



Sandwell
Children's Trust

Workforce Strategy

(2025-2028)

PEOPLE



sandwellchildrenstrust.org

Trust Board Chair and Chief Executive's Foreword

We are pleased to introduce Sandwell Children's Trust Workforce Strategy 2025-2028.

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](#).

The last few years have seen significant progress in how we work with the children and families we help and support; this would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of all our people. Our staff and employees are our most important asset which is why **People** continue to be **Priority 1** of our **Transformation Programme**. With a strong focus on our Sandwell Family this has led to greater stability across the Trust and it's positive to see more people, not only choosing to come to the Trust, but also progressing through the organisation.

Feedback from our staff indicates a growing positive culture of inclusiveness and a greater sense of feeling valued, with access to good training which is impacting positively on our families and the way we work with one another. However, we recognise that there is more work to do and it is important that our new strategy builds on the progress we've made so far so we can say that across the Trust we are a stable, confident, skilled and innovative organisation that truly values all its people.

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.

This 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.



Graham Archer
Board Chair



Emma Taylor
Chief Executive

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, the Trust has worked hard to improve how we work with children and 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 diverse group of people who share our purpose to improve our children's lives and keep them safely with their families wherever possible. Those who work at the Trust often refer to the **Sandwell Family**. We are small enough to be a tight knit unit, but large enough to continue to offer good opportunities for professional development. Like all families we have our challenges, however we support each other and celebrate together.



This strategy is underpinned by our [Ethos](#) and [ST*R Practice Model](#):

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

ST*R is our **S**trengths based, **T**rauma informed, and **R**elationship based approach to working with children and families. Everyone working in the Trust is expected to work in this way, no matter what their role is because everyone plays their part in improving children's lives. It is also a shared partnership practice model so collectively everyone involved with children and families can work with them consistently through a relationship approach.

Importantly, how we work with each other and our children and families should also be driven by our [Working Together Strategy](#). Written and led by our young people, this strategy drives how we should all be listening to and involving children in everything that matters to them. It sets clear expectations on the language we all should use, and how we write about them on their files.

Ambition

Priority 1 of our Transformation Programme is **People** and our ambition is for:

The Trust to be a safe place where our people are proud to be part of a skilled and diverse Sandwell family by being respected, supported, nurtured and empowered to thrive.

Our **Strategic** aims are:

- A stable, safe & progressive workforce that embraces diversity and the inclusive culture of the Trust.
- An ambitious, aspirational and creative workforce that achieves the priorities within our whole transformation Programme and wider children's system.
- Talent management and succession planning at every level.

Our **key objectives** are to:

- Attract and retain outstanding people to our Sandwell Family.
- Develop an organisation that reflects national strategy and policy.
- Develop our workforce by 'growing our own' with career pathways, apprenticeship & development programmes.
- Embed a culture of continuous learning and development.

Our first strategy contributed to a more stable workforce and leadership team, for example:

- Greater stability in our workforce - turnover of 30% in May 2022 to 19.6% in December 2024
- Reduction in the number of SW agency workers – 25.5% in May 2022 to 16.7% in December 2024
- Reduction in permanent SW vacancy rate - 43.6% in May 2022 to 21.9% in December 2024
- Attendance at the Trusts induction programme: Since its launch,
- 418 new starters have attended "Day 1 Corporate Induction"
- 294 new starters have attended "Day 2 Corporate Induction"

Direction of Travel: National Reforms and System Transformation

Nationally there is clear direction of travel as we enter a new phase of transformation across children's services. There is a shift to early identification and intervention, services being seen as part of a whole **Family Help System**, and there are clear ambitions:

- An end-to-end system of support and protection so families receive high quality support at the earliest opportunity, to overcome challenges, stay together and thrive
- A decisive multiagency safeguarding and child protection system, which identifies harms quickly and accurately and takes rapid and effective protective action.

This is based on a **vision** to create a system that:

- **Works with the whole family** so more children can thrive in their family
- **Prioritises kinship care** for children who cannot live safely with their parent
- Supports children in care and care leavers to live healthy and happy lives
- Provides a high quality of care, which all children deserve
- Works effectively across agencies and empowers professionals working within it

Therefore, we must develop our future workforce needs and achieve our strategic aims in line with the **National Framework**, new **legislation** and **statutory guidance** to achieve **4 key outcomes**:

- Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- Children and young people are supported by their family network
- Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

To achieve these outcomes, the National Framework stipulates that **leaders** need to **drive the conditions for effective practice** and that the **workforce** should be **equipped and effective**.

Therefore, this strategy will show how we will deliver on this, especially:

- How leaders articulate the direction of travel and what it means for the Trust and wider partners; and
- How we ensure our workforce has the knowledge, skills, and experience to deliver the reforms to Family Help and Child Protection, including training and development, with a strong emphasis on best practice and supervision.

Approach to this strategy

This strategy reflects our achievements so far and sets out our approach over the next 3 years to continue developing our workforce and achieve our strategic aims, within the context of national reforms. Development of this strategy has been through consultation with our staff, our Trust Board and Strategic Leadership Team; recognised Unions feedback through our employee groups and staff survey; our VOICE group and Forum for Independent Young Adult group; and informed by national learning and research.

The strategy has 4 themes that inform its action plan:

- Leadership and Culture
- Our Workforce
- New Ways of Working with our Children, Families & Communities
- Governance

Sandwell Borough

Our Workforce



The highest ethnicity for the Management Team (all managers) is White/White British at **51.26%**. The lowest ethnicity for the same group is 'Mixed Ethnicities' at **6.72%**. There are more Asian/Asian British ethnicities within workforce level roles (**19.35%**) in comparison to management roles (**13.45%**).



There is a higher level of females within management roles (**82.38%**), the difference between management roles and workforce level roles is **5.07%**. In comparison to males, where there is a higher level within management roles (**22.69%**) compared to **16.09%** at workforce level. The data highlights that as of April 2024, SCT had a mean gender pay gap of **7.1%**. This means that when we compare pay, males earn **7.1%** more than females. SCT had a median gender pay gap of **1.2%**.



A majority of the whole organisation identifies as having no disability. The highest level of disclosing disability is within the 'workforce' level at **9.20%** and **4.21%** within the management roles. There is a rate of **12.48%** unknown disability data across the Trust.



The largest age range within the Trust is **36-40**, the lowest are under 20 and over 70+. The highest age range within the Management Team level is **41-45**, the lowest is under 31.

Source: Trust data gathered April 2024

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Our Community



50.8
Female



49.2
Male

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

42.8% of Sandwell residents are from a Minority Ethnic Group. 25.8% of Sandwell residents identified their ethnic group within the 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh' category, up from 19.2% in 2011.

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

39.9% of Sandwell residents are Christian, lower than the national average of 46.2%. 13.4% of Sandwell residents are Muslim, 11.5% are Sikh and 26.1% identify as having no religion.

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021



17.9% of Sandwell residents identify as disabled under the Equality Act 2010.

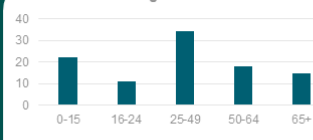
Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021



Overall, 80.8% of all households in Sandwell speak English as a Main Language. However, 8.6% do not speak English as a Main Language.

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Age Profile



Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Sexual Orientation	Sandwell	England
Heterosexual	89.29%	89.37%
Gay or Lesbian	1.06%	1.54%
Bisexual	0.95%	1.29%
Other	0.29%	0.34%

Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

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Theme 1: Leadership and Culture

What have we achieved	To progress further we will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed and introduced our ST*R Practice Model, along with our practice standards and service expectations across the Trust. • Introduced a quarterly Leadership Hub to share knowledge and learning as leaders. • Listened to our workforce, Trade Unions and partners to help drive improvements. • Launched a comprehensive HR training programme for leaders. • Increased the number of permanent team managers, including internal promotion. • Embedded a consistent approach to corporate induction for all new starters. • Improved data and intelligence with new systems and processes. • Developed as a listening organisation through staff engagement forums. • Embedded our Transformation Programme with all 5 priorities strongly connected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve our communication channels through a new Communication Strategy. • Introduce a new Workforce Task group to support progress of this strategy and our survey results • Launch our Aspirant Programme to help identify and develop our future leaders. • Roll out further HR leadership training and embed our practice standards. underpinned by our ethos and within a positive culture of accountability. • Strengthen EMT 'on the road' through a rolling programme of visits to all services. • Strengthen our approach to and oversight of Supervision and Appraisals. • Further improve the Trust brand in a competitive market. • Roll out more advanced technology, including AI, to safely improve working practices. • Design a Family Help system alongside our partners and consider where new roles may be needed to meet the requirements of national reforms. • Introduce a partnership project team to manage any agreed workstreams to oversee and coordinate day to day activities regarding the Family Help system.
Impact - What we want to see	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principles of ST*R Practice Model embedded across the Trust • A strong, stable and visible leaders at all levels, driving the conditions for effective practice with a strong sense of accountability. • All our staff have a strong sense of what it means to be part of the Sandwell Family. • Increased staff engagement through a range of clear communication channels • An embedded culture of continuous learning, curiosity, creativity and challenge. • Forward thinking leaders, making best use of technology, infrastructure and people's knowledge and skills. • Consistent application of Trust policies and practices. 	

Theme 2 - Our Workforce

What have we achieved	To progress further we will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed and embedded our 'Grow our Own' Social Worker development programme plus increased student and apprenticeship intake. • Introduced career pathways across all Directorates. • Implemented Trust-wide Appraisal and Supervision Policies. • Increased training resources, plus access to external webinars and learning events. • Launched our Sandwell Deal and evaluated its effectiveness at 6 and 12 months • Undertaken 6 monthly reviews of salaries and benefits to remain competitive. • Recognised success and achievements through our Compliments café. • Embedded our Trust's Academy and Practitioner Forum and introduced reflective group supervision through Advanced Practitioners and Service Managers. • Embedded SW pathways and reduced SW vacancy rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicated any changes following any type of staff feedback. • Refresh our Workforce Task Group to identify and support workforce initiatives. • Continue to stabilise and increase our permanent workforce through further marketing campaigns and improving the Sandwell Family brand. • Continue to enhance our 'Grow our Own' programme for both social work and non-social work positions • Identify more apprenticeship and permanent opportunities, including for our care experienced young adults. • Review career pathways to improve internal & regional development opportunities. • Review the skills mix across the Trust to support the Trust's new ways of working which will include the development of non-Social Worker groups. • Review our Sandwell Deal and agree how to remain competitive in the region. • Strengthen our approach to Well-Being through the 4 pillars: physical, mental, financial and social to increase resilience, plus our Mental Health First Aiders. • Improve our approach to flexible and family friendly working so it's applied consistently and fairly across the Trust. • Improve the working environment and technology to improve staff satisfaction and productivity. • Introduce a development programme regarding managing trauma. • Develop a programme of effective mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes
Impact - What we want to see	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stable, skilled and resilient workforce, with high standards reflective of our ethos. • A creative workforce able to share their views and ideas and challenge themselves through clear training and development opportunities. • A workforce that meets expected standards & is rewarded with competitive benefits. • A well-informed workforce that contributes to Trust developments and is prepared and fully involved in national system reforms. • All staff benefiting from regular and good quality supervision and appraisals. • All staff feel valued, with their voices heard and helping to shape the future. 	

Strategic Theme 3 - New Ways of Working with our Children, Families and Communities

What have we achieved	To progress further we will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed the concept of Sandwell's Family Help system, based on a set of shared key principles across the children's partnership. • Introduced our ST*R Practice Model across the Trust and children's partnership. • Improved how we work with Sandwell's Family Hubs so there is more joined up working and more timely support offered to families. • Redesigned services to better serve the children and families in Sandwell. • Embedded our Intervention Hub, offering highly effective relationship-based services. • Launched our Working Together strategy defining how we should work with our children and young people. • Introduced a school supervision and support pilot to enable schools to confidently identify, respond to and help families with additional needs. • Introduced a Multi-Agency Support Panel to collectively consider how best to help families without the need for them to escalate into intrusive statutory services. • Improved how our system enablers help teams who work directly with families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed our ST*R practice model across the Trust and the wider partnership so we consistently work with families in a trauma informed and relational way. • Learn from regional and national innovation programmes to achieve best practice as Sandwell develops its own Family Help system. • Test out new ways of working through a local pilot, reflective of national reforms and statutory guidance. • Co-design multi-agency services alongside families and communities. • Clarify what the national reforms mean for our workforce needs, identifying any training needs and specific roles that may be required. • Introduce clear communication channels so all our workforce is informed of activity and developments and can contribute their own views. • Develop an annual children's summit for all our partners, co-produced by our children so they are fully involved in the design and development of our Family Help system. • Explore and develop integrated collaborative spaces for our staff and children within our communities. • Explore how IT systems improve the effectiveness of how we work with families.
Impact - What we want to see	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated multi-agency services for children where families are helped in their community at the earliest opportunity. • A Family Help system that reflects national reforms but remains focused on children at heart of everything we do and underpinned by our ethos. • Individualised plans and support for children and families, driven by our ST*R practice model. • An infrastructure that supports plans for our Family Help system. • A workforce that is fully informed and involved in the design and development of our Family Help system, and prepared to make best use of its skills, developing areas where there may be gaps. • A forward thinking, outward looking workforce that is supported by IT and an infrastructure that meets its needs and those of our communities. 	

Strategic Theme 4 - Governance

What have we achieved	To progress further we will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published regular Workforce and Health and Safety reports to our Workforce, Trust Board, recognised Trade Unions and Workforce Committee. Launched the Trust's Health & Safety Policy, created a H&S Working Group and introduced Safety Walks with recognised Unions and senior leaders. Strengthened oversight of activity through our Workforce Committee. Improved our workforce data and critically analysed it to inform improvements Worked on new initiatives and policies with recognised Trade Unions. Undertaken two Staff Surveys, analysed their findings with our workforce, Trust Board and recognised Trade Unions and implemented changes as a result. Undertaken monthly reviews of staff turnover and analysed exit interview data, introducing changes where necessary and appropriate. Increased supervision and appraisal rates and increased mandatory training rates. Reviewed and cascaded learning from our compliments and complaints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek opportunities to invite external peer review and scrutiny on the effectiveness of workforce initiatives. Further improve how we invite and receive feedback from our children through our Quality Assurance programmes and children and young people groups. Improve our approach to discuss workforce issues through a refreshed Workforce Task Group that helps to oversee the effectiveness of this strategy. Establish a HR Panel to improve consistency of policies and procedures. Continue to stabilise the Trust's workforce, increasing permanent staff and reducing reliance on agency workers wherever feasible. Undertake 6 monthly reviews on the effectiveness of the Sandwell Deal. Continue to build on the existing collaborative Trade Union relationship. Undertake Health & Safety audits, identify actions and communicate these clearly. Improve how our analysis of workforce data informs improvement activity. Review H&S Policy and processes to ensure that they are relevant and fit for purpose
Impact - What we want to see	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong oversight, scrutiny and challenge, plus evidence that the Trust continues to invest in and develop its workforce. Clear accountability at every level. A workforce confident they are listened to with their ideas considered. A safe, productive and efficient working environment, and a Trust that is proactive in its statutory obligations regarding Health and Safety matters. A learning organisation that regularly seeks feedback to help improve further. A strong culture of innovation, best practice and continuous improvement. 	

Evaluation

Success of the strategy will be evaluated through a range of performance measures and feedback mechanisms:

Performance Measures	Feedback Mechanisms
Recruitment & Retention measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New appointments Agency rates & conversion to permanent Staff turnover rates Newly Qualified retention rate Internal promotions Staff in formal HR processes Exit interviews 	Survey Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee Engagement Surveys Point in time surveys- staff Point in time surveys- foster carers
Workload and Wellbeing measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workloads Work related absence Health and safety reports Training Measures Professional development opportunities from supervision & appraisal objectives 	Line of sight Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EMT on the Road and Leadership Hub Workshop Task group Service and team meetings Individual supervision and appraisal Market Place events Recognised Trade Unions
Training Needs Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development opportunities from supervision & appraisal objectives Training Needs Analysis Mandatory & optional training rates Impact of training & development opportunities 	Children and Family Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VOICE, FIYA and the broadest possible reach of children QA Programme to test out impact of ST*R Community engagement Outcomes framework

Monitoring and Review

Effectiveness of this strategy will be tracked through an action plan, based on our 4 themes. Regular reviews will help identify successes, challenges, and any areas for adjustment. This will be achieved through:

- Quarterly Reviews in the Strategic Leadership Team and Quarterly Workforce Committee meetings.
- Progress Reports presented to the Executive Management Team on specific themes, especially workforce performance indicators.
- Bi-monthly Workforce Task Group meetings.
- Children and Families Strategic Partnership and Safeguarding Partnership will track partnership progress against theme 3.