

Questions/Statements to be raised via Worcestershire SEND Parent/Carer Forum at Worcestershire Children First AGM 24.9.2024

1. What are you going to do about the lost generation of Worcestershire SEND children who've repeatedly not had their educational and medical needs met? Who have been out of education through 3 failed Ofsted inspections? What opportunities will these children be given to catch up & achieve their full potential?

Response: WCF along with the ICB, Parent Carer Forum and their delivery partners including Health and Care Trust, SENDIASS and education settings form the local area partnership for SEND. In our role as a key partner, we are sorry and disappointed that children continue to have experiences that prevent them from accessing education and recognise the frustration and worry where children have experienced long waiting times for health services. Where children have Education Health and Care Plans the importance of reviewing these plans is a key focus of improvement as this ensures that provision is right to meet needs and outcomes.

2. Why does both the WCF 2024 Annual Report and the Chief Executive's Annual Report to WCC, not state the actual Ofsted/CQC grading – “widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND”? If you cannot own and accept the failure, let alone apologise, why should parent carers expect anything to change?

Response: The WCF Annual Report does not in any way seek to dilute the inspection findings. The report focusses on the entirety of children's social care over the past year. There is a dedicated focus at the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the 25th September, also a public meeting and one where the parent/carers forum will be actively represented. The report submitted for Overview and Scrutiny explicitly specifies the widespread failings along with the ownership WCF assumes as a key partner in the local area partnership. That sentiment applies to WCF's position from the point of the inspection judgement being shared, at today's AGM and indeed going forward, along with an absolute commitment to drive forward the necessary improvements alongside key partners, not least – parent/carers. WCF issued a clear apology when the inspection report was published, and I reaffirm that apology today – we are sorry for the failings identified which have adversely impacted your children.

3. Why do WCF continue to oppose appeals at the Tribunal when there is no prospect of winning?

WCF are currently reviewing any current opposition to appeals at Tribunal where there is no prospect of winning and have already sought to reach resolution without Tribunal being pursued any further. Further, WCF is seeking to promote mediation far more proactively in an effort to resolve matters at the earliest opportunity.



4. **Your website states that SEND children's views and opinions are at the forefront of decision-making. If this is the case, then why do you not listen to what our SEN children want and make it so stressful for the parent carers and unfair for the children involved? Do you realise how much mental stress and damage you cause and how this adds the systems-generated trauma?**

Response: Throughout the annual report the importance placed upon children and young people's voices is self-apparent. This is a fundamental element of a well-established and effective quality assurance process. There has been feedback on children and young people's voices being more evident within EHCP's. An intrinsic element of both the Priority Action Plan and Improvement Plan is an absolute focus in meaningfully accessing and listening to children's voices and evolving service provision accordingly.

5. **Parent carers are forced to make formal complaints to get the bare minimum, but no lessons appear to be learnt from your mistakes, even when found at fault by the Ombudsman. Going forward, how do you plan to learn from your mistakes to prevent further parent carers from being affected by systems-generated trauma?**

Response: Complaints in children's social care are subject to a well-established system of thematic learning. This is no different for parent/carers of SEND children. Learning is undertaken on an 'end to end' basis to ensure the entirety of the workforce can focus on applying learning both operationally and strategically. For example, thematic learning has arisen as a consequence of complaints around children with SEND missing education. WCF have made improvements in speeding up responses to missing education notifications, commissioning alternative provision and review and provision of suitable education. This has been recognised by the LGO.

6. **As the last and final AGM of Worcestershire Children First, why were children not put first?**

The inherent values WCF applies to its practice are evident early in the report under the section titled Mission and Vision. From a values perspective, it is clear that children and young people are at the heart of what WCF does. Whilst this is the last WCF AGM, it is the beginning of the improvement journey to remedy the deficits identified in April's local area partnership SEND inspection. Parent/carers will be aware from feedback at the Senior Officials Meeting with the DFE, in which they were proactively represented, that children's needs were very much at the centre of discussions and coproduction work to begin to address improvements was well received. This has ultimately contributed and led to the acceptance of both the Priority Action Plan and Improvement Plan by the DFE and Ofsted.

Going forwards, the parent/carer forum will remain an intrinsic partner on the improvement journey and will be directly represented at the Improvement Board which in itself, will be independently chaired. In short, children and young people will be front and centre in the improvements being striven for and the efforts to achieve this will be subject to regular and robust independent scrutiny.



Despite understandable frustration, anger and perhaps even scepticism expressed so clearly by some parent/carers it is clear that meaningful improvements can only be achieved by working together as a genuine partnership focussed on priority actions and building from there. It is really encouraging that my personal experience since recently becoming Director of Children's Services, is that parent/carers are proactively engaging in this process as has been evident at recent workshop events and they have conveyed a commitment to continue in this vein going forwards.