

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

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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

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