

WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST



WCF ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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1. FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Rob Morrison

Chair, Worcestershire Children First



Tina Russell

Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First
and Director of Children's Services

We are proud to share our Annual Report in follow up to our business plan for 2021/22. As we look back on what a phenomenal amount of work has been undertaken, what great outcomes for children and young people have been achieved and what we have learnt as an organisation to improve, we are proud and excited to continue our work.

Our work often means working with families at times of challenge and crisis and it requires the identification and management of risk. Using our strengths-based approach, we work in partnership with families and our partner agencies to provide the support and services needed to promote the health, education, and the welfare and safety of children.

Our partnership with families, partners and our workforce continues to be the foundation of our work.

Since achieving "requires improvement to be good" in the July 2019 ILACS and an extremely positive focused visit to our Front Door in July 2021, we have continued to sustain good key performance indicators with strong evidence of year-on-year sustained performance and improvement. Our quality assurance audit reports give us continued evidence of our self-reflection and learning which has led to improvement in the quality of practice. Our service user feedback continues to be positive with outcomes showing our children and parents feel we are making a difference to their lives. Finally, our staff health check and indicators on staffing permanence and stability evidence we continue to be an employer of choice.

2022/23 will be our third full year in full company. Our company values to **Keep Children at our Heart, Value Family Life, Provide Good Education For All** and **Protect from Harm** continue to be the basis for our cultural approach to working with families, and we have added a fifth value **Embrace Diversity**. Our aim is to develop a WCF culture where our employees embrace our vision, mission and values, diversity, and inclusion through everything they do.

2. ABOUT WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST

2021/22 was the second year of Worcestershire Children First (WCF) delivering children's services across the county of Worcestershire. These services include Early Help and Support to Children in Need, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, Through Care Services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Services for Children with a Disability, SEND services and Education Improvement, Learning and Achievement services.

WCF has an independently registered Fostering Agency providing foster care placements to children in care and we have an independently registered Adoption and Permanency service that works alongside our regional adoption agency "Adoption Central England" whose focus is to ensure we achieve timely permanency for children who have entered the care system.

The company is 100% owned by Worcestershire County Council and delivers its children's services on behalf of the local authority, working with partners across the county to ensure children, young people and families receive the best possible services.

Download: [WCF Business Plan 2021 to 2022](#)

3. OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

During 2021/22 we extended our values to include a fifth value, 'embrace diversity' to reflect our Company wide focus on Workforce and Culture and our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

OUR VISION

Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up.

WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST



OUR MISSION

Supporting children and young people to be happy, healthy and safe.

OUR VALUES



CHILDREN AT OUR HEART

We will keep children and young people at the heart of everything we do.



VALUE FAMILY LIFE

We will support and empower parents to care for their own children.



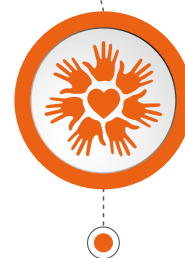
GOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL

We will value education as the best start in life for all children and young people.



PROTECTION FROM HARM

We will act in a professional and timely way to protect children from harm.



EMBRACE DIVERSITY

A progressive culture of championing equality, diversity and inclusion.

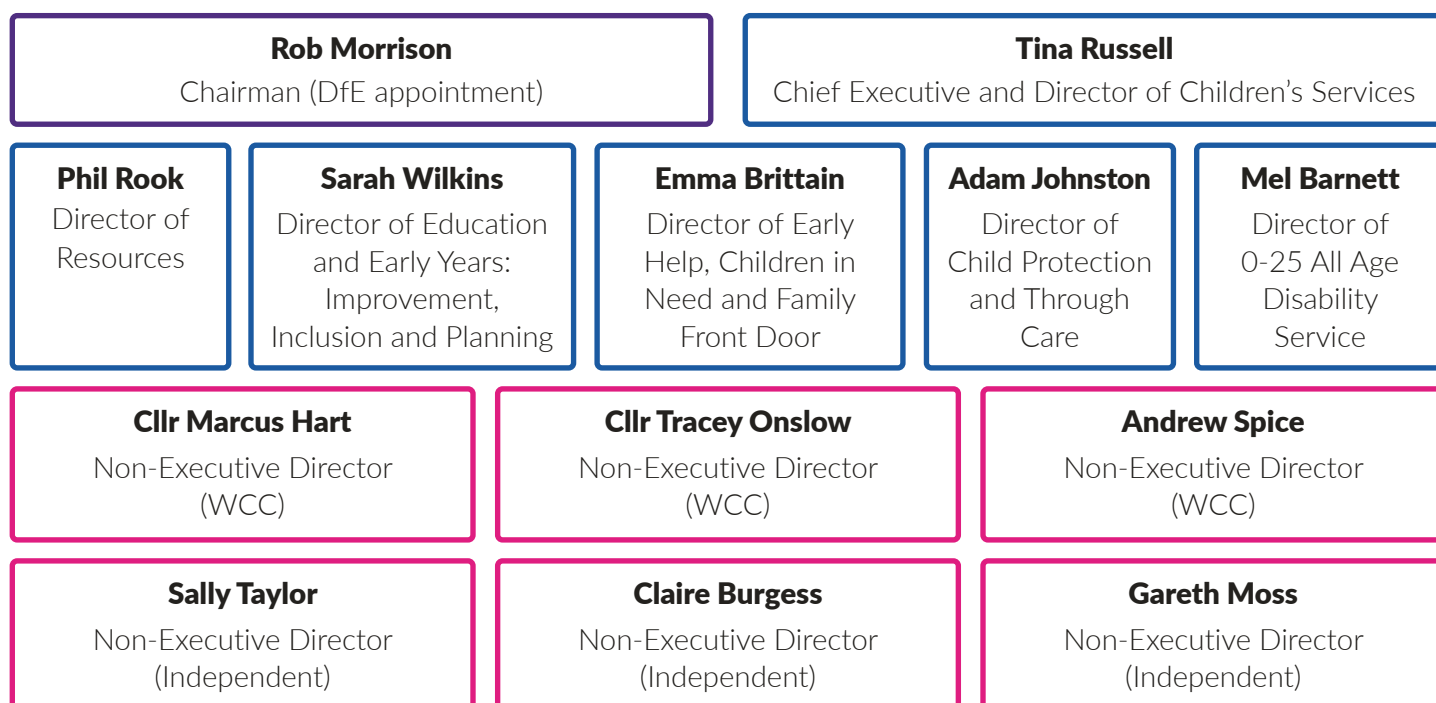


4. OUR BOARD AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Internal Governance

During 2021, WCF saw the appointment of Tina Russell to the joint position of Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services. The Directorship of Sarah Wilkins changed to Director of Education & Early Years: Improvement, Inclusion and Planning. There has been the addition of two new Executive Directors, Emma Brittain, Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door and Adam Johnston, Director of Child Protection and Through Care and creation of a further position, Director of 0-25 All Age Disability Services, with the appointment of Melanie Barnett to this post. The board currently consists of 12 Executive and Non-Executive Directors with a wealth of public sector expertise in supporting families and communities. Executive Directors are those employed by WCF to lead and manage delivery functions and teams, whilst Non-Executive Directors do not have responsibility for day-to-day operations but provide input and challenge via Board meetings and sub-board meetings throughout the year.

The current WCF is shown below following a change to the one of the WCC Non-Executive Directors, Cllr Karen May being replaced by Cllr Tracey Onslow in August 2022.

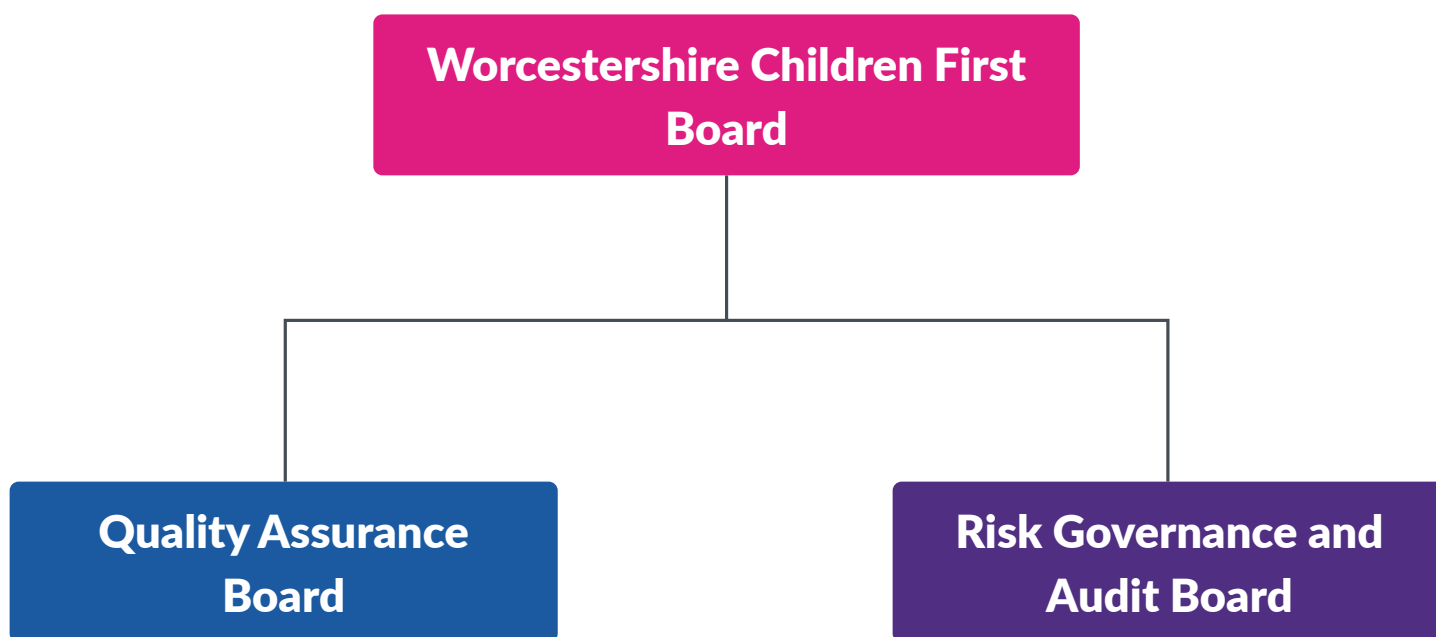


(■ (Pink) denotes Non-Executive Director; ■ (Dark Blue) represents Executive Director. The Chairman of the Board is a DfE appointment ■ (Purple))

Internally, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), who are responsible on a day-to-day basis for running the business, meet regularly to ensure service improvement continues with momentum, and to ensure all areas of WCF have strategic oversight.

A programme of regular reporting on performance, finance, business planning and innovation is in place under the direction of the Chief Executive and extended senior leadership team to ensure monitoring impacts positively on outcomes for children and young people and is the core and demonstrable Company purpose.

To maintain rigour, WCF's internal governance takes the form of monthly WCF Board meetings with an **Annual General Meeting** and every third Board meeting held in public when conditions allow. Additionally, there are two sub-boards reporting into the Board of Directors focusing on improvement of services;



The Quality Assurance Board

The Quality Assurance Board typically meets four times a year and sets an annual programme of deep dive reviews across our front-line Social Care and Education services. This includes actively seeking the views and opinions of children and young people on the impact of our interventions and how we continuously learn and improve to be even better. Reports are then presented to WCF board. During 2021/22 quality assurance reports were completed in participation and engagement, leadership and management and learning and improvement services.

The Risk Governance and Audit Board

The Risk Governance and Audit Board typically meets three times a year and maintains an oversight of our governance, risk management, internal control and value for money framework. This Board ensures strategic compliance, management and performance of WCF as a whole with an unwavering focus on children and young people at the heart of our Company's purpose.

Internally, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), who are responsible on a day-to-day basis for running the business, meet regularly to ensure service improvement continues with momentum, and to ensure all areas of WCF have strategic oversight. A programme of meetings cover Staffing / Finance / Performance / Business Planning and in all covers impact on outcomes for children and young people and is the core and demonstrable Company purpose.

Each year we will share our company achievement and challenges through our public meetings. This will be an opportunity for our stakeholders, young people, staff and the public to feedback on company performance and inform services.

5. OUR WORKFORCE

Our workforce is our most valuable asset to successfully deliver services that make a positive difference for our families in Worcestershire. We strive to be the 'employer of choice' for children's services staff, and we approach this through a culture that values the impact that our staff have in improving children's lives. We have high expectations and have created the conditions where professional expertise is valued and can flourish, where everyone is empowered to act and supported to succeed.

2021/22 continued to be a response and reset as the pandemic continued to sweep through the nation. We saw a continued increase in workload and pressures as we experienced a rise in the demand for help and support. There was an increase in the number of serious harm cases in young children and a rising demand for support and assistance for children with additional needs.

Despite these pressures and national challenges on recruitment, our workforce overall remained remarkably stable and committed to Worcestershire Children First; with over 88% permanency in staffing overall, 90% permanency in front line social worker posts and 92% in managerial posts. This stability is an important part of sustaining our continued quality.



However, “change and turnover” is an inevitable part of an organisation and as such positive and timely recruitment, bringing new people into our services and supporting internal career development of others, also adds a valuable mix of experiences, knowledge, skills and diversity to our workforce which we welcome.

Our staff conference was held in November 2021, and we launched our 5th Company Value – Embrace Diversity, to reinforce our commitment to continue to develop a progressive culture in which we champion equality, diversity and inclusion. Our Diversity and Inclusion Collective invites all staff to participate in a monthly forum of discussion, learning and development.

In July 2021 we launched our Workforce Strategy, which sets us out as an organisation of high challenge and high support. The strategy focuses on the following workforce foundations:

- Health and Well-being
- Recruitment and Retention
- Diversity and Culture
- Leadership and Management
- Building Skills for our Future Workforce

In 2021 we introduced our annual Voice of the Workforce (VOW) survey; a system health check and a barometer of our services that enables staff to share their views and feedback on the strengths and areas for development to support continuous improvement. The survey was completed by 61% of the workforce and its findings support the key priorities of our quarterly Workforce Board. Headline results from the survey were as follows:

- 84% of staff said they get the support and reflective supervision required to manage the emotional demands of work
- 84% of staff said they felt listened to and had their worries/concerns dealt with
- 65% of staff felt they have a manageable caseload/workload, in-line with their role
- 78% of staff felt valued at work
- 79% said WCF is proactive in promoting anti-discriminatory practice
- 78% said as part of supervision they have opportunities to discuss development and are encouraged to attend training and develop CPD

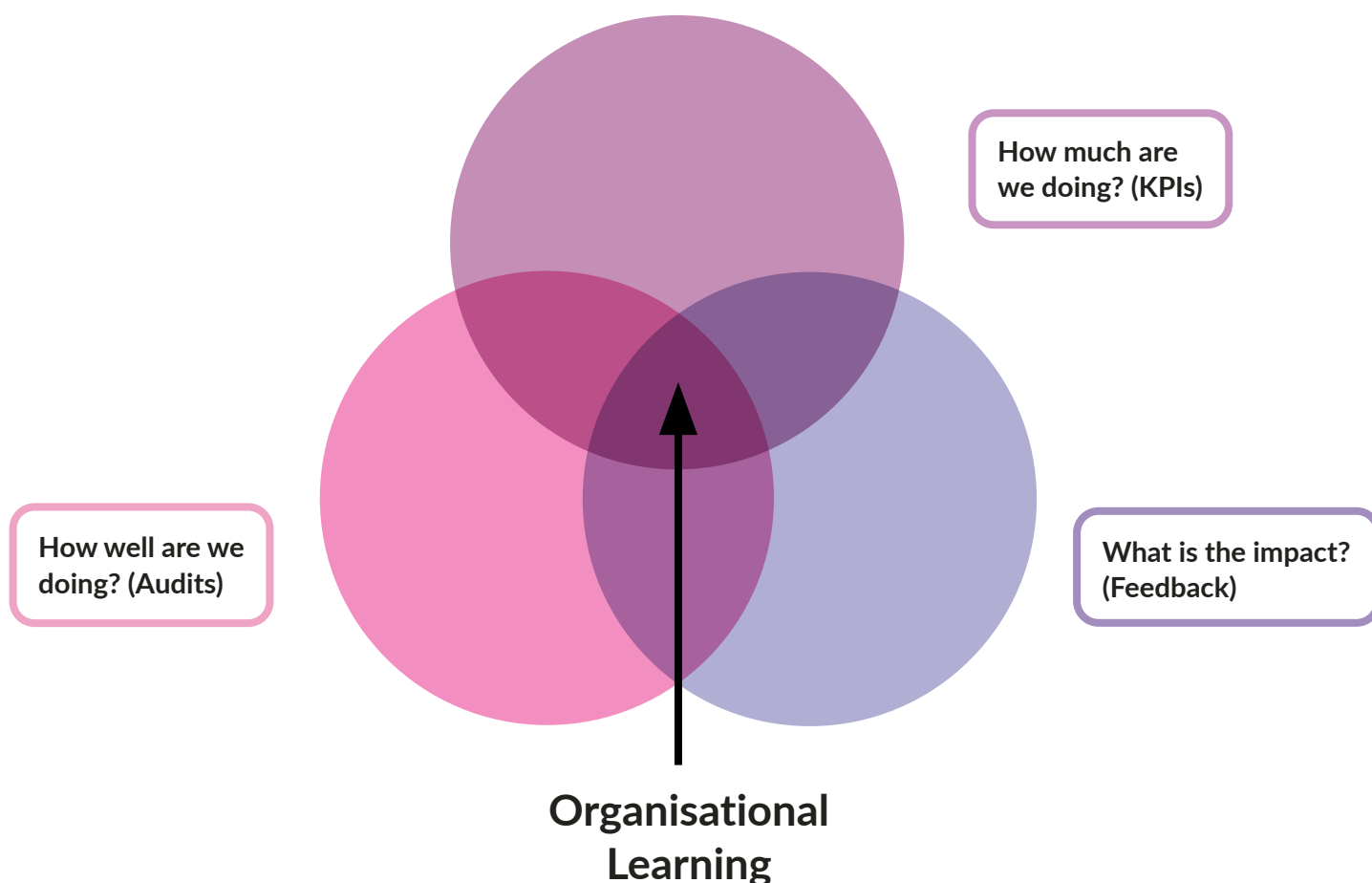
We structure our service planning using an End-to-End approach; this ensures we think whole service, ensuring all staff across our teams and service areas are included and outcomes for children are prioritised, wherever they are in their journey through our services.

Our Workforce Strategy is underpinned by our robust Quality Assurance programme. Using the Key Performance Indicators, Audit and feedback from children, young people and families we will improve our understanding of how the strategy is supporting us to deliver good quality services in relation to: Staffing stability – permanency and sickness. Voice of the child – quality of practice through audit. Participation and inclusion – recruitment and service development. Compliments and Complaint - outcomes and learning.

6. WCF QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Quality and impact of practice

Our Quality Assurance and Performance Management Framework bring together the key processes and activities that contribute to our development as a learning organisation. There are three core principles within the framework, and they are illustrated here:



We have continued to develop and embed this framework throughout our services to help us answer the important questions, how our services are being experienced by children, young people and their families and what difference we are making to their lives. We strive for a business-as-usual approach to our Quality Assurance activity. During 2021/22:

- We appointed a Worcestershire Children First Head of Quality Assurance, the position brings together the work and oversight of Quality Assurance for Social Care and Safeguarding, Early Help and SEND.
- We have reviewed and redeveloped a Quality Assurance Framework for our SEND Services, learning from principles in Social Care and Safeguarding. We undertook a pilot across November/December 2021 and launched the programme of Auditing and Feedback in January 2022.
- We have developed a Quality Assurance Framework for Worcestershire Children First Fostering which went live in April 2022 – this is aligned to the learning and focus from the WCFF Ofsted Inspection (September 2021) and will include opportunities for carers, children in placement and birth parents to give feedback.
- We have developed and launched a new virtual tool for children and young people to share their views, wishes and feelings called “Have Your Say!”.

Learning from Quality Assurance Work

Learning from Quality Assurance is a key area of our development and embedding learning and change. Safeguarding Quality Assurance prepare quarterly Quality Assurance Reports which brings together the quantitative and qualitative learning, and highlights by service area what is working well, what are we worried about and what needs to happen.

We recognise that it is essential to 'close the loop' and embed the learning through a variety of activity and channels including staff communication, supervision, management oversight and training. Working alongside the Director for Social Care and Safeguarding and the Senior Leadership Team, including the Principal Social Worker, dissemination of learning takes place across the service in a range of ways:

- Case audit feedback to the individual Social Worker/Case worker and Manager at the time of audit
- Team Meetings and Staff Supervision
- Quality Assurance Reports
- Principal Social Worker Newsletters
- End to End learning presentations - Whole Service Front Line Management
- Learning from Quality Assurance page on our Practice Standards website

Our business planning for the forthcoming year sets to extend this to a company-wide Quality Assurance framework.



“Ofsted said of our QA Framework in our 2021 Focused Visit **“Leaders have established a positive culture of commitment to continuous improvement across this service area, supported by particularly strong quality assurance arrangements”**”

The quality assurance framework is a strong area of practice, well embedded internally and across the safeguarding partnership. In particular, the audit approach is very effective. Children’s case file audits are well moderated and identified actions followed through to completion, making a real time difference to improving interventions in case work. Collective learning from quality assurance activity, including extensive child and family feedback, is used well to inform service improvement” - **Ofsted Focused Visit 2021**



During 2021/22 we remained committed to a business as usual and a priority focus of strong quality assurance systems across Social Care and Safeguarding. We completed a total of 162 peer/moderated case file audits across the year – using our peer/moderated approach this equated to 486 pieces of audit activity.

We have continued to see an **increase in good cases** and a reduction in requires improvement and inadequate; in total **38% of audits had a good outcome** – this is a 7% increase from the previous 12 months but a **25% increase from 3 years ago**. We have seen an increase in good judgements within assessments, plans, management oversight and quality of partnership working – our first full year of strengths-based practice judgements evidenced this as area of significant strength with 61% graded good. We have seen a small reduction in those cases judged good for Voice of the Child.

7. BUSINESS PLANNING 2021/22

Our Business Plan for 2021/22 is set out in a single plan on a page below. The following pages provide an overview of our areas of focus and provides the achievements and progress made for Social Care and Safeguarding, and Education and Early Help services.

Social Care and Safeguarding Directorate Priorities 2021/22

Early Help and Children in Need	Services to Children in Need Developing models and approaches of multi-disciplinary working to reduce risks to children and effectively meet their needs in family care and the community	Early Help Review Partnership Working Right Service Right Time	Get Safe Supporting and Protecting children and young adults from exploitation	Positive Outcomes Project Investing in our future social workers. Student delivering a contextual safeguarding approach with partners	
Children in Need of Protection	Worcestershire Safeguarding Families Project Positive and timely outcome for children at risk of significant harm and care proceedings	PAUSE Preventing repeated removal of babies from parental care	Domestic Abuse Supporting & Protecting children living with DA harm	Timeliness & Sustainability in Permanency Supporting permanency carers: SGO/LTF/Adoption	
Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers	SUFFICIENCY Foster Carers: Meeting demand and complexities of care for older children Transition from care: Semi Independent Support & Housing for Care Leavers Developing the quality and purpose of Residential Care to young people			Emotional and Health and Well-Being Looked After Children & Care Leavers	External Residential Care: Developing partnerships with private providers and stakeholders
Knowing ourselves Impact Independent Validation	Review and Evaluation of the Children's Safeguarding Arrangement	Ofsted Focused Visits and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services	Inspection of WCF Independent Fostering Agency Children's Homes	Registration of Adoption Central England (ACE)	Quality Assurance Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Key Performance Indicators ■ Service User Feedback ■ Audit



Service Area: Early Help and Children in Need

Priority: Services to Children in Need - Developing models and approaches of multi-disciplinary working to reduce risks to children and effectively meet their needs in family care and the community

Outcome: The Supporting Families First Edge of care team has moved to the responsibility of the Director of Early Help, CIN and Family Front Door from locality services in 2021/22. This brings the closest possible connection to the support and prevention pathway through services and via adoption of learning and effectiveness of the “Edge of Care” model into prevention of escalating risk and need for child protection, as a model for our Children in Need cohort.

Priority: Early Help Review - Partnership Working Right Service Right Time

Outcome: The new WCF Early Help Service went live on the 12th April 2021. The restructure brought our EH level 2 and 3 needs teams together into one service under one directorate. It became a 0-18 EH Family Support service that is seamless in working with both level 2 and 3 needs across the county.

There are now 6 district-based teams, and families and young people can refer directly into their local team via the phone. The changes to the service have been overwhelmingly positively received by partner agencies who feel the service is more equitable for children and young people and less confusing.

Priority: Get Safe - Supporting and protecting children and young adults from exploitation

Outcome: GET SAFE continues to be a formal multi-agency subgroup of the WSCP Partnership, chaired by a Supt of West Mercia with the lead for Strategic and Operational delivery by WCF Director of FFD/CIN and Group Manager.

In 2021/22 we have worked with young people, partners, and voluntary groups to develop our GET SAFE response to 16–25-year-olds who are vulnerable to or experiencing criminal exploitation. The 18–25-year-old focus is specifically on care leavers and our SEND young adults. We have developed a practitioner’s guidance on the approach and addressed the specific contextual and transitions practice and legislative framework and guidance for these young people/adults. This was signed off by the GET SAFE partnership meeting in December 2021.

Priority: Positive Outcomes Project - Investing in our future social workers. Student delivering a contextual safeguarding approach with partners

Outcome: During 2021/22 the Positive outcomes project (POP) has provided:

- 516 personalised interventions for children.
- 251 Early help interventions. 265 Section 17 family assessments (under the supervision and management of the qualified Practice Educators.)
- Social workers in the assessment teams have had support from students completing chronologies, lateral checks, supervising contact and joint visiting to families.

The capacity to deliver this was achieved by providing 27 students with Social Work placements in POP.

16 final year students (73%) have gone onto secure AYSE positions in WCF, with further interviews currently underway. Some of the POP students were 70-day placements and therefore not in their final year

Service Area: Children in Need of Protection

Priority: Worcestershire Safeguarding Families Project - Positively and timely outcome for children at risk of significant harm and care proceedings

Outcome: Piloted our Worcestershire Family Safeguarding (WFS) model with a collaborative approach, working alongside our partner agencies in Public Health, Cranstoun, DRIVE and WMWA to support families to live healthier, happier and safer lives, specifically reducing issues impacting on the quality and adequacy of parenting associated with domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health.

Following the pilot, we are expanding our Worcestershire Family Safeguarding model to working with all children who become the subject of Child Protection where the three trio of risk in parental capacity (DA/MH/SubMs) are assessed, and we have secured joint funding with Public Health to expand the project to work with a wider cohort as identified in our analysis.

Priority: PAUSE - Preventing repeated removal of babies from parental care

Outcome: PAUSE Worcestershire was launched on 25th January 2021 and is delivered by Ripplez. Pause is a trauma-informed programme that works with women who have experienced or are at risk of repeated pregnancies that result in children needing to be removed from their care. At the end of 2021-22 no women open to the programme have become pregnant, and 100% of women open to the programme are maintaining contraception.

Priority: Domestic Abuse - Supporting and protecting children living with DA harm

Outcome: WCF took part in the successful procurement tender and evaluation of the newly re-commissioned DASS, IDVA & DRIVE services.

New contracts commenced on 1st April 2022 and run to 31st March 2025. Within the new service there is appropriate emergency and safe accommodation with dedicated support for survivors aged 16 years and over affected by domestic abuse and their children. This includes increased dedicated support and child focused integrative counselling and play therapy for children and young people of families affected by domestic abuse, more support for young people in abusive relationships, improved recognition of associated mental health, drug and alcohol support, physical support needs of survivors and improved referral links into relevant services including adult and children safeguarding, and improved court experiences for survivors and their children.

Priority: Timeliness & Sustainability in permanency - Supporting permanency carers: SGO/LTF/Adoption

Outcome: The Permanency Support Team was established within WCF to work alongside our regional adoption agency ACE. WCF was required to register as a Voluntary Adoption Agency and, following our application, was formally registered on 17th November 2021. Our permanency team is the focal point of our agency and continues to be the link into ACE but also supports the service on all routes to permanency.

Historically, the financial loss to Kinship Carers on being appointed as a Special Guardianship Carer has acted as a barrier to this route to permanency for some children. To this end we have reviewed and updated our core offer and developed an SGO Offer Leaflet which was launched in November 2021. This offer incorporates a new Financial Offer for new SGO Carers which was approved by WCC Cabinet Member Report in November 2021.

Service Area: Look After Children, Young People and Care Leavers

Priority: Sufficiency - Foster Carers: Meeting demand and complexities of care for older children

Outcome: We are developing an all-encompassing and targeted support 'Offer' to both retain existing carers and attract new local carers for our children. The support strategy incorporates enhanced training to carers to develop their understanding and ability to respond and manage the often complex needs of our looked after children, particularly within 10-17 year age range.

Priority: Sufficiency - Transition from care: Semi-independent support and housing for care leavers

Outcome: WCF recognises the importance of semi-independent supported living provision being of the highest quality and the real value it can have in enabling young people to develop the skills and confidence to successfully transition to independent living. At this time this is "unregulated" provision and WCF have taken action to ensure our internal provision is of the highest quality focused on supporting young people to achieve positive outcomes from this placement experience. At year end there are a total of 63 young people residing in semi-independent supported provision; 44 of whom are placed in 24 WCF owned provisions.

A provision, Oak House, has been successfully re-purposed as a 3-bed supported living property with a separate 1 bed flatlet and is fully occupied.

Individualised Statements of Purpose (SOP) have been produced for each provision detailing the type / location and how young people will be supported and how their feedback will be sought and incorporated into the provision's development. Each SOP includes photos of the provision, all of which enables young people to feel a degree of familiarisation and ease their transition prior to a move occurring.

Priority: Sufficiency - Developing the quality and purpose of Residential Care to young people

Outcome: Our sufficiency strategy – January 2021-2023 sets out the aims and objectives to meet our sufficiency duties and our vision on the placement experience for Looked After Children, Care Leavers and those on the Edge of Care

Priority: Emotional Health and Well-Being - Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Outcome: WCF has representation at 17 health and wellbeing forums and 4 task and finish groups which include focus on the emotional health and wellbeing of Looked After Children and Care leavers. This has been underpinned by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing local transformation plan 2021/22.

Priority: External Residential Care - Developing partnerships with private providers and stakeholders

Outcome: WCF has a weekly Placement panel chaired by the Group manager and overseen by the Director of Through Care. The panel oversees all external placements to ensure there is appropriate placement matching within care planning, QA review on outcomes for children in these placements and financial monitoring.

The Placements team have a well-established quality assurance system applied to all types of residential provisions and is applied to both internal and external provisions.

Service Area: Knowing ourselves, Impact and Independent Validation

Priority: Review and evaluation of the Children's Safeguarding Arrangement

Outcome: During 2021/22 we re-configured our safeguarding "Locality" teams as part of the expansion of Supporting Families First (SFF) and moved a cohort of Children in Need cases over to the new multi-disciplinary services. We undertook a senior management change with the creation of a Director for Child Protection and Care, the appointment of a dedicated Assistant Director for Care Proceedings and Permanency and we configured "locality safeguarding" under two Group Managers. We developed a protocol for what CIN cases remain in locality and agreed a transition protocol to ensure there was minimal disruption and change of social workers for children.

Priority: Ofsted - Focused Visits and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

Outcome: In July 2021, Worcestershire received an extremely positive Ofsted Focused Visit, undertaken over two-days which had a specific focus on our Family Front Door, including decision making on new referrals, quality of Social Work Assessments and the quality of Early Help decision making and assessment.

In September 2021 our statutory direction was removed by the DfE due to good and sustained performance.

As of 2022, Worcestershire are due a Full Inspection, this can take place anytime during the 12-month period. Focused work and activity are being undertaken to prepare for our Inspection.

Priority: Inspection of WCF - Independent Fostering Agency and Children's Homes

Outcome: Worcestershire Independent Fostering Agency was registered October 2019 and inspected September 2021. The service was graded "requires improvement" overall with an inadequate rating for management and leadership. The service has a comprehensive improvement and development plan in place, and we are prepared for the re-inspection 2022/23.

Vale Lodge was inspected by Ofsted 16th November 2021 and was judged Good, demonstrating sustained improvement and positive staff – child relationships.

Priority: Registration of Adoption Central England - (ACE)

Outcome: WCF was formally registered on 17th November 2021 as a Voluntary Adoption Agency. Our permanency team is the focal point of our agency and continues to be the link into ACE but also supports the service on all routes to permanency.

An Ofsted inspection of the VAA in June 2022 rated the service as good in all areas.

Priority: Quality Assurance Framework - Key performance indicators, Service User Feedback and Audit

Outcome: Our approach to Quality Assurance follows a framework of three key elements. These are KPIs (how much are we doing), Audits (how well are we doing) and Feedback from children and families (what is the impact of what we are doing).

In Autumn 2021 WCF appointed a Head of Quality Assurance to lead of Quality Assurance across services. Since this time, we have developed Quality Assurance Frameworks for WCF Fostering, Early Help and SEND – these areas all now have an Audit and Feedback programme to evidence the learning and impact for our services.

Education and Early Help Directorate Priorities 2021/22

Sufficiency and Planning for Education Places	Worcester City Secondary Places providing school places in their community	Special School Place Sufficiency specialist provision places for children and young people	District Level School Place Planning responding to the place sufficiency report	Early Years Place Sufficiency Network working with the community, voluntary and private sector early years providers	
Quality of Education Provision	Education Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worcestershire Small School Project Governor Recruitment and training 		Covid Recovery and the Education System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum Recovery Emotional Health & Well-being Traded Services Support 	Early Years Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Development Plan Early Years Safeguarding 	
SEND and Vulnerable Learners	SEND Strategy and Improvement	Dedicated School Grant High Needs Management Plan	Developing a continuum of effective provision for vulnerable learners	Vulnerable Learner Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual School Development incl. post 16 Medical Educational Provision Attendance and Exclusion Review 	Integrated Business Systems
Early Help Partnership	Troubled Families Programme 2021/22 evidencing effective support and change for children and families	Implementation of the Early Help Review right support and service at the right time	Community Early Help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening Community Capacity Ready Steady Worcestershire for vulnerable children Participation 	Children & Young People's Plan 2021 refresh of partnership priorities and plan	
Knowing Ourselves Impact Independent Validation	Inspections & Regulatory Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools & settings Inspection SEND Monitoring & revisit Inspection 		Co-Production with Children and Families	Quality Assurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> KPI's Service User Feedback Audit & Reviews 	

Service Area: Sufficiency and Planning for Education Places

Priority: Worcester City Secondary Places - Providing school places in their community

Outcome: Cabinet agreement to purchase land complete, lock out agreement complete. Land negotiations planned. Academy Sponsor competition planned.

Priority: Special School Place Sufficiency - Specialist provision places for children and young people

Outcome: Stakeholder consultation for Medical Education Review completed and Cabinet Member approved and authorised the commissioning of the Service to a third-party provider. Expressions of Interest, evaluations of bids to identify registered providers completed. Negotiations entered with one provider.

The Mainstream Autism Base Review identified a need for two new Enhanced Bases, bids from Chaddesley Corbett Primary School and Christopher Whitehead Language College (CWLC) were agreed. Chaddesley Corbett base opened in April 2022. Planning for CWLC Base is still ongoing.

A review of demand for Special School reception and nursery places began in March 2022.

Priority: District Level School Place Planning - Responding to the place sufficiency report

Outcome: Focussed work on district level planning for Worcester City, Bromsgrove and Pershore progressed. Mitigation places agreed with Worcester City Secondary Schools whilst new Secondary School is being built. Review of options for Bromsgrove Middle and High School expansions – some delays due to PFI complexities. Pershore Review progressed through full public consultation and options for conversion to single two-tier system.

Mainstream, Early Years and SEND forecasting and Sufficiency Reports completed.

Capital Spend return, School Capacity and Planning (SCAP) return to DfE completed. Condition Maintenance Capital programme agreed.

Priority: Early years place Sufficiency Network - Working with the community, voluntary and private sector early years providers

Outcome: Termly Take up and sufficiency reporting implemented with Early Years Team and Family Information Service.

Early Years Sufficiency forecasting, and sufficiency reporting completed.

Planning for co-production and engagement with other stakeholders in 2022/23.

Service Area: Quality of Education Provision

Priority: Education Leadership - Worcestershire Small School Project and Governor recruitment and training

Outcome: Small School Summit was held in March 2021. 61 schools with NOR less than 210 invited. 46, 75% attended.

Follow on workshops included:

16 June with focus on federation. 19 schools attended

23 June with focus on academisation. 11 schools attended

Feedback from schools that attended as well as wider sector feedback from SIA meetings indicated wider understanding of sustainability challenges with requests for a repeat of summit information to be shared. A further 29 schools attended an Autumn 2021 briefing. 28 schools, 9 groups are proceeding with discussions for a federation model. White Paper recommendations for academisation will influence further decisions and actions 2022 onwards.

A recruitment campaign with WCC/WCF employees was undertaken during Autumn 2021 and Early Spring 2022 which resulted in a small number of volunteers being recruited to support 3 governing bodies. Recruitment was impacted by the ongoing Pandemic. We will repeat the promotional campaign for 22/23. 28 courses were run for governors and 344 delegates took part. 141 schools have an SLA for governor support services. Evidence of effective governance detailed in Ofsted reports.

Priority: Early Years Strategy - Evaluation, Development Plan and Early Years Safeguarding

Outcome: New EYFS/ Development Matters training delivered virtually and as a recorded session in 2021. Recording has had 1500 views. EY Conference had 148 delegates attend.

NEF manager has led on NEF Providers meetings, Childminders' registration briefings and Prevent and British values training.

EY Language Class Tender process completed Summer 21. Provision re-commissioned in Redditch, Bromsgrove and Worcester. New provision for Malvern and Wychavon and new provider for Wyre Forest. All language units provided with public health funded resources and Wellcomm language screening tool.

Early Years monthly Consultation Group established including public health, speech and language therapy, education, midwifery, Starting Well Partnership and EY providers.

Early Years Needs Assessment research undertaken for Worcestershire County Council completed April 2022. This will be added as needs assessment for Early Years Strategy.

Early Years Safeguarding Training Pathway devised and launched.

Early Years self-assessment tool devised and launched.

Early Years safeguarding audit tool, to be used by Improvement Advisers devised, trialled, and is now being used with settings causing concern.

more than 100 settings attending each safeguarding network.

Outcome: Headteacher briefing given to all schools on Catch up funding, 29 June 21. CPD offer also reflects specific courses aimed at 'closing the gap'.

Ofsted inspection outcomes recognise that schools are developing the curriculum appropriately, this was referred to in 14 of the 18 maintained school reports. In response to trends in Ofsted outcomes where common areas for improvement were identified 'Power Hour' webinars were delivered to all those schools (maintained and academy) due inspection for the academic year 2021/22 (50 schools).

2-day Curriculum conference undertaken November, with a total of 172 delegates.

Autumn risk assessment visits have increased focussed on the evaluation of education, and in particular curriculum.

Performance tables

Trauma Informed Schools. The Virtual School has funded this 11day Level 5 diploma through the use of pupil premium grant and for all state funded schools within Worcestershire. It is a systemic approach to support all vulnerable learners with their mental health intended to reduce suspensions and exclusions, improving pupil attendance and staff well-being. The training is designed to inform and empower school staff to respond effectively to vulnerable children to enable them to engage in their learning. All schools completing the diploma are also provided with 2-day senior leaders training to ensure school leaders understand the rationale behind the Trauma Informed Schools approach and can influence whole school culture. 106 schools have completed the training. A reduction in suspensions and improved attendance has been monitored for CLA. All delegates have reported improvements in knowledge and practice change in school following course.

2-day Curriculum conference, with national speakers, and a series of workshops delivered in November 2021. Total of 172 delegates attended.

CPD programme went live in Sept 21 and offers a comprehensive package of training, delivered through varied platforms. Number of attendees 2167.

Bespoke training has occurred, and feedback is strong. Of the 7 high risk schools inspected this year by Ofsted (and reports published), 4 achieved a Good, 2 achieved a Requires Improvement and 1 was judged inadequate.

221 state funded schools have purchased the education safeguarding SLA and 15 independent schools in Worcestershire.

Service Area: SEND and Vulnerable Learners

Priority: SEND Strategy and Improvement

Outcome: Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out a revisit inspection in November 2021. It was confirmed that the local area had made sufficient progress in eight of the twelve weaknesses identified at the initial inspection in 2018. The DfE required an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) for the four areas where sufficient progress was not made. The APP was signed off by Ofsted and CQC and the six-monthly review of progress is scheduled for 22nd September.

Priority: Dedicated School Grant High Needs Management Plan

Outcome: The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget is not part of Worcestershire Children First, with the budget retained by WCC. At the end of 21/22 the DSG reserve has a deficit balance of £11.3m, built up from previous years' overspend. The High Needs Management Plan has not impacted on reducing overspend. From 2023 Worcestershire will take part in the DfE Delivering Best Value Programme to assist LA's (55) to reform their high needs systems, addressing the underlying issues that lead to increased pressure, and putting them on a more sustainable footing.

Priority: Developing a continuum of effective provision for vulnerable learners

Outcome: Links with Social Care have been strengthened across the Vulnerable Learners Service, with training having been provided and information including contact numbers being accessible. A focus has been given on improved relationships between social care and educational settings – with an emphasis on wider educational outcomes.

Priority: Vulnerable Learner Strategy - Virtual School Development incl.post 16, Medical Education Provision and Attendance and Exclusion Review

Outcome: Following an announcement by the DfE, from September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head was extended to take a strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes of the cohort of children with a social worker (and those who have previously had a social worker) who are aged from 0 up to 18.

There is a fortnightly meeting arranged between the Group Manager for Vulnerable Learners and a SEND Team Manager. This is to discuss all of those children who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) who are also Children Missing Education (CME) to ensure that they are prioritised and to work together to ensure their timely return to education. At this meeting children who have an EHCP and are Electively Home Educated, or who have Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE) are also discussed to ensure that the education at home or the education placement is meeting the child's needs. Fixed Term exclusions are tracked and referred to the SEND Caseworker if the trend of FTEs continues for a child.

All areas of concern relating to CME within the SEND Ofsted Inspection in November 2021, were considered to have improved sufficiently.

Priority: Integrated Business Systems

Outcome: Gypsy Roma Traveller service recording implemented Capita One, with online referral into Liquidlogic.

Attendance Collection Tool procured and in process of piloting with view to go live in Autumn term 2022.

Free School Meal Online module implemented within citizen portal of Capita One.

EHCP module procured and in progress of configuring within Liquidlogic with a view to go live in Jan 2023.

Service Area: Early Help Partnership

Priority: Troubled Families Programme 2021/22 - Evidencing effective support and change for children and families

Outcome: The Troubled Families programme changed name to Supporting Families. Worcestershire achieved its Supporting Families target of 555 claims by the end of February 2022 and therefore exceeded the year's target. Mid-March data is indicated 657 claims which demonstrates the positive impact and outcomes for families in Worcestershire.

Priority: Implementation of Early Help Review - Right support and service at the right time

Outcome: Direct referral routes to Early Help Family Support have been created to enable professionals to make direct requests for service into the WCF Early Help family support services; by-passing the social care referral team to prioritise the social work oversight on our most at risk children and delivering a timely, seamless service to all children and young people.

Priority: Community Early Help - Strengthening Community Capacity, Ready, Steady, Worcestershire for vulnerable children and Participation

Outcome: Early Help in the community as a partnership moved under a new WCF Director in Summer 2021 (Early Help, CIN and FFD). The Early Help in the community portal was launched in November 2021 which facilitates partners sharing their early help assessments via the Liquid Logic portal with Worcestershire Children First.

Our Ready, Steady, Worcestershire Holiday Activities and Food initiative has delivered 16,140 activity and food experiences to children across Worcestershire from Easter to December 2021 for 12,115 primary age and 4,025 secondary school age children.

Priority: Children & Young People's Plan - 2021 refresh of partnership priorities and plan

Outcome: The Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) has been refreshed for 2022 - 2024. This sets out how organisations in the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) will work together to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families. Progress reports will be presented regularly to the CYPSP and a biannual update given to the Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB).

Service Area: Knowing Ourselves, Impact and Independent Validation

Priority: Inspections & Regulatory Monitoring

Outcome: As of July 2022, 55 inspections of schools had occurred since September 2021. Of these, 41 school inspection reports have been published to date:

- 33 maintained schools have been inspected.
- 22 academies have been inspected.

90% of maintained schools either outstanding/good (ie schools that WCF can directly influence/intervene).

Of the 41 published Ofsted reports, 27 make positive reference to SEND (any theme), with a further 5 identifying an aspect relating to SEND as an area for development.

Priority: Co-Production with Children & Families

Outcome: The review for Alternative Provision and Exclusions, the Medical Education Review, development of the specification for Worcester City Secondary and Pershore Pyramid review have all involved children and young people and parent contributions to development and consultation of proposals.

8. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Our financial resources, performance and governance arrangements are overseen by the Director of Resources, Phil Rook. The Director of Resources and team have successfully guided the company through its third year of trading returning a small profit. In 2021/22 the company's turnover for the period was £129.3M making a small profit of £51k, which represents 0.04%.

The company is an admitted body to the Worcestershire Pension Fund. The cost of pensions in 2021/22 was £5.195M and the contribution rate was 18.6%. The financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors on 2 August 2022, an extract is included in this report. Worcestershire Children First Support Services (ICT, human resources, payroll and facilities management services etc) are provided by Worcestershire County Council. The value of these contracts was £7.5M for the 2021/22.

Income for the year ended 31 March 2020	2020- 21 (£M)	2021 - 22 (£M)
Income from Worcestershire County Council for main contract	117.4	125.4
Income from Worcestershire County Council Pay Award paid in March	0.0	0.7
Other Income	2.3	3.2
Total Turnover	119.7	129.3

Financial Information Summary

Profit and Loss Account and Other Comprehensive Income	2020 - 21 (£)	2021 - 22 (£)
Turnover	119,731,869	129,291,383
Cost of sales	(111,939,005)	(121,733,890)
Gross profit	7,792,864	7,557,493
Other operating expenses	(7,323,758)	(7,506,200)
Operating profit	469,106	51,293
Interest Receivable	4,528	5,062
Profit before taxation	473,634	56,355
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	92,911	(5,585)
Profit for the financial year	566,545	50,770

Worcestershire Children First- Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2021	2020 - 2021 (£)	2021 - 2022 (£)
Current Assets		
Debtors	28,354,791	3,566,537
Cash at bank and in hand	13,936,548	13,674,295
Total Assets	42,291,339	17,240,832
Liabilities		
Creditors; amounts falling due within one year	(40,202,383)	(16,101,106)
Total Liabilities	(41,202,383)	(16,101,106)
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	1,088,956	1,139,726
Capital Reserves		
Retained Earnings	1,088,956	1,139,726
Equity	1,088,956	1,139,726

Company Secretary: Phil Rook | **Auditors:** Grant Thornton | **Company Number:** 11447965

9. RISK

Risk Management and Business Continuity Planning are a vital part of the Company's success to consider and mitigate (where possible) inherent (unmanaged) and residual (managed) risk. This involves an informed understanding of the effectiveness of controls and actions in place subject to ORCT principles (Objective, Risks, Controls, Tests). WCF are representatives at Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) Corporate Risk Management Group (CRMG) who implement Corporate Risk Management and Business Continuity arrangements for critical services across all aspects of the Council's activities.

WCF maintains the Company risk register, which will be scrutinised at the Risk, Governance and Audit Board:

- Serious harm or death of a child/young person
- Reputational risk as a result of receiving a poor Ofsted inspection rating
- Failure to act in the interests of children and young people - keeping them safe or planning for permanence
- Financial pressure on resources due to increased demand on Children's Placements
- Uncertainty of future funding arrangements (2022- 23 onwards) for local government which impacts financial strategy for the company
- Business continuity failure in critical services
- Insufficient staff capacity, capability and productivity - recruitment and retention
- Education for all children in Worcestershire including school financial pressures, home to school transport costs, management of the Dedicated Schools Grant on behalf of the Council, changes to school organisation and SEND
- Future government strategy around SEND and High Needs Funding arrangements (managed on behalf of council)
- Additionally, risks are captured as part of transformational projects

Our risk management and business continuity framework, alongside our performance monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms, support our commitment to provide rigorous quality services, improving outcomes for our children and young people in Worcestershire.

10. STRATEGIC GOALS AND BUSINESS PLANNING FOR 2022/23

Strategic Goals - Five Year Plan

Our ambition is to make a positive and sustained difference to the lives of children, young people and families and to be able to provide a wide range of evidence to support this achievement. The diagram below provides a visual representation of how we plan to develop and improve our services for children, young people and their families over the next five years, and will guide our work in 22/23 (our second full year in operation):

Year 1 and 2

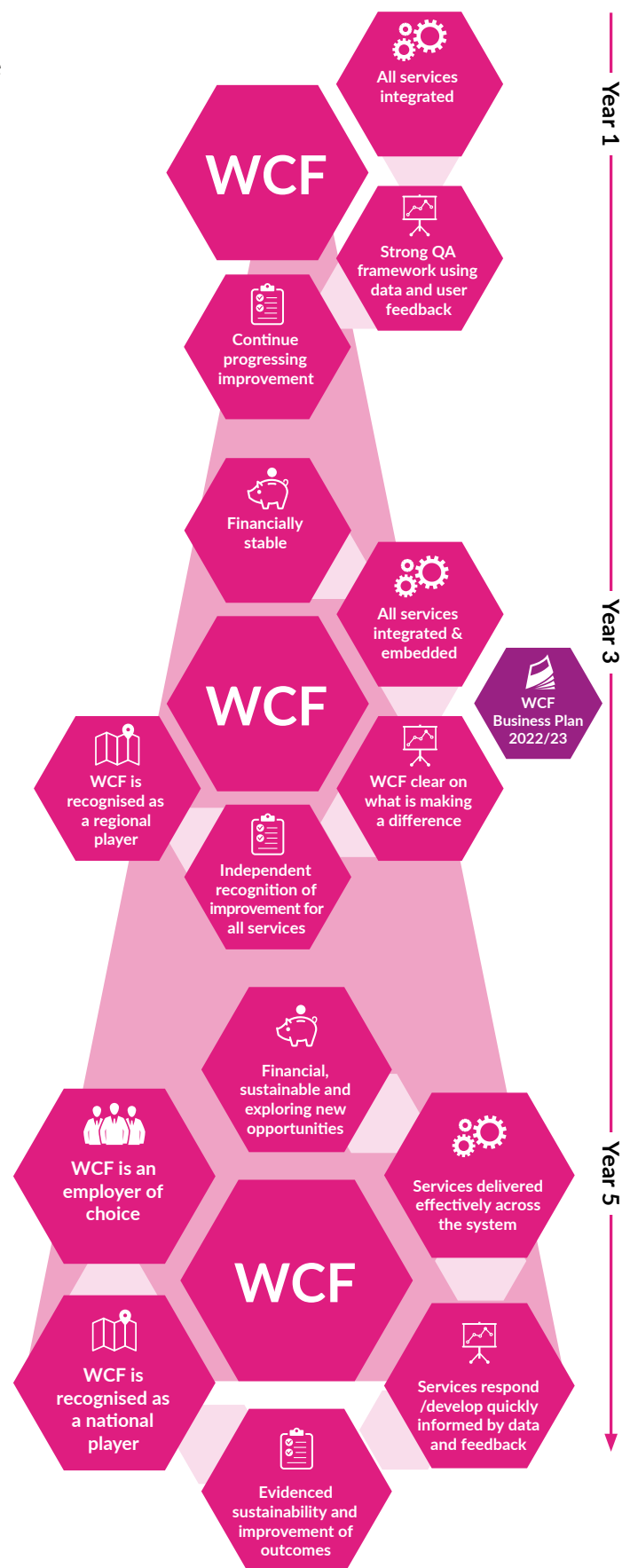
- Service user feedback indicates WCF is making a positive difference to CYPF
- Working under WCF Brand
- Building stable and productive teams, culture and behaviours
- Social care rated Requires Improvement (at point of transfer)
- Commissioner/Provider separation
- Support services tested and operational
- Demonstrate credentials with existing parties and children, young people and families

Year 3 and 4

- Increasing co-creation with children, young people and families
- Work effectively and efficiently within financial envelope
- Evidence of improved outcomes
- Embedding WCF culture
- Review opportunities for growth within existing services
- Wider strategic relationships developed
- Gain independent recognition of improvement and performance

Year 5

- Achieve sustainability and potentially explore new improved and evidenced outcomes
- Effective and responsive development
- Council and community are proud of WCF
- Begin review of commissioning intentions
- Integrated, effective partnership working across the system
- Support services sourced effectively



Worcestershire Children First Business Plan 2022/23

Our Business Plan for 2022/23 is published on our website which sets out our ambitions, priorities and arrangements and outlines how we will deliver services for children, young people and families in Worcestershire, aligning with our strategic goals.

Download: [WCF Business Plan 2022/23](#)

Company-wide priorities for 2022/23

Knowing ourselves, listening to the experiences of children and families of our services and understanding the impact we are making to the lives of children and young people is our highest priority. The Quality Assurance Framework within the business plan sets out how we will continue to use this three-dimensional approach to all our service through 2022-23.

2022-23 will be our 3rd full year in operation and our plan sets out our priorities to **Sustain and Improve** services, to be **Innovative** and to **Invest** to save and ensure best value.

- **Sustain and Improve** – Our foremost priority is to sustain the significant improvements that we have achieved since we were first rated as an inadequate Children’s Service in October 2016. Sustaining such good levels of performance is not something that’s achieved at any one point in time, it requires a continuation of hard work, commitment, and dedication of the whole workforce to be achieved and re-achieved every day, every month and every year.
- **Innovate** – We are proud to be in a place where we can build on foundations of good practice and start to innovate. Innovation means taking that brave step to do something new and different. As part of our innovations, we will join with regional and national activities to reflect and share our own learning to achieve best practice.
- **Invest** – “Money makes the world go around” We know though it is often in short supply, so taking every possible opportunity for national, regional and local funding opportunities alongside making savings in order to invest and re-invest in our front-line services is our third priority for 2022/23.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Worcestershire Children First – Company Key Performance Indicators Month 01/03/2021 – 31/03/2022

Children Looked After

at month end

894



Subject of Child Protection Plan

at month end

447



Children in Need

at month end

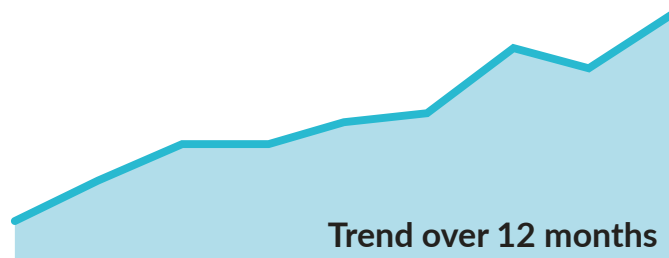
793



Children and YP with an EHCP

at month end

4,648



Indicator	Target	Min	Max	Average
A: (KPI-SC1) Referrals - Level 4 decision within 24 hours	52.3	69.3	87.8	79.1
B: (KPI-SC2) S17 Assessments completed within 45 days	75.6	79.3	96.7	86.9
C: (KPI-SC3) Proportion of Children Subject to CP Plan with Plan in Place	80	96.7	100.0	99.0
D: (KPI-SC4) ICPCs completed within 15 days	67.8	87.1	100.0	94.3
E: (KPI-SC5) Proportion of children who became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time within 2 years	27.3	0.0	25.0	15.6
F: (KPI-SC6) RCPCs completed within timescale	87.9	93.1	100.0	99.1
G: (KPI-SC7) Proportion of children subject to a Child Protection Plan seen within 20 days	77	91.9	97.6	95.4
H: (KPI-SC8) % Children Looked After Reviews in timescale	80.9	86.2	100.0	96.2
I: (KPI-SC9) Looked After Children with up to date Care Plan/Pathway Plan	73	94.4	99.9	98.7
J: (KPI-SC10) % Looked After Children who had a visit (in person) within timescale (30 days/60 days)	85	84.5	92.1	88.3
K: (KPI-SC11) % Children Open for assessment or plan without an allocated worker for 5 days	1	0.3	1.0	0.6
L: (KPI-SC12) % of Care Leavers open to services with an up to date pathway plan (age 18-25)	52.4	63.6	82.1	70.9
M: (KPI-EH1) % of annual target reached for successful claims under the "Troubled Families" programme	6.6	13.9	118.4	59.1
N: (KPI-ED1) Percentage of EHCP requests received where review decisions have been made within 6 weeks	80	100.0	100.0	100.0
O: (KPI-ED2) Percentage of Education Health and Care Plan decisions made within 16 weeks	60	11.5	100.0	55.1
P: (KPI-ED3) Percentage of Education Health and Care Plans completed within 20 weeks	60	7.0	100.0	57.7
Q: (KPI-ED4) Percentage of Statutory Advice Reports (all types) for EHCP Needs Assessment submitted within 6 weeks of request sent	80	31.8	96.3	60.3
R: (KPI-ED6) Percentage of looked after children of school age with an up to date Personal Education Plan	80	100.0	100.0	100.0

Key to KPI Status

- Green - KPI is at or above target
- Amber - KPI is below target, but not for three consecutive months, so action plan not triggered
- Red - KPI is below target and has been for three consecutive months, triggering action plan

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