

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 20 July 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr Alan Amos (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Richard Udall
and Mr T Reid

Also attended:

Cllr Andy Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and
Families
Steve Eccleston, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership
Tina Russell, Director of Children's Services / Chief Executive, Worcestershire
Children First
Emma Brittain, Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door,
Worcestershire Children First
Sarah Wilkins, Director of Education, Early Years and Children with
Disabilities, Worcestershire Children First
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alyson Grice, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 June 2022 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

1264 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Adams, Dormer and Webb, and from
Councillor Onslow (CMR for Education) and Liz Altay (Interim Director of Public
Health).

1265 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board Wednesday, 20 July 2022
Date of Issue: 22 August 2022

None.

1266 Public Participation

None.

1267 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1268 Worcestershire Children & Young People's Plan 2022-2024

The Board considered the draft Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan 2022-2024 (the CYP Plan).

By way of introduction, the Director of Children's Services/Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First made the following main points:

- The CYP Plan was a strategic document which provided a framework setting out what would be delivered for all children in Worcestershire. It aimed to support all children in the County not just those who were considered vulnerable.
- The Plan took into account the priorities of the all-age Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (HWS) and the Integrated Care System (ICS). The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Healthwatch report into the impact of COVID-19 on Young People's Emotional Wellbeing had also been considered as part of the development of the Plan.
- Consultation and stakeholder engagement on the draft Plan had been mainly undertaken online due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- The Plan was overseen by the Worcestershire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board, a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Governance chart on page 21 of the agenda showed how the Partnership Board linked to other bodies, including the four subgroups of the Board. It was important to note the 2-way arrows between bodies indicating that feedback and reporting went both ways.
- The Plan would be delivered by the four subgroups via a set of key measures that would be considered by the Strategic Partnership Board, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children and Families. The next report back would be in September.

Members were invited to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- In response to the suggestion that a Plan covering two years did not allow much time for delivery, Members were informed that two years was felt to be long enough to allow action to be embedded and see some outcomes. After two years there would be an opportunity to

review the Plan as needed, looking at what had been achieved and what needed to be refreshed rather than a complete revision. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that this opportunity for review could be communicated more clearly.

- It was suggested that it was difficult for Board Members to comment on aspects of the Plan when no data or specific targets were included. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that baseline data was available and could be added to the plan as a starting point. This could then be updated as outcomes were assessed. The challenge had been to present the Plan in a simple user-friendly format.
- Concern was expressed that the interlinked nature of the governance structure needed all partnership groups to deliver, and this could be seen as a risk. It was confirmed that all areas required partnership representation due to the cross-cutting nature of the work and there had been consistent positive engagement across the whole system. The membership of each partnership was listed in the Plan.
- A Member acknowledged that inclusivity was important but suggested that it was unwieldy to have such a large partnership membership. In response, the Board was reminded that the partnership groups were of different sizes. Although a large group was a challenge, it was right that all partners were involved. There were ways to make this work, including ensuring a tight focus on the most important agenda items.
- Members were reminded that qualitative outcomes were also important as the success of some workstreams was not easy to measure using data alone. For example, the Get Safe Partnership was working to ensure consistent advice across partners in relation to online exploitation, something which was not possible to measure via a quantitative approach.
- It was suggested that the Plan could do more to highlight the contribution of parents and young people themselves. For example, there was no reference to the Youth Cabinet. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that each of the sub-groups had direct links with service users and acknowledged that the Plan needed to make that clearer.
- A Member asked about home to school transport, something that was regularly raised with him by residents. It was confirmed that home to school transport was not part of the Plan. Parents had raised issues at each of the stakeholder groups and they may also raise the same issues with their local councillors.
- It was confirmed that it was WCF's aspiration for all mainstream schools to return a SEND audit and attend SENCO training and officers were talking to schools about this. All schools had a responsibility to outline their offer for children with additional needs.
- In response to a Member's question, the Director of Children's Services reminded the Board that, although the cost of children's services was rising year on year, the management of finance in WCF was very effective with sound budget management which compared extremely well with statistical neighbour authorities and

was regularly reported to Children and Families O&S Panel. Early help aimed to invest in services at an early stage to stop needs and risks escalating leading to a better life experience for the child and reduced demand on services. For the third year running, Worcestershire had the lowest rate of new children coming into care in the region. Therefore, it was possible to show effective outcomes.

- A Member suggested that there was a danger of medicalising children's behavioural problems and translating them into mental health issues. The Director of Children's Services informed the Board that she did not think that was the case. Many referrals to CAMHS did not meet the required threshold as the children were deemed to have behavioural issues. However, if a child was self-harming, the adults around the child needed to deal with this, whether it stemmed from behavioural or mental health issues.
- The Director of Children's Services confirmed that it was the service's clear expectation that parents should parent their own children well. Staff worked on a strengths-based approach with parents.
- A Member of the Board reported that headteachers in his local area had suggested that Worcestershire Children First's management structure was 'top heavy'. They had also suggested that it would be helpful to have social workers attached to schools. In response, the Director of Children's Services said that there was no evidence that WCF was top heavy and reported that no other local authority that she worked with had a slimmer management structure. She pointed out that she herself combined two roles as Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive of WCF. She agreed to speak to the Member following the meeting so that she could address the schools' concerns.
- With reference to social workers in schools, the shortage of social workers meant that it was not possible to staff this. Also, research showed that this approach did not reduce referral rates.
- With reference to levels of intervention, the Board was reminded that the important thing was having the right children in care for the right amount of time. It was not possible to have targets for child protection as it was important to look after the right children.
- Whether progress against the Plan would be considered by the Panel in the future would depend on the Children and Families O&S Panel's work programme.
- It was confirmed that the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown had had an impact on children's mental well-being. This was now the top concern raised at the Family Front Door and this was why it was a priority in the Plan.
- In relation to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), Members were informed that WCF's accelerated action plan had received good feedback from the DfE and a further meeting would be held in September to review progress. The picture remained challenging but the action plan was in place and, although it was early days, engagement with parents was now receiving more positive feedback.

- In response to a question about support for refugees from Ukraine, it was confirmed that schools were meeting current demand but it was not possible to predict future demand. The Director of Education confirmed that no money had yet been received by schools from the DfE. Locally, schools had been able to access trauma informed training and over half had taken up this offer. Schools in the county were currently accommodating approximately 250 children. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the issue of funding had been raised with the DfE and had also been raised by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). Although there was no reference to Ukraine in the Children and Young People's Plan, it was important to ensure that the Plan was flexible enough to address emerging issues.
- With reference to the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership, Members were reminded about the Partnership's multi-agency approach, and the role of the three key partners and the sub-groups. In response to a question about why not all district councils were listed in the Partnership's membership, it was confirmed that this list would be updated. It was also confirmed that the Partnership did not work directly with St Richard's Hospice and the inclusion of Primrose Hospice was a legacy position from the previous Safeguarding Board.

The Chairman thanked all those attending. He wished to put on record his thanks for the amazing job done by the Director of Children's Service and her team and noted that their enthusiasm and passion was clear.

At this point, Officers and other witnesses left the meeting and the Board took a short break, after which Board Members went on to discuss their feedback to Cabinet on the draft Plan. The following main points were made:

- Concern was expressed about whether WCF had the staffing resources (in particular social workers) in order to fully implement the plan. However, it was acknowledged that intervention by staff other than social workers was also important.
- It was suggested that, if the Plan contained more measurable outcomes, it would be easier to see whether it was deliverable. Without clear targets, it was difficult to judge whether there were sufficient staff to implement the Plan.
- The Board discussed whether a two-year plan allowed sufficient time for delivery before it would need to be refreshed. It was suggested that schools often produced five-year plans with interim milestones within them and this may be a useful model to follow.
- A fundamental question to ask was 'how could success be measured?'
- A Member suggested that the draft was more of a checklist or a working document than a Plan, and the Governance chart was top heavy.
- Members discussed whether this was a Plan for all children rather than simply for a small cohort of children.

- The Board was reminded that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment would identify needs in the County. The Director of Children's Services had pointed out that needs would change which is why the Plan only covered two years.
- The Chairman noted the vision outlined on page 6 of the agenda including the aim for children and young people to be happy, healthy and safe, and queried how these aims could be measured. It was suggested that the Plan outlined what would be done to support those children who were unhappy, unhealthy and unsafe.
- A Member of the Board expressed concern that the plan did not outline any proposals to tackle issues related to child poverty. In response, it was suggested that there was not necessarily a correlation between poverty and the need for support from children's services. Although poverty was a reason that some children and young people experienced issues, it was not clear that it was the main driver overall.
- A Member noted that the Plan set out a framework for services but did not give the full picture. He went on to suggest that it would be for Children and Families O&S Panel to judge the outcomes based on the parameters outlined in the Plan, through its regular monitoring of performance information.

It was agreed that the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager would draft comments based on the Board's discussion, to accompany the 22 September report to Cabinet.

1269 Performance and In-year Budget Monitoring Feedback

The Board considered agenda items 6 and 7 together covering all feedback from recent scrutiny panel discussions.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Steve Mackay)

The Panel's last meeting had included updates on:

- the Council's youth service, which was due to be recommissioned in April 2023. A needs assessment had been undertaken to identify gaps, which would be addressed before the recommissioning process.
- Support for children and families from Ukraine, covering education, safeguarding of unaccompanied children, healthcare and employment opportunities.
- Performance information. The Panel had noted that the number of referrals via the Family Front Door was now returning to pre-covid levels and, although the service still employed a high number of agency staff, retention rates were good.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Scrutiny Task Group (Cllr Steve Mackay)

Members of the task group had recently visited SOLAR which ran children's mental health services in Solihull. This was effectively a 'one stop shop' covering all children presenting with mental health issues at levels 1 to 4 and had been rated as 'good' by the Care Quality Commission.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Cllr Brandon Clayton)

The Chairman of the Board informed Members that he had been appointed as a Member of HOSC replacing Councillor McVey.

Members were informed that an additional meeting of HOSC had been scheduled for December.

At its last meeting, HOSC had discussed:

- Patient Flow – An update had been received on progress relating to the recent scrutiny task group report and the ongoing situation. Further updates would be provided at future meetings.
- The Covid Vaccination Programme – Take up of first and second vaccine doses in Worcestershire was among the highest in the country. Take up of the third dose was lower but still consistent with national levels. Work to increase vaccination rates continued. Although there had been an increase in the number of Covid cases in recent weeks, fewer patients were being admitted to hospital.
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy Consultation – The Committee received feedback on the recent consultation exercise which had been successful in terms of the number of responses received.
- Year End Budget Monitoring – An update in relation to the County Council's public health budget had been received.

A Member of the Board expressed concern about waiting times in the A&E department at Worcestershire Royal Hospital, an issue which was regularly raised with him by members of the public. The Chairman of HOSC reminded the Board about the scrutiny work which had been completed on this issue and noted that similar difficulties were being experienced nationally. Plans to address the issues were in place but it would take time for improvements to be seen and HOSC would continue to monitor outcomes.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Emma Stokes)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent meeting.

The Panel planned to meet informally at Redditch Library in September, ahead of a formal meeting to discuss proposals for the library. Comments and recommendations would then be reported to Cabinet on 22 September.

With reference to performance information, there was nothing to report to the Board on this occasion. However, the Panel intended to consider the current suite of indicators to ensure they remained relevant.

Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted the Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan. No comments were made.

1270 Member Update, Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

This item was covered under discussion of Item 6.

The meeting ended at 1.08 pm

Chairman