the extension.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Council receives a grant from the DfE which cover the full costs of the independent non-executive directors.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 The Governance Side Agreement between the Council and Department for Education sets out the composition of the board of directors of the Trust.
- 7.2 The Council is required, as sole owner of the Trust, to consult with the Secretary of State on certain 'Consultation Reserved Matters' prior to notifying the Trust of its decisions in respect of that Consultation Reserved Matter. The approval of any removal or appointment of an Independent Non-Executive Director is such a matter.

8. Risks

- 8.1 The corporate risk management strategy has been complied with and risks have been identified arising from the recommendations being sought. This has concluded that there are no significant risks that require reporting and that suitable measures are in place to mitigate the risks identified to acceptable levels.

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

An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report.

10. Other Relevant Implications

- 10.1 Sandwell Children's Trust receives a significant financial resource to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities for children's social care, this includes the cost of the non-executive Directors.

10.2 The amount that SCT receives is agreed annually in line with mechanisms set out in the Service Delivery Contract.

10.3 **Corporate parenting** – *Having a full complement of non-executive directors in place strengthens the governance and oversight of the delivery of corporate parenting.*

10.4 **Social Value** – SCT supports children to achieve, feel safe, be supported and access opportunities. SCT supports care leavers to access education, employment and training. Having strong governance and oversight supports SCT to achieve service improvement and better support children and families in Sandwell.

10.5 **Health and Wellbeing** – SCT continues to support children and families in Sandwell and as the quality of service that they deliver improves so does the impact they have on improving the health and wellbeing of children and families.

11. Background Documents

Cabinet Paper dated:

19 October 2016

[04 - Formation of a Children's Trust](#)

[04 - Formation of a Children's Trust - Appendix](#)

7 December 2016

[04 - Formation of Children' Trust - MoU](#)

[04a - Appendix 1 Strategic Project Risk Register](#)

[04b - Appendix 2 Formal Commissioner Response](#)

22 March 2017

[22 - Role of Sandwell MBC in relation to Sandwell Children's Social Care Trust](#)

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

- Growing up in Sandwell**

Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) plays a central role in ensuring children and young people grow up in a safe, nurturing environment. The appointment of strong non-executive directors enhances governance and strategic oversight, supporting improved outcomes for children in care and those in need of support.

- One Council One Team Approach**

The Council's role as sole owner of the Trust and its involvement in key governance decisions reflects a joined-up, collaborative approach to delivering children's services. This reinforces the Council's commitment to integrated working and shared accountability across departments and partners.