

**HEALTH AND WELL-BEING BOARD
14 FEBRUARY 2017****OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN
NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION, CHILDREN LOOKED
AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS**

Board Sponsor

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Priorities

Older people & long term conditions

Mental health & well-being

Obesity

Alcohol

Other (specify below)

(Please click below
then on down arrow)

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Educational attainment

Groups of particular interest

Children & young people

Communities & groups with poor health outcomes

People with learning disabilities

Yes

Yes

Yes

Safeguarding

Impact on Safeguarding Children

If yes please give details

Yes

Impact on Safeguarding Adults

If yes please give details

No

Item for Decision, Consideration or Information

Information

Recommendation

1. The Health and Well-being Board is asked to note this update in relation to the recent Worcestershire Ofsted Inspection and the County Council's response regarding the Improvement Plan.

Background

2. Ofsted carry out inspections of Local Authority services with regard to the help, care and protection of children and young people. The inspections are carried out under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which replaced the previous inspection process in November 2013. The SIF covers inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after, care leavers, adoption and a review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

3. The inspections are announced at short notice and take place over a four week period. The framework includes a detailed and forensic analysis of the quality of work with children and the impact made on the outcomes they achieve. The inspection outcome has four possible judgements: inadequate, requires improvement to be good, good and outstanding. Under the SIF the judgements of the 116 Authorities where the results have been published to date show that 73% of authorities are 'inadequate' or 'require improvement'.

4. Worcestershire's inspection took place from 24 October to 17 November 2016. This involved 11 inspectors and 155 meetings with over 200 people as well as the rigorous examination of case files of children.

Ofsted Judgements and Recommendations

5. The overall judgement for Worcestershire was 'inadequate' and was published on 24 January 2017. This is a very disappointing judgement for Worcestershire's children and young people, as well as for the committed and hardworking staff within the service. Plans were already in place to deliver service improvement prior to the inspection and this work has continued and been further strengthened to form an improvement plan to cover all recommendations from Ofsted.

Ofsted Ratings Table

Children's services in Worcestershire are 'inadequate'	
1. Children who need help and protection	Inadequate
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Inadequate
2.1 Adoption performance	Requires improvement
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Inadequate
3. Leadership, management and governance	Inadequate

6. The report contained fourteen recommendations for the Authority, with its partners, to implement. These are:

1. Ensure that elected members and senior leaders meet their statutory responsibilities and duties to the children of Worcestershire by improving all children's services
2. Implement the workforce strategy as swiftly as possible to improve workforce stability and capacity
3. Ensure that children's services staff and the wider partnership understand and consistently apply the 'level of needs' at every stage of the child's journey, including in the early help pathway
4. Strengthen children's voices by ensuring that children are seen, and seen alone, that their views are fully considered and taken into account, that they are supported to contribute to their plans and that their wishes are acted upon, when appropriate
5. Ensure that the management oversight and performance information relating to children who are at risk or vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and missing are accurate, and lead to improved safeguarding practice
6. Complete a thorough review of all children subject to Section 20 accommodation to ensure that their arrangements are appropriate in all cases
7. The local authority should assure itself that decisions made to close the cases of the cohort of children in need that were recently reviewed are both appropriate and in the children's best interests
8. Improve the quality of assessments and plans for all children. Ensure that children progress, including permanence plans, through robust reviews and effective oversight
9. Ensure that strategy discussions include all relevant agencies and robust contingency arrangements so that children are safeguarded while child protection enquiries are undertaken
10. Improve the timeliness of health assessments for children looked after to ensure that their needs are fully understood and met
11. Ensure that social workers and managers fully understand and exercise their responsibilities to unaccompanied asylum seeking children
12. Review the response to privately fostered children to ensure that assessments of carers are completed and agreed, and that children are visited within required timescales.
13. Improve the service to care leavers by ensuring that there is a sufficient range of support and services available to all care leavers.

14. Ensure that effective performance management and quality assurance drive improvements and consistency in the quality of practice, including findings from complaints and training.
7. The detailed report is available on the County Council's website or directly through Ofsted's website <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/worcestershire>

Worcestershire's Improvement Plan

8. The Chief Executive invited the Local Government Association to carry out a peer review of children's services in April 2015. Following the peer review report, which confirmed the challenges within the service, an improvement board and 'back to basics' plan for children's social work were implemented. Ofsted's view was that there was progress since the peer review, although they felt the progress had lacked pace and stability of leadership to have had a clear impact on children's outcomes.

9. However, Ofsted did recognise that some progress had been made in relation to:

- Recruitment of a permanent senior leadership team: the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, Director of Children, Families and Communities, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board have all taken up their roles in the last four to nine months.
- Implementation of the Safeguarding Board's Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy
- Establishing an integrated Family Front Door (incorporating the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub ethos) with the publication of revised Threshold of Need Guidance
- Children's Social Care 'Back to Basics' Improvement Programme showing improvements in compliance with key performance standards (for example return interviews for children missing, timeliness for assessment activity and adoption performance amongst others)

10. The improvement plan has been refreshed in the light of the final Ofsted judgement. The plan focuses on 8 major work programmes. These are:

1. Workforce strategy
2. Ensuring conditions for good practice
3. Performance and quality assurance
4. Service user feedback
5. Thresholds and assessments
6. Good outcomes for children in care and care leavers
7. Improving the quality of practice for children subject to public law outline and care proceedings
8. Targeted early help.

The service improvement plan is attached at Appendix 1.

11. The political and managerial commitment to delivering good services to Worcestershire's children and young people has ensured that progress has continued to be made since the inspection. The stability and commitment of current leadership has continued to focus on making improvements since the inspection.

12. A key part of the inspectors' feedback at the end of the inspection was that they had seen evidence of positive change but that it was too early to judge that it had made a real difference to the experience of children. Continuing to deliver and embed the plan is the best way to make this positive difference.

Worcestershire's Financial Strategy

13. The Council has made significant financial investment in Children's social care placements in recent years (£3m for the 2017/18 financial year) which has allowed services to be available to meet the needs of children requiring intensive support to meet their needs.

14. Cabinet agreed in December 2016 to recommend a further £700,000 per annum to increase safeguarding capacity following the 2015/16 Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board which advised that it could not be fully assured that child protection services were effective.

15. In light of the Ofsted judgement, Cabinet are recommending an allocation of additional resource, recognising that the pace of change can be accelerated through the availability of additional funding. Council will be asked to recommend a budget for 2017/18 that adds a further £800,000 per annum on an ongoing basis. In addition, there is a recommendation for a short-term allocation of £1m for 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years (£2m in total).

16. The additional funding recommendation is broken down below:

- £1.5m revenue for children's safeguarding and for services for care leavers on an ongoing basis
- £1m of revenue funding for each of the next two financial years
- £1m to the capital programme to support improvements in social care IT systems to accelerate the pace of change required

Policy Framework

17. There are a number of policies and strategies that are currently in need of refreshing and approving in order to ensure that the framework for the delivery of services is clear, effective and follows current best practice guidelines. Work is already underway to prepare these documents for formal approval by Cabinet later in 2017.

18. The County Council had a Key Issues Debate at its meeting on 12 January 2017 about the role of all Councillors as corporate parents. This was a positive debate that demonstrated strong cross-party commitment to the vital role that Councillors play as corporate parent to children in care and to care leavers.

19. The Corporate Parenting Board, on behalf of the Council, will discuss and approve a revised Corporate Parenting Strategy and a pledge to children in care and care leavers at their meetings in February and April 2017.

20. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families will be asked to approve the a number of strategies by April 2017 including the Looked After Children strategy, the sufficiency and placement strategy and the Care Leavers strategy.

Wider partners

21. There are key roles for partner organisations across Worcestershire to play in order to ensure that services are playing their full part in improving outcomes for children and families. This includes the full range of public sector organisations, as well as schools, the voluntary and community sector, families and the wider community and of course children and young people themselves.

22. The judgement has been shared widely and the improvement work will continue to be discussed and debated through the range of key strategic forums to ensure that all partners play their full part in keeping children safe, healthy and achieving great outcomes for a positive future. The voice of the child will be at the heart of the improvement work being delivered. There will be a refresh of the Children and Young People Plan and a strengthening of partnership oversight of improving outcomes.

Supporting Information

- Service Improvement Plan

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