



Sandwell
Children's Trust

Our approach to Workforce Development 2022-2025

**Priority 1
People**



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Introduction

Sandwell Children's Trust is in the heart of the West Midlands, covering the six towns of Tipton, Rowley Regis, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Smethwick and Oldbury. Since its formation in April 2018 we have worked hard to improve how we work with families and we continue to make progress. We have a clear purpose: to improve the lives of children and young people in Sandwell, and at the heart of this purpose is our most important asset, our people.

We are fortunate to have a rich and diverse group of people who share our purpose and ethos to improve children's lives and keep them safely with their families wherever possible. Those who work here often refer to the 'Sandwell Family'. We are small enough to be a tight knit unit, but large enough to offer fantastic opportunities. Like all families we have

our challenges, however we support each other and celebrate together. We are striving to embed a fully inclusive culture and an environment where we continually learn and develop.

We want the Trust to be the employer of choice for all roles and underpinning our whole approach regarding our workforce is our "12 Reasons To Work In Sandwell." We work in a sector where demand for great talent and practitioners significantly outweighs supply, so we cannot be complacent when it comes to our workforce.

The success of our 12 Reasons is dependent on a clear set of actions and this document outlines our activity over the next three years, with the aim that all our staff continue to improve the lives of children and young people in Sandwell and reach their full potential.

That's what families do.

12 reasons to work in Sandwell Children's Trust

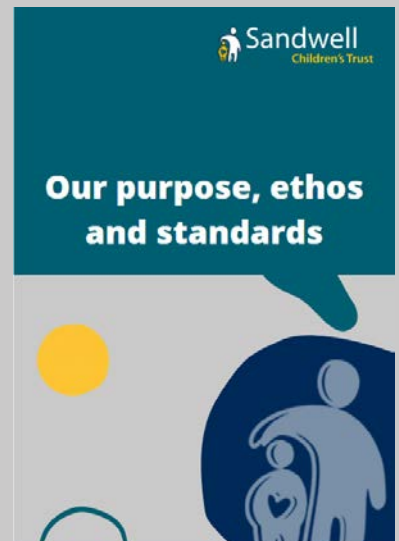
- 1. A new beginning**
 - Small enough to be a tight knit unit
 - Large enough to offer fantastic opportunities
- 2. Clear vision and purpose**
 - Our purpose of 'improving the lives of children and young people' is at the heart of everything we do
- 3. Inspirational, visible leadership and great management**
 - Connected leadership that truly knows the workforce, and listens, acts and cares
- 4. Learning Organisation**
 - 15 days per year professional development
 - Learning placements to expand your knowledge
 - Effective supervision
 - High quality induction
- 5. Manageable case loads**
 - Committed to reducing caseloads for social workers
 - Reduced caseloads for ASYEs and Advanced Practitioners
- 6. Excellent career progression**
 - Clear and supported career progression
 - Grow your own scheme
 - Frontline & Firstline
 - Recognised ASYE & Management programmes
- 7. Stable and permanent workforce**
 - A stable, dedicated and committed workforce
 - Flexible workforce with 20% agency staff
- 8. Competitive rewards**
 - Competitive salary with excellent benefits package
 - Up to £6,500 relocation package
 - Refer a friend scheme
 - Your SWE Registration paid for
- 9. User-friendly IT systems**
 - Class leading social care system
 - Each social worker gets laptop and smartphone
 - Committed to enhancing and improving your IT
- 10. Great accommodation**
 - Great working environment in refurbished buildings
 - Committed to agile working
- 11. Good work-life balance**
 - Flexible and family friendly policies
 - Opportunity for working patterns that suit you
- 12. Well looked after**
 - Range of wellbeing offers and initiatives
 - A personal thankyou goes a long way

The Trust's purpose and ethos

At Sandwell Children's Trust we serve the **purpose** of improving the lives of children and young people in Sandwell by:

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

Our purpose is underpinned by our **ethos** which has been co-developed with staff from across the Trust.



Our ethos for 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



Our ethos for ourselves and 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 & reflect
- We embrace diversity and celebrate each other's differences
- We promote the positives – we are advocates for the Trust

How we live our values

- **We will celebrate success.** This means recognising good work and its impact and giving praise where it's warranted
- **We will recognise the importance of the team.** This means looking after and supporting them, addressing any issues swiftly and developing individuals and groups
- **We will act consistently and fairly when applying our policies and procedures.** This means getting the best from our staff, offering the best possible support and creating the space for open and honest conversations
- **We will respect the boundary between our work and personal life.** This means understanding different pressures, promoting our wellbeing, protecting time for reflection and mutually agreeing how best to achieve this
- **We will make the simple things count.** This means not losing sight of what matters - direct contact, conversations, support, direction and guidance

We will only achieve our purpose and be true to our ethos by ensuring we have a well-supported, highly skilled workforce that works effectively with our partners, with all of us placing the needs of children and families at the heart of everything we do.

Underpinned by our 12 Reasons To Work In Sandwell, we need to ensure we have the skill, dedication and experience within all roles in the Trust and at all levels. Every person in every role needs to share our ethos the same ambition- to improve the lives of the children and families we work with.



Our aims

In this document we aim to:

- Provide an understanding and an overview of the Trust's workforce, especially the connectivity between Social Work qualified staff and other colleagues roles that play an equally important role the success of the Trust
- Outline the main strategic activities being taken to enrich and develop the whole workforce to meet the Trusts objectives, purpose and ethos
- Set out how we will attract, retain and support the development of a talented and committed workforce that shares our ethos and has the skills, knowledge and motivation to improve children's lives

This document should be read in conjunction with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy.



National and regional context

The Trust can only function with all roles within it working together to achieve its overarching objective - protecting children and improving their outcomes. Whilst each part of the system are equally important, it is recognised that some roles are harder to recruit to than others, none more so than social workers; and this has been especially difficult over the last two years.

Sandwell Children's Trust, like many other Trusts / Local Authorities, continues to operate in a difficult market where there is a national shortage of children's social workers. A LGiU report (*September 2021*) on children's social work workforce (*reporting year 2021*) reported 6,522 children social worker vacancies across the UK.

The impact of the pandemic has magnified this position, reducing the number of available and suitable candidates and consequently on both our recruitment and retention of staff. These concerns are not unique to Sandwell; these are evident regionally and nationally. There is also the issue that permanent social workers can be attracted to agency work due to higher hourly rates, although agency work doesn't bring wider benefits, eg annual leave, sick pay, career developments, employee rewards and stability.

Staffing challenges are familiar across the West Midlands and its 14 Local Authorities/ Trusts. To address both the recruitment and retention difficulties, organisations across the region continue to trial a range of enhancements and incentives.

When staff move on the impact can be two-fold:

- It impacts on our families and delays plans being progressed due to changes of worker
- It impacts on the stability of the rest of the Trust and increases workloads as tasks have to be shared out amongst other colleagues

Therefore, within this context, we need to make sure that our approach is fully inclusive and all our staff sense their importance, whilst we continually focus on **attracting** and **retaining** a stable social care workforce.

Trust context - analysis of our activity

It is within this national and regional context that the Trust is aiming to establish itself as a strong contender as the employer of choice for children's services in the region and beyond, placing our **purpose, ethos** and **standards** at the core of our activity to recruit and attract staff.

As well as ongoing activity to recruit permanent staff, activity has included short-term initiatives to introduce workers to the Trust, for example project teams to ease pressure on services where there are vacancies. There have also been market supplements to attract people to posts where there is a shortage of staff, yet high demand.

This activity within the regional and national context has informed our approach.

Research and analysis have brought us to the conclusion that we want to create and embed a culture of permanency where we attract the best and there is parity across teams. Also, importantly, that we 'grow our own' workforce, including our next generation.

To lead us to this point, key developments have already progressed. We have:

- Following staff consultation, we developed the **'that's what families do'** campaign focusing heavily on our ethos and family approach
- Invested heavily into 'growing our own' by focusing on students, apprenticeships and welcoming newly qualified Social Workers through our SW Academy and learning hub, plus growing our Practice Educator capacity
- Moved to a locality Social Work model to ensure a greater focus on working with families at community level, alongside our partners



- Improved career pathways with a clear structure for SW development, from student to senior leader



- Taken a strategic approach to addressing the issue of demand in the system, focusing on front door activity and earlier intervention alongside our partners, prevention at all levels and thinking permanency at every opportunity - all of which should lead to a reduction in demand for statutory services and more manageable workloads for our staff
- Benchmarked our salary and examined our rewards. Whilst salary makes up one part of a total reward package, it is also made up of benefits and terms & conditions

Central to the Trust's drive to recruit and retain staff is the **"12 Reasons to Work in Sandwell Children's Trust"**. These commitments cover both the total reward elements but also identify factors such as a clear vision and purpose, strong leadership, on-going development of our staff and manageable work-loads.

What we want now is to set out our plan, building on activity so far, to create an environment where staff want to become part, and remain part, of our 'Sandwell Family'; where practice can flourish in all roles, within a clear framework of our "12 Reasons". This is what this plan does.

Transformation programme



To move the Trust to the next stage and develop further, we have created our Transformation Programme, which sets out our six strategic priorities, underpinned by our ethos.



- Recruitment, retention and career development
- Creating a safe working environment and embedding culture of staff wellbeing
- Refocus and improve activity in relation to ED&I



- Embed robust management oversight, and IRO resolution and challenge (including risk management)
- Ensure our interventions meet assessed need and have the desired impact, including for children with particular circumstances
- Ensure good quality practice and standards



- The introduction of a partnership practice model
- Greater communication with children and young people
- Enhance the community / locality approach



- A focus on prevention and improving outcomes at every level
- Monitor and report on the impact of interventions
- Targeted early help



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- A transformational programme of change, addressing all areas of the Trust
- The creation of a future operating model

Our Practice Standards

Underpinned by our purpose and ethos, we have refreshed our practice standards which set out our expectations that everyone across the Trust will work towards:

- We will intervene proportionately in children's lives, through risks being clearly identified, managed and reduced safely whilst building on family strengths
- We will accurately identify children's needs and risks through high-quality, analytical assessments which balance children's wishes with parent's ability to make the changes
- We will track progress in children's lives through clear, bespoke plans that reflect identified needs and risks, with clear actions to address them
- We will help families to prevent needs rising wherever possible through preventing risk, forming positive relationships and undertaking evidence based interventions that address the root causes of problems
- We will understand and improve children's lives through regular communication and high quality direct work and life story work
- We will make sure all children have their plans progressed and needs met through consistent and effective supervision, management oversight and independent challenge where necessary
- We will make sure that every child is able to understand why we are involved and what life is really like for them through simple and timely recording that brings each child to life
- We will make sure the children we care for feel safe, secure and positive about their future through stable placements that meet their needs, valuing our carers and by professionals treating them as their own
- We will secure children's futures, and where they cannot live with their parents we will secure the best plan of permanence for them as early as possible
- We will improve every aspect of children's lives through involving all relevant professionals and us having a shared approach to risk and decision making



Our approach to participation

- Participation is the means by which young people realise their **rights**, where they join with adults to make **decisions**
- Our principles of participation
 - it is an **ongoing** process
 - it must enable young people to **influence** their outcomes
 - it values and supports **collaboration**

Invest

Everyone in the Trust family will understand the importance and value of participation

Inform

Children and young people will know their rights and have access to the information they need



Influence

Children and young people will make a difference, now and in the future

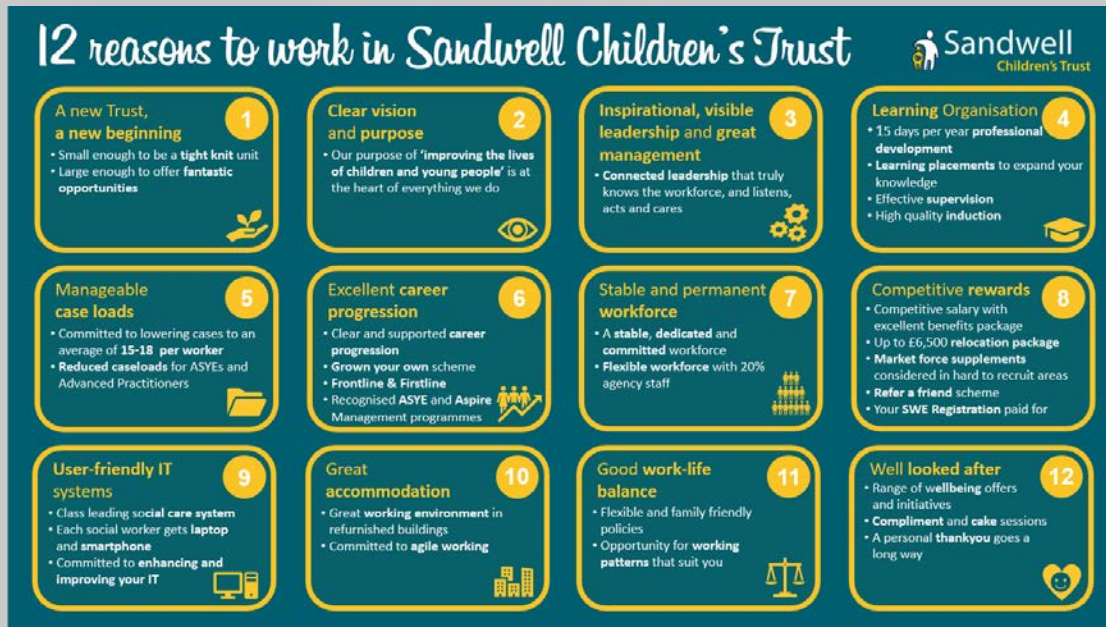
Involve

Children and young people will co-design and review the services they receive



Our approach to workforce development

Our **12 Reasons to Work in Sandwell** forms the basis of our approach:



To deliver on this, we have put together a number of actions, based on 6 specific areas:


1. Attracting and retaining the best to the Sandwell Family
2. Developing the organisation- everyone performing to the highest standard
3. Promotion and development of individuals
4. Promotion and development of leaders
5. Continuous learning and development
6. Pay, rewards and benefits

1. Attracting and retaining the best to the Sandwell Family

We want to attract and retain the very best talent who reflect our ethos and have children at the heart of everything that we do. This means making sure that everyone knows and feels valued and has access to excellent training, development and career progression opportunities.

We will do this by:

- Promoting the Trust's external brand: "That's what families do." This will include the continual development of our social media presence, targeted marketing campaigns and PR output through internal word of mouth.

- Taking a targeted and innovative approach to recruit to 'harder to fill' posts
 - Promoting a diverse workforce, where different skills, experiences and backgrounds are welcomed and valued and continuing to develop strategies and ideas to ensure we attract the best people
 - Refreshing and updating recruitment processes to provide an outstanding applicant experience where we actively identify individuals who reflect the Trust's culture through our interviews and assessment processes; and continuing to include young people and service users in the process
 - Collaborating with our partners to attract the very best workers to the Trust
 - Ensuring that all staff are valued, have their voice heard and help shape the future, in line with our ethos and practice standards
- 
- The image shows the Sandwell Children's Trust logo on the left, which includes a stylized figure icon and the text 'Sandwell Children's Trust'. To the right is a photograph of two men; one in a blue shirt is touching the shoulder of a man in a maroon shirt, suggesting a supportive or mentoring interaction.
- When times are tough we work together.
That's what families do.
- Focusing on staff safety and their well-being. We will continue to review our policies and procedures and provide the best in class support to our people. This will take place either through our H&S Team, use of external professionals, our mental aid first aiders, access to specific practitioners or through our well-being group. As a specific action we will review our support to women during the perimenopause and menopause.
 - Continuing to carry out exit interviews to understand the reasons why staff choose to leave, so we can identify any trends and respond accordingly
 - Continuing to ask everyone's views via our annual survey with a commitment to share the results openly and in a timely manner and engage with and enabling our staff to identify improvements
 - Creating a safe working environment where individuals can raise concerns free from fear or prejudice in an open manner
 - Utilising Performance Indicators to quickly identify concerns and provide innovative solutions

2. Developing the organisation- everyone performing to the highest standard

We want the Trust to continually evolve by developing all our staff, so everyone has the right skills and competencies to do their job to the highest standard. This means making sure that induction, training and development opportunities are appropriate; and that we do everything possible to ensure staff work in an environment that is supportive and responsive to their well-being.

We will do this by:

- Embedding a learning culture across the Trust, where learning and knowledge are a continual process that are shared and valued through a range of learning tools

- Identifying opportunities for professional development for all our staff, where training increases credibility, confidence and capability across the whole workforce
- Identifying and setting ambitious targets for apprenticeships across the Trust,
- Providing work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for the children and young people that we care for
- Ensuring that the knowledge and capability our staff need to do their jobs is appropriately developed from induction onwards, both via a corporate and localised induction programme
- Reviewing and introducing career pathways that cover all roles within the Trust
- Listening to the views of our staff
- Promoting staff well-being
- Ensuring that all our staff have a good understanding of our six priorities and understand their roles and responsibilities in the part they play in achieving them
- Continue to work in collaboration with our recognised Trade Unions

3. Promotion and development of individuals

We want everyone to work to the highest standard and reach their professional potential. This means developing individuals which in turn increases the skills and capacity of the wider workforce, making use of best practice principles.

We will do this by:

- Embedding our purpose, ethos and practice standards across the Trust
- Reviewing our supervision policies and ensuring regular one to one meetings between staff and their line manager so everyone receives the support, direction and guidance they need
- Making sure everyone is trained in safeguarding matters, relevant to their role
- Keeping up to date with national and regional issues, as well as research and evaluations
- Learning from national regional projects, innovation programmes and evaluations



4. Promotion and development of leaders

We want a strong, skilled leadership team at strategic and operational level. This means growing our own leaders at every level, identifying our future leaders; being attractive to external leaders; and investing in them so we have the capacity to be sustainable.

We will do this by:

- Having a range of 'aspiring programmes' for potential leaders at every level
- Creating professional development opportunities
- Equipping leaders with the skills to lead effectively

- Ensuring that leadership training programmes create a common understanding and consistency in how our expectations, communications and policies are applied.
- Making reflective spaces for leaders the 'norm'
- Enabling access to coaching to enhance professional development
- The introduction of succession planning, to help identify the next generation of leaders at all levels within the organisation

5. Embedding a culture of continuous learning and development

We want everyone to develop and increase their skill and confidence on an ongoing basis; for them to question and probe; and for this to permeate throughout the Trust. This means embedding a culture of continuous learning and development where the expectation is that everyone can question and challenge constructively.

We will do this by:

- Creating time for our staff to attend training courses and reflective sessions
- Supporting progression and internal promotion
- Continuing to review and evaluate our training offer by listening to the voice of the child feedback from staff, families and partners
- Effectively monitoring and evaluating the impact of training to inform future programmes
- Investing in a range of training and development resources, including membership of external organisations where this will add value, eg Research in Practice (RiP)
- Providing access to webinars, research, practice materials and learning events
- Maintaining a high profile of our Principal Social Worker
- Exploring access to other 'learning hubs' such as those developed by universities to support Social Care training; and more general ones, such as that provided by the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV)
- Using in-house expertise to hold regular 'lunch and learn' sessions and regular practice workshops
- Continuing to learn from practice learning reviews and feedback from families

6. Ensuring competitive pay, rewards and benefits

We expect everyone to perform to the highest standard. This means making sure that in return our staff are rewarded with a range of competitive pay, rewards and benefits.

We will do this by:

- Continually focusing on our ethos and continuous learning alongside our pay and rewards package

- Reviewing our salaries and terms and benefits annually to make sure that our offer is strong and remains competitive across the region, as well as nationally
- Celebrating success and achievements across the Trust
- Embracing and putting into practice a wide range of policies to support individual circumstances including flexible working and wide range of family friendly policies
- Striving to ensure all our staff enjoy an appropriate work-life balance which includes the commitment of manageable workloads
- Ensuring all our staff have the right equipment to benefit from flexible working
- Listening to and inviting feedback from our staff and the recognised Trade Unions when we review our rewards and benefits



Social Work recruitment and retention

The business of the Trust is about delivering the best services, in particular statutory services, to children and families. Therefore, it is important that we look specifically at our social work workforce to make sure we have sufficient social workers and leaders to manage day to day business of protecting vulnerable children and improving their outcomes.

We need to do this within an environment where our staff are supported and enabled to develop; and they continually learn and improve their practice. Therefore, whilst the above themes are relevant for all our staff, certain elements are specifically aimed at our staff who are Social Work qualified:

Attracting and retaining the best social workers to the Sandwell Family

Like all our staff, we want to attract and retain the very best social workers who reflect our ethos. This means making sure that we 'grow our own' future generation of social workers who have access to excellent social work training, development and career progression opportunities.

We will do this by:

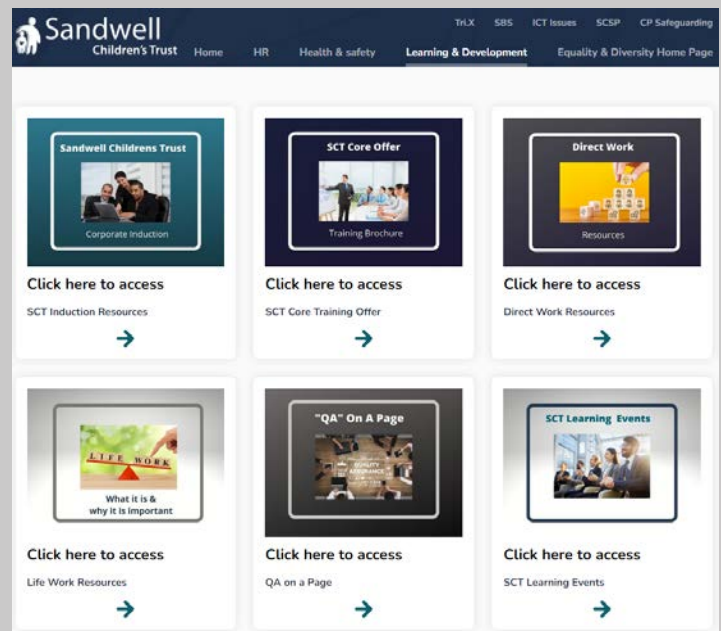
- Continuing to support a range of routes into social work, making best use of national and regional programmes, eg Frontline, step up to social work
- Focusing on a sustained intake of ASYE we recruit each year
- Working closely with local universities to ensure a high profile for Sandwell and an outstanding experience for students
- Exploring work experience opportunities and making best use of apprentice programmes
- Working on a regional basis to attract social workers and to canvas DfE support for national recruitment campaigns where it's in our interests to do so
- Managing a proactive recruitment campaign to attract experienced and newly qualified social workers through a range of marketing activity
- Making sure we remain competitive in our offer to social workers
- Continually reviewing our operational structure and activity to make sure that it provides the best service to children, young people and families.

Smooth transition, induction and career development

We want all social workers to either start or continue their career with a strong sense of what it means to be part of the Sandwell Family. This means making sure that everyone benefits from a meaningful introduction to Sandwell, with a comprehensive induction programme and opportunities to progress internally.

We will do this by:

- Making sure our recruitment processes are swift so new social workers can join us with no delay
- Reviewing our induction programme for social workers, including access to buddying and mentoring and making sure that induction starts and relationships begin prior to the actual start date
- Developing a programme that enables social workers to have a range of experiences to ensure their professional development
- Monitoring the effectiveness of our career development pathway to ensure there is a range of opportunities to progress
- Having a dedicated resource for our students and newly qualified social workers so they get access to the best support, advice and guidance at the start of their careers



irrespective of their experience. This means making sure that all social workers are outward looking in their approach to learning, as well as focusing on local practice issues that are relevant to the Trust.

We will do this by:

- Paying for Social Work England registration fees and making sure all social workers adhere to national practice standards and expectations
- Having a comprehensive framework of training that is both Trust-wide and bespoke to individual needs
- Continuing to work with other Higher Education Institutions and regional children's services as part of the Teaching Partnership to strengthen social work practice and leadership
- Embedding reflective practice at all levels across teams and services
- Ensuring there is a forum for social workers and other practitioners to learn from regional and national developments; reflect and learn about current practice issues; and shape the future direction of the Trust
- Ensuring that all practitioners are supported to critically analyse their practice and share their learning with their colleagues
- Ensuring access to the most up to date research relating to practice
- Enabling social workers to be part of established sub groups and task groups that focus on practice improvement

Equality and Diversity

Sandwell is wonderfully diverse and it is essential that we continually foster an environment where diversity is celebrated and everyone is supported to achieve their full potential. A deep understanding of the various communities and cultures within Sandwell also allow us to best serve the young people and families of Sandwell.

Since the Trust was created in 2018 we have benefited from the richness of a diverse population and whilst we are focusing heavily on our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion we recognise that this is still a lot more to do. We recognise however we progress, there has to be a continual cycle of listening, understanding and doing.



The Trust's Statement of Intent lays out the direction we're going in in this area and what we are striving to achieve. This has informed our ED&I strategy 2022 – 2025.

All of our actions need to consider the implications of ED&I and the Workforce Strategy must be read in parallel with our ED&I Strategy 2022 - 2025

We have set ambitious goals, actions and outcome measures to hold ourselves to account on. These actions fall under 5 themes that form our action plan: leadership & culture; working with our families & communities; people; governance; and environment.

There must be continual improvement that can only be achieved by the participation of all of us and accountability at all levels. This strategy gives us the framework to do this. We want to embed a culture where all our staff can reach their professional potential, free from any form of prejudice; and for our workforce to be knowledgeable about the communities we support, so we can connect directly with our children and families and fully meet their needs.

In line with our ethos, any form of discrimination, bullying, harassment or other inappropriate behaviour is unacceptable. We have been clear that we will take a zero-tolerance approach to these behaviours.

Governance

Our approach to workforce development is led by our Head of HR, with the support of our Senior Leadership Team and Trade Unions. All employees, however have a part to play in helping us achieve our aims.

An action plan will be created, with activities owned by members of the Workforce Committee. Progress will reported to the Workforce Committee, (chaired by the Chair of the Trust) and the Trust Board. The purpose of the group is to provide scrutiny, challenge and direction in relation to workforce activity and ensure that the on-going plans and initiatives will lead to progress in each area.

We will track progress through a number of performance indicators and targets where appropriate. Although not exhaustive, these will include:

- Annual engagement survey results
- Total headcount against budget
- Length of service
- Turnover (including exit interview analysis)
- Number of social workers that each child has over a 6-month period.
- Work load numbers, average and range
- Attendance at induction and attendance at training courses
- Number of ASYE's completing their first year and progressing to G grade
- On time held supervision meetings and appraisals
- Diversity monitoring
- Feedback from parents and children
- The progression of Sandwell Children's Trust to delivering good and outstanding services