

Agenda

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 24 October 2017, 10.00 am
County Hall, Worcester

All County Councillors are invited to attend and participate

This document can be provided in alternative formats such as Large Print, an audio recording or Braille; it can also be emailed as a Microsoft Word attachment. Please contact Democratic Services on telephone number 01905 844963 or by emailing democraticservices@worcestershire.gov.uk

DISCLOSING INTERESTS

There are now 2 types of interests:
'Disclosable pecuniary interests' and **'other disclosable interests'**

WHAT IS A 'DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST' (DPI)?

- Any **employment**, office, trade or vocation carried on for profit or gain
- **Sponsorship** by a 3rd party of your member or election expenses
- Any **contract** for goods, services or works between the Council and you, a firm where you are a partner/director, or company in which you hold shares
- Interests in **land** in Worcestershire (including licence to occupy for a month or longer)
- **Shares** etc (with either a total nominal value above £25,000 or 1% of the total issued share capital) in companies with a place of business or land in Worcestershire.

NB Your DPIs include the interests of your spouse/partner as well as you

WHAT MUST I DO WITH A DPI?

- **Register** it within 28 days and
- **Declare** it where you have a DPI in a matter at a particular meeting
 - you must **not participate** and you **must withdraw**.

NB It is a criminal offence to participate in matters in which you have a DPI

WHAT ABOUT 'OTHER DISCLOSABLE INTERESTS'?

- No need to register them but
- You must **declare** them at a particular meeting where:
You/your family/person or body with whom you are associated have a **pecuniary interest** in or **close connection** with the matter under discussion.

WHAT ABOUT MEMBERSHIP OF ANOTHER AUTHORITY OR PUBLIC BODY?

You will not normally even need to declare this as an interest. The only exception is where the conflict of interest is so significant it is seen as likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest.

DO I HAVE TO WITHDRAW IF I HAVE A DISCLOSABLE INTEREST WHICH ISN'T A DPI?

Not normally. You must withdraw only if it:

- affects your **pecuniary interests OR** relates to a **planning or regulatory** matter
- **AND** it is seen as likely to **prejudice your judgement** of the public interest.

DON'T FORGET

- If you have a disclosable interest at a meeting you must **disclose both its existence and nature** – 'as noted/recorded' is insufficient
- **Declarations must relate to specific business** on the agenda
 - General scattergun declarations are not needed and achieve little
- Breaches of most of the **DPI provisions** are now **criminal offences** which may be referred to the police which can on conviction by a court lead to fines up to £5,000 and disqualification up to 5 years
- Formal **dispensation** in respect of interests can be sought in appropriate cases.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 24 October 2017, 10.00 am, County Hall, Worcester

Membership

Councillors:

Mrs F M Oborski (Chairman), Mrs J A Potter (Vice Chairman), Ms P Agar, Mr R W Banks, Ms R L Dent, Ms P A Hill, Mr S M Mackay, Ms T L Onslow and Ms S A Webb

Co-opted Church Representatives (for education matters)

Bryan Allbut (Church of England)

Parent Governor Representatives (for education matters)

Ms C Richardson (Parent Governor) and Vacancy

Agenda

Item No	Subject	Page No
1	Apologies and Welcome	
2	Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip	
3	Public Participation Members of the public wishing to take part should notify the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in writing or by e-mail indicating the nature and content of their proposed participation no later than 9.00am on the working day before the meeting (in this case Monday 23 October 2017). Enquiries can be made through the telephone number/e-mail address below.	
4	Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting (previously circulated)	
5	Update on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback	1 - 22

Agenda produced and published by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP. To obtain further information or hard copies of this agenda, please contact Alyson Grice 01905 844962/Samantha Morris 01905 844963 email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

All the above reports and supporting information can be accessed via the Council's website [here](#)

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 24 OCTOBER 2017

UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN – OFSTED MONITORING VISIT FEEDBACK

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) have been invited to the meeting to provide an update on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan.
2. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the outcome of Ofsted's second monitoring visit of the Council's safeguarding services, which took place on 12 and 13 September 2017 and focused on the Family Front Door (FFD) service.

Background

3. On 24 January 2017, Ofsted published their report entitled 'Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board'.
4. The overall judgement for Worcestershire was 'inadequate'. This was a very disappointing judgement for Worcestershire's children and young people, as well as for the committed and hardworking staff within the service.
5. Following the Ofsted judgement, an eight-point Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was developed to cover all of the recommendations made by Ofsted.
6. Ofsted conducted their first monitoring visit on 23 and 24 May 2017, with the focus being the Family Front Door service. Unfortunately, the feedback Ofsted provided in May was not as we would have liked.
7. During the May visit, Ofsted acknowledged our detailed improvement plan, which is targeted on outcomes but challenged whether the focus was too broad based at our current point in the improvement journey.
8. In response to this feedback, Children, Families and Communities agreed to focus on a smaller set of key priorities to enable tangible and sustained improvement to take place. It is important to note that this does not supersede the eight point plan, but instead places an intensive focus on the following priorities/activities already included:
 - Family Front Door – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessments

- Remodel the Early Help Offer
- Culture – Create a Child-focused and Accountable Culture
- Quality Assurance – Understand What 'Good' Looks Like

Feedback from Ofsted Monitoring Visit – No.2

9. Ofsted conducted their second monitoring visit on 12 and 13 September 2017, with the focus again being on the Family Front Door service. Dominic Stephens, HMI from Ofsted, led the inspection working alongside fellow Ofsted inspector Brenda McInerney.

10. Appendix 1 is the outcome letter which was published by Ofsted on 12 October 2017. The purpose of each letter following an Ofsted monitoring visit is to outline the outcome of the visit. There are no judgements made, but instead a statement summarising the direction of travel.

11. Ofsted's headline statement on Worcestershire following the monitoring visit in September is that 'the local authority has taken steps to tackle the serious weaknesses and is now beginning to make progress to improve services for children and young people'.

12. This is a positive message and reference is made to the local authority's priority improvement plan for July to September 2017, which is described by Ofsted as succinct and well-focused. Ofsted feel that the revised priority plan has been used effectively to drive and measure progress against key priorities, in particular, improving both the pace and quality of the work of the FFD.

13. It is important to note that there is a clear understanding that Worcestershire are still in the early stage of their improvement journey and there is still much work to be done. Appendix 2 is a presentation which will be delivered to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 24 October, by the Assistant Director for Safeguarding Services and will elaborate on the feedback provided by Ofsted, as well as outlining next steps.

Next Steps

14. Based on the feedback provided by Ofsted and recognition that we are still in the early stages of improvement, a decision has been made to retain the priority plan with the focus on the same four priority areas, whilst refreshing the activity within them.

15. The next phase of the plan will cover the period October 2017 to March 2018.

16. The next Ofsted monitoring visit (No. 3) has not been confirmed but is likely to be scheduled to take place during February 2018 with the focus of the visit to be decided.

Purpose of the Meeting

17. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- consider the information in the report and the presentation to be provided on the day;
- determine whether it would wish to carry out any further scrutiny; and
- agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – Ofsted Monitoring Visit Outcome Letter
- Appendix 2 – Presentation to be delivered to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel by Assistant Director: Safeguarding Services

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children, Families and Communities) the following background papers relate to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and background papers for the meetings of the Cabinet held on 2 February 2017, 6 April 2017 and 28 September 2017
- Agenda and background papers for the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 13 March 2017 and 14 August 2017

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12 October 2017

Dr Catherine Driscoll
Director of children, families and communities
Worcestershire County Council
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester WR5 2NP

Dear Catherine

Monitoring visit of Worcestershire children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Worcestershire children's services on 12 and 13 September 2017. This was the second monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in November 2016. The visit was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors, Dominic Stevens and Brenda McInerney.

The local authority has taken steps to tackle the serious weaknesses and is now beginning to make progress to improve services for children and young people.

Areas covered by the visit

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the area of help and protection, with a particular focus on children whose cases were open to the contact and referral service, known as the Family Front Door (FFD). Additionally, inspectors reviewed the quality of social work practice in the assessment service. The progress of the local authority was reviewed against its improvement plan targets, to assess the distance travelled.

The visit considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, child and parent telephone conversations and meetings with social workers and team managers. Inspectors also spoke to senior leaders and managers, including the local authority's chief executive, the leader of the council and the cabinet member with responsibility for children and families.

Overview

The local authority has been working hard to improve services to children since Ofsted inspectors conducted a monitoring visit in May 2017. At that time, inspectors concluded that insufficient progress had been made since services were judged to be inadequate in November 2016.

The director of children's services and her senior team know where services need to be better. They have the backing of the chief executive, wider council and political leaders to tackle these challenges. Many of the actions taken by the local authority are quite recent, and some are too new to have yet had a significant impact on

improving services. Significant weaknesses remain, for example, in the quality of services to children who go missing, in the electronic systems to support managers in the FFD and in the consistent focus within assessments and plans on the lived experience of children.

However, the local authority has achieved some tangible improvements. A well-focused improvement plan and significant investment in additional staffing have supported these improvements. The local authority has prioritised engaging the workforce in understanding the improvements needed for children in Worcestershire. Social workers and team managers spoke to the inspectors about the positive impact of recent audits and the role of the principal social worker to support their practice.

When referrals about children's safety and welfare are made to the FFD, the multi-agency team receives and considers such concerns, and initial decisions about levels of risk and need are made much more quickly than previously. Threshold decision-making about children's levels of need is more consistent. As a result, the services received by most children are better matched to their needs, supported by an improving application of the threshold for early help services. These improvements have been helped by a very recent, but significant, improvement in the attendance of health professionals at child protection strategy discussions and by more timely completion of assessments by social workers.

Findings and evaluation of progress

The local authority's priority improvement plan for July to September 2017 is succinct and well focused. It has been used effectively to drive and measure progress against key priorities, in particular, improving both the pace and quality of the work of the FFD. The local authority has tackled successfully a significant backlog of work in the FFD that inspectors, who visited in May 2017, found was delaying children being seen and receiving services. Tight oversight of initial decisions about children's levels of need and the services and further assessments that they may require is resulting in decisions being made more quickly, mostly within 24 hours. When, in a small number of cases, decision-making does take longer than 24 hours, these children's cases are reviewed daily by team managers to prevent drift and to make sure that no child who requires an urgent visit from a social worker is left waiting. This is a notable improvement on the situation that inspectors found in May 2017. At that time, children, including those with immediate safeguarding needs, were waiting for up to two weeks for decisions to be made. The local authority has achieved this improvement through significant investment in additional staffing. The recent permanent addition of two extra team managers and two more social workers is helping to improve the speed of social work and management decision-making in the FFD.

A generally helpful and clear 'Multi-agency levels of need' document, published in June 2017, has been used as the basis for a number of briefing sessions for staff. Inappropriate and inconsistent decision-making seen at the time of the last inspection and at May's monitoring visit has improved. In the majority of children's cases looked at by inspectors in the FFD, more recent decision-making was timely and appropriately matched to need. However, in a small number of those cases seen

by inspectors, decision-making remains poor. Although none of these children were left at immediate risk of significant harm as a result of poor decision-making, this is not good enough. In one case seen by inspectors, the risks to a young child were only recognised after multiple referrals were made to the FFD by family members.

In almost all children's cases seen by inspectors, the issue of parents' and older children's consent to referrals and to information sharing between agencies is both appropriately considered and recorded. This is a significant improvement. The local authority has also taken an important step forward to engage health agencies to fulfil their statutory expectation of attending all child protection strategy discussions. Health agencies' attendance, which fell as low as 44% in July of this year, has been 100% since the start of September, when an agreement was reached to ensure their consistent attendance. This is a very recent improvement. It is important that it is sustained and that work also continues to improve the attendance of other relevant agencies, such as schools.

A sharp focus on the timeliness of assessments has resulted in a significant improvement at the point of this monitoring visit. Alongside this improvement, there has been a shift to a much more even spread of completion timescales across the 45-day period. This means that children are more likely to have their needs understood and to receive services more quickly and within a timescale that is proportionate to the urgency of their needs.

Electronic case management and performance management systems for the FFD are not fit for purpose. They do not provide sufficient 'real-time' information to support fully effective management oversight and workflow management. For example, it is not easily possible to know how many children's referrals are being worked on by the FFD at any one time or, until they go beyond 24 hours, what stage each individual child's case has progressed to. The local authority has improvements to the electronic system included in its work plan and needs to progress these at the earliest opportunity.

The local authority has a standard that all children will be seen by a social worker within five days of a referral being made. Senior managers are monitoring performance against this standard and, at the time of the monitoring visit, the majority of visits were being achieved within this timeframe. This is a notable improvement. The local authority also has an expectation that the most vulnerable children, those who may be at risk of significant harm, are seen within one day. However, there is not yet a mechanism for recording this performance. This lack of oversight makes it difficult for managers to know which children's cases may most need their oversight or direction. It also results in senior leaders and managers not having a full picture of the effectiveness of frontline practice. The local authority is aware of these weaknesses and is working towards solutions, but these are not yet in place. The reduction in social workers' average caseloads, combined with a significant increase in management time, resulting from increased staffing in the FFD mitigates the risks arising from these systemic shortcomings but is not a sufficient long-term solution.

Work to ensure that children who are at risk as a result of going missing is poor. Despite a recommendation at the time of the inspection to improve management oversight, performance information and practice in this area, performance is declining. There is no management oversight of missing notifications received by the FFD. As a result, the risks to children who go missing, including children missing overnight, are not adequately assessed. In July 2017, only 61% of children received a return home interview after going missing, and only 24% received their interview within 72 hours of their return. This means that children's feedback about the 'push and pull factors' that influence their running away is not being consistently collected to help plan to keep them safe in the future. This is reduced performance compared with that at April 2017, at which time all children received an interview and 68% of these interviews were within 72 hours. Furthermore, children who go missing are not being offered return home interviews carried out by an independent person, as required by statutory guidance.

The local authority has prioritised improving social workers' focus on the child. Progress against this aspiration is mixed. Inspectors saw some examples of assessments that are very child-focused and in which the voices of children are clearly articulated and driving analysis and planning. However, an equal number had too strong a focus on the needs of adults at the expense of fully exploring and understanding children's wishes and feelings. A new template for recording home visits to children is supporting social workers to focus on the voice of the child and to improve their analysis, but this development is too recent to have had a significant impact. While some children attend child protection case conferences, this is not promoted strongly enough. Although there is an advocacy service for children, most staff are not aware of it and advocacy has been used for children at only a very few conferences since April 2017.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for your positive engagement with this monitoring visit. While services for children in Worcestershire require much further progress, I am pleased to report the progress that has been made and to be able to acknowledge the 'whole-council' commitment to improving services. I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dominic Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

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Tina Russell

Assistant Director Safeguarding

Inadequate Services

- October & November 2016 - Ofsted Inspection
- December 2016 - Eight point service improvement plan
- January 2017 public report - Widespread and serious failures. 14 key Recommendations
- March/April 2017 - Commissioners review
- May 2017 – Ofsted Monitoring visit
- June 2017 – Priority plan developed
- August 2017 - Essex improvement programme
- September 2017 - Commissioners report published
- September 2017 - Ofsted Monitoring visit
- October 2017 – Priority Plan

Ofsted Monitoring Visit: September 17

- Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the area of help and protection, with particular focus on children whose cases were open to the contact and referral service, known as the Family Front Door (FFD).
- Additionally, inspectors reviewed the quality of social work practice in the assessment service.
- The visit considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, child and parent telephone conversations and meetings with social workers and team managers

Leadership and Commitment

- The director of children's services and her senior team know where services need to be better. They have the backing of the chief executive, wider council and political leaders to tackle these challenges
- The significant investment made in additional staffing has supported the improvements
- Engagement of the workforce in understanding improvement needed has been prioritised and staff were able to speak positively about the impact of audits and the new Principal Social Worker
- The priority plan is succinct and focused, it has been used to effectively drive and measure progress improving pace and quality of work.

Significant Weaknesses Remain

- Work to ensure that children who are at risk as a result of going missing is poor. Absent and late welfare return interviews a cause for concern.
- Electronic performance systems to support managers at the Family Front Door are still not fit for purpose, developments required are recognised in the work plan – need to progress at pace.
- Inconsistent focus within assessments and plans on the lived experience of children
- In a small number of those cases seen by inspectors, decision-making remains poor

A mixed picture

- Inspectors saw some examples of assessments that are very child focused and in which the voices of children are clearly articulated and driving analysis and planning
- However, an equal number had too strong a focus on the needs of adults at the expense of fully exploring and understanding children's wishes and feelings.
- A new template for recording home visits to children is supporting social workers to focus on the voice of the child and to improve their analysis, but this development is too recent to have had a significant impact.
- Whilst some children attend child protection case conferences, this is not promoted strongly enough
- High quality managerial decision making is not yet consistent

The local authority has achieved some tangible improvements (1)

- When referrals about children's safety and welfare are made initial decisions about levels of risk and need are made much more quickly than previously.
- Threshold decision-making about children's level of need is more consistent.
- Services received by most children are better matched to their needs, supported by an improving application of the threshold for early help services.
- Recent, but significant, improvement in the attendance of health professionals at strategy discussions.

The local authority has achieved some tangible improvements (2)

- Tight oversight of initial decisions about children's levels of need and the services is resulting in decisions being made more quickly, mostly within 24 hours.
- A generally helpful and clear 'Multi-agency levels of need' document, published in June, has been used as the basis for a number of briefing sessions for staff.
- Evidence on consent from Parents and Young People to referrals and information sharing significantly improved

The local authority has achieved some tangible improvements (3)

- The local authority has tackled successfully a significant backlog of social work assessment work in the FFD
- A sharp focus on the timeliness of assessments has resulted in a significant improvement at the point of this monitoring visit.
- Evidence of much more even spread of completion timescales across the 45 day period. This means that children are more likely to have their needs understood and to receive services more quickly and within a timescale that is proportionate to the urgency of their needs

While services for children in Worcestershire require much further progress, I am pleased to report the progress that has been made and to be able to acknowledge the 'whole council' commitment to improving services.

Dominic Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

The local authority's priority improvement plan for July to September 2017 is succinct and well-focused

- **Family Front Door** – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessment / Multi Agency working / Consistent understanding and application of levels of need
- **Remodel the Early Help Offer** – WSCB agreement to the Early Help Strategy / development of the Targeted Early Help offer at level 3 supporting step down
- **Culture – Create a child-focused and accountable culture** - Shared understanding of vision, mission and core values / Signs of Safety a relationship and strength-based practice model / Voice of the Child
- **QA – Understand What 'Good' Looks Like** - Practice standards / better performance management information / Team Diagnostics / Learning from QA , audit and complaints

Key Considerations for Next Phase

- Passion for Children
- Professional knowledge and expertise
- Personal skills and qualities
- Resilience, Motivation and Commitment
- Support next work
- Challenges and our Critics

QUESTIONS

“While services for children in Worcestershire require much further progress, I am pleased to report the progress that has been made and to be able to acknowledge the 'whole council' commitment to improving services.”

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