

## **Minutes of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny**

### **Panel**

### **County Hall, Worcester**

**Friday, 7 July 2023, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr Steve Mackay (Chairman), Cllr David Chambers (Vice Chairman),  
Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Jo Monk and  
Cllr David Ross

#### **Also attended:**

Cllr Andy Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and  
Families  
Cllr Tracey Onslow, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education  
Steve Eccleston, Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership  
Tina Russell, Director of Children's Services/Chief Executive, Worcestershire  
Children First  
Phil Rook, Chief Financial Officer  
Chris Bird, Interim Director of Resources, Worcestershire Children First  
Emma Brittain, Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door,  
Worcestershire Children First  
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager  
Deborah Dale, Community Engagement Officer

#### **Available Papers**

The members had before them:

The Agenda papers (previously circulated);

#### **590 Apologies and Welcome**

Apologies were received from Councillors Nathan Desmond, Tony Muir and  
Tim Reid (Co-opted Church Representative for education matters).

#### **591 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

## 592 Public Participation

None.

## 593 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021-2022

In attendance for this item:

Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP)

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Chief Executive, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) and Director of Children's Services, Worcestershire County Council

Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door

The Independent Chairman of the WSCP introduced the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Annual Report for 2021 – 2022 (reporting period October 2021 to September 2022). The key areas of the Report were summarised and the Panel was advised that the reporting period had been about laying the groundwork for changes to the child protection system in England following the serious and tragic deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes. Further, in May 2022 Josh MacAlister's independent review of children's social care was published.

A number of other reports had been published in this period which carried potential learning for all safeguarding children's partnerships:

- The Solihull Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) report (February 2022)
- The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Telford (July 2022)
- The final Report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in October 2022.

The Independent Chair summarised the areas of focus for WSCP for 2021 – 2022 as detailed in the Report.

During the opportunity for discussion and questions, the following main points were made:

- It was clarified that the national definition of Children in Need (CIN) included all children that had a social work plan including child protection, looked after children and CIN. Locally, the definition of CIN was split down to children in need of a support plan, child protection plan or care plan.
- A Member expressed concerns about the relationship between the Police and young people and how trust could be built. The example was given about the recent incident in Cardiff where two young people had died on e-bikes. The Independent Chair of the WSCP advised that

whilst unable to comment specifically on the ongoing investigation of the Cardiff case, the relationship between the Police and young people was a longstanding issue and needed to improve. The Police Community Safety Officer model was helpful as was working with schools and summer activity clubs for example. There would however always be some hard to reach groups.

- The Chief Executive of WCF reinforced the value of the GET SAFE approach and ensuring that all partners were aware of and engaged with GET SAFE.
- In response to a member question about whether Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group multi-agency audits had highlighted a consistent approach from all the agencies, it was confirmed that there had been consistency and strong understanding from all agencies about the expectations around when a child protection process should be used. Learning from these audits had been published showing the systems in place were strong.
- In response to a question regarding timely information sharing and if this could be improved, the Panel was advised that audits had shown that information was being shared appropriately at the right time in the vast majority of cases, but it could always be better and would never be perfect.
- The Chief Executive, WCF added that it was important for information sharing to be for the right purpose, to add value to the child whilst managing risk and professional anxiety. An example was given whereby through the audit process it was identified that the Police were struggling with capacity to provide information in a timely manner in respect of domestic abuse referrals and conversations had taken place within the Partnership to find ways to address this and in response, additional capacity from Senior Social Workers were placed in the Family Front Door to help manage information and support the Police whilst they addressed the capacity issues.
- The success of last year's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme was discussed and it was confirmed that the programme would be rolled out to a wider audience during the school holidays, working in partnership with schools. Further information about this programme would be circulated to the Panel.
- In response to a question about what action was being taken about the Multi-Agency Audit: Voice of the Child and (SEND) and some of the case records not being kept up to date by some agencies. The Panel was informed that a briefing had been sent to all practitioners and in October, the Section 11 Audit was going out to individual agencies to ask specific questions around their arrangements for child safeguarding and protection and how effective they were. It was confirmed that there was not a question that specifically asked about how to improve the saving of records and conversations. The Independent Chair of the WSCP advised he would consider this further.
- The Chief Executive, WCF confirmed that Liquid Logic case recording system was now being used for both safeguarding and SEND work.

The Chairman of the Panel summed up stating this was a comprehensive report and hoped the knowledge and learning would make Worcestershire's children safe and wished the Partnership success in taking this forward.

## **594 Worcestershire Children First and the Independent Care Review**

In attendance for this item:

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families  
Chief Executive, WCF and Director of Children's Services, Worcestershire County Council  
Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door

The Panel considered an update on developments relating to the Independent Care Review and how this was being approached within WCF.

The Chief Executive, WCF introduced the report and referred to the presentation slides included in the agenda pack. Children's Social Care reform: Stable homes, built on love was published in February 2023 having been commissioned by the Government to take a fundamental look at Children's social care and understand how to transform it to better support the most vulnerable children and families.

The review was the largest review of systems for some time. The reforms were set out under 6 pillars and identified a range of further consultations and pilots as part of a phased implementation over two years. The Chief Executive, WCF explained where Worcestershire was at in respect of each of 6 Pillars (detailed in the presentation slides included in the agenda pack). The 6 pillars were:

- Pillar 1 – Family Help – To provide the right support at the right time so children can thrive with their families.
- Pillar 2 – A decisive multi-agency child protection system.
- Pillar 3 – Unlocking the potential of family networks.
- Pillar 4 – Putting love, relationships and stable home at the heart of being a child in care.
- Pillar 5 – A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one.
- Pillar 6 – A system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- A Member referred to Pillar 2 and the Specialist Child Protection role (final detail yet to be determined) and questioned if it was needed. The Chief Executive was concerned that this specialist role could result in the knowledge and expertise being contained in one area and not spread across the whole of the child protection system. However, this would be re-proved by being tested out with the Families First Pathfinders.

- A Member asked about the progress made with regard to the recruitment of Social Workers. Although data was not available at this meeting, the Chief Executive, WCF suggested that there were approximately 40 social worker vacancies. However, during Q1-2022, there had been an increase in the number of Social Workers leaving the organisation as two neighbouring authorities were offering agency workers £50 per hour and WCF was not able to compete with this and staff had therefore moved for better wages. Government had recently carried out a consultation on Child and Family Social Worker Workforce and was due to report back in September – this report was awaited.
- The CMR for Education stated that all social care reviews had a financial element and recommended the Panel contacted Government Ministers to obtain help for funding.
- In terms of lobbying Government, the Chief Executive, WCF confirmed that the CMR for Children and had raised this with Government earlier in the year.
- A Member questioned about foster care recruitment and whether the authorities involved in the North-East trial/two year programme had done anything different to WCF. The Chief Executive, WCF would be watching this programme closely. In Worcestershire however there was a more targeted approach around recruiting foster carers.

The Chairman explained this review was about transforming social care, supporting families first, providing a loving stable relationship with children by using all the professional expertise and data. The Panel was interested to see the changes over the next few years.

## **595 Performance and 2022/23 Year End Budget Monitoring**

In attendance for this item:

The Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Children and Families and Education  
 The Chief Financial Officer  
 Interim Director of Resources, WCF  
 Chief Executive, WCF and Director of Children’s Services, Worcestershire County Council  
 Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door

### Budget Monitoring

The Panel received the budget monitoring 2022/23 – outturn period 12 and were provided with an overview of the Councils outturn position for 2022/23 which had been presented to Cabinet on 29 June 2023.

The Chief Finance Officer explained the presentation included in the Agenda pack and in doing so highlighted that:

- There was a net over-spend of £7.3 million for the Council on a £373.2 million budget. The over-spend was in all demand led areas – Adult

Social Care, Children's Social Care and Home to School Transport and would be funded by a planned transfer from reserves.

- The Dedicated Schools Grant year-end position was overspent by £8.9m with a cumulative deficit of £20.3m at the end of 2022/23, the deficit position at the end of 2023/24 was predicted to be around £28m.
- The full-year WCF budget was currently £138m of which over half was the 'demand led' budgets for Placements and Home to School Transport. WCF was overspent by £6.5m which included a net overspend of £5.3m for Home to School
- Delivering Better Value In SEND – 55 authorities had opted to be part of this initiative which had given valuable insight engaging with other local authorities and shown that Worcestershire was doing good things with other authorities in more difficult positions. Projections going forward showed there would be a gap in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). As the gap would continue to grow it was expected the Government needed to do something about that.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The report on the Home to School Transport review was scheduled for the September meeting of the Panel.
- The CMR for Education explained that Home to School Transport was currently being reviewed and would include both the statutory and discretionary services. It was hoped that by September there would be some information with options to mitigate some issues.
- The Panel was advised that the overspend on all age disability would be managed through additional funding that had been allocated this year. The CCN report showed an overspend by many councils in Childrens Services which were still recovering post Covid.

### Performance Monitoring

During the opportunity for questions, the following main points were noted:

- A Member questioned why the OFSTED performance data showed that some schools performance had gone from 'good' to 'inadequate'. The Chief Executive, WCF explained that there could be a number a reasons including the length of time between inspections or attendance issues. The CMR further explained that the School Improvement Team looked at each school individually to establish why performance had reduced. It was agreed to provide the Panel with a detailed report.
- A Member referred to page 79 of the Agenda (Number of EHCPs completed and timeliness) and questioned how long it was sustainable for EHCPs to continue to increase. The Chief Executive, WCF explained that at some point the demand would plateau and reduce but that there a number of issues that needed to be resolved first eg cultural change, parental confidence in mainstream schools and health capacity, these were all areas currently being worked on but there would not be a quick turnaround.

## **596 Work Programme**

The Panel reviewed the Work Programme and agreed that the Chairman would discuss with Officers whether all of the issues on the Work Programme were still relevant.

It was agreed that Children Missing Education would be scheduled for the September meeting.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

Chairman .....