

COUNCIL
13 SEPTEMBER 2018**REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY**

(a) Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families**Overview**

1. Substantial improvements have been made in service standards in the last year and significant steps have been taken towards forming a company. It remains the intention to develop service standards so that Worcestershire Children First can have an unerring focus on children and families. Our vision is for Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up. We will help create supportive communities where children and young people are safe, secure and nurtured to become independent. This will be done within a sustainable budget.
2. The culture of practice is moving to a greater focus on support for vulnerable children who, without the intervention of services, risk becoming 'children in need' of local authority care or protective services.
3. The approach of intervention being developed in children's social care is a 'strength based' model, which aims to engage, educate and support parents to make positive lasting changes to their parenting.
4. A key element of this approach is our 'edge of care' offer. This entails the prevention of children and young people entering into the care system. Supporting them at home and in their communities and, where it is safe to do so, helping them and their parents/family to work through crisis and problems to achieve lasting change.
5. We currently have a higher number of children in our care than is expected when compared to England national averages. There are complex reasons for this which includes legacy issues identified in our 2016 Ofsted Inspection.
6. Our improvement work has done much to address quality and drift and we are working now to remodel our services and approach to intervention to achieve our vision.

Service Improvement Plan.

7. Councillors have been kept regularly informed by the Director of Children, Families and Communities about the progress of the Service Improvement Plan and the development of the company. The service has worked closely with our improvement partner Essex County Council and has been subject to quarterly Ofsted monitoring visits which have identified consistent progress since July 2017.

8. The system of improvement involves senior managers identifying the strengths and weaknesses in their area of responsibility, as well as strategies for improvement. This is robustly challenged by our partner in 'Quality Performance Monitoring Meetings' which is a two phase 'diagnostic' session.

9. The first part involves the social services senior management team, department/team leaders and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility. The second session entails a verbal feedback and is attended by directors, the Leader of the Council and other cabinet members.

10. The report on the work Essex did with us between February and July 2018 highlighted positive progress with the new structure, reduced caseloads, better staff morale and increased recruitment amongst other areas. Social worker teams, that Essex had previously considered as inadequate, were identified as either 'good' or 'requires improvement' with 'good' team management.

11. Essex has reported that, 'in general the direction of travel in Worcestershire has been positive. The service and the senior management have continued to be open to and responsive to our intervention and feedback and they have continued to know themselves taking positive action to drive improvements.'

Ofsted

12. Worcestershire children's social services were subject to a full safeguarding inspection in October 2016, when it was considered there were widespread and serious failures. Since then there have been six monitoring visits, the most recent in July 2018.

13. Much of the focus of the first three visits was the Family Front Door, a multi-agency first point of contact, which assesses and makes initial safeguarding decisions about children, young people and their families.

14. Initially it was concluded that the improvement plan was 'not yet resulting in progress in a number of key areas' and later that, though there were tangible improvements, actions were 'too new to have had a significant impact'. However, this year Ofsted acknowledged that, 'whilst services still require much work to be of a good standard, progress has been made'.

15. At subsequent visits it has been noted that there is progress in improving services to children and young people and that Corporate Parenting is, 'now a strength'.

16. The visit in July 2018 focused on 'child protection' and 'child in need' work. Ofsted reported that we continue to make progress to make sure our services are delivering good outcomes for children and young people.

17. Inspectors were impressed by the morale of the staff members they met and saw that managers recognise good quality work and challenge appropriately when this is not evident. Reference was made to the 'positive trajectory of change'.

18. There remains work to be done on the quality and consistency of management oversight and decision-making, ensuring children's plans are of a consistently high quality and better forward planning for young people leaving care. Our recruitment and retention work also remains a priority.

Early Help

19. Early help means providing the right support at the earliest opportunity to solve problems before they become more pressing and complex. This may prevent children from suffering significant harm. Early Help is delivered by a wide range of agencies including universal services, the voluntary and community sector and specialist services. In September 2017, the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board endorsed the Early Help Strategy, which sets out the duties of all partners involved working together to ensure that early help is available for children, young people and families who need additional support.

20. Early Help has featured as part of the Service Improvement Plan since its inception in January 2017. The initial focus was on providing earlier access to support children and families. Since the Service Improvement Plan refresh in April 2018, Early Help is included under the Enhancing Multi-Agency Partnerships work stream, shifting the focus to the development of our partnership approach.

21. As a result of the focus on children with complex or escalating needs (that can only be met by a coordinated multi-agency plan) there has been a successful transfer of 32 staff from external agencies into the Early Help Team. The consolidation of this resource aligns the service more closely enabling more joined-up service delivery.

22. Further progress in developing the multi-agency aspect of Early Help delivery has involved working closely with schools to ensure they have a good understanding of the offer in Worcestershire and the role they play. We are also working closely with Essex County Council, particularly around building capacity of Early Help in our partnerships. We are implementing the roll-out of Signs of Safety (a new strengths based social care practice model) across our partnerships.

Troubled Families

23. Worcestershire is currently in the fourth year of delivery of the Troubled Families Programme, a national programme of targeted intervention for families with multiple problems. As part of our continued effort to enhance multi-agency coordination we are using the programme to ensure that our partnership working is providing the best outcomes for children. We are currently working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to ensure that we make the most of the programme's opportunities, to bring in resource to assist with delivery of Early Help in Worcestershire.

24. There is close contact with colleagues from the MHCLG. Following a recent visit the MHCLG Troubled Families Practice Lead provided specific feedback on our Troubled Families Outcomes Plan, noting that it is comprehensive and covers everything the Ministry would expect. It is of a good standard.

25. Public Health colleagues are currently finalising the Early Help Needs Assessment, a research document which will provide valuable information on the levels and areas of need, and specifically help us to understand the Troubled Families themes identified in the national framework.

Finance and Human Resources

26. Additional investment in frontline social workers and management has meant a reduction in the manager to worker ratio and a reduction in average caseload. Reporting and publications about the improvement, as well as additional investment, means we are competing as an employer of choice. We have seen a high number of new recruitments and an 11% reduction in turnover.

27. However, we have not yet achieved our 85% permanent staff target and, due to the poor quality of some agency staff, turnover still presents a challenge on the front line.

28. A further £10.5million was allocated in the 2018/19 budget to support the growing number of looked after children and the increased demand within the safeguarding and care system. Although work continues to ensure the best value for money solution, there remains a risk associated with a demand related service.

Worcestershire Children First

29. In compliance with the directive issued by the Department for Education (DfE) work is progressing on forming our company Worcestershire Children First, which will assume operational responsibility for delivering children's social care. The aim is that at the point of transfer the service will be performing well, providing a positive platform to enable sustained progress and continued improvement of outcomes for children and young people.

30. The DfE has agreed to extend the programme by six months, so Worcestershire Children First will now formally launch on the 1 October 2019. This will allow us to better manage a predicted intense period for children's service and will permit a proper shadow period from 1 April 2019.

31. The DfE has also confirmed the financial support package, which includes £3.15m set-up costs and a contribution to non-executive directors for a two-year period.

32. It is now expected that Worcestershire Children First will be able to charge VAT, which the council will be able to claim back. This will be factored into the work on the company's budget and will be reporting to cabinet in the autumn.

33. Work is still taking place on clarifying the additional running costs of the company, however, we are expecting this to be considerably less than the £2.2m predicted in the business case.

34. The recruitment campaign for the company's chairperson has been launched and interviews will be held in the autumn. This is a DfE appointment and the role is government funded whilst the council remains under statutory direction. Work also continues on agreeing the senior management structure for the company. We will continue to work with the Commissioner on agreeing the right way forward. Investment into practice-based leadership to develop leadership capacity, capability and resilience is important to sustain the positive trajectory of improvement.

Corporate Parent (and Corporate Parent Board)

35. The April 2018 Ofsted monitoring visit found 'corporate parenting' to be, 'a strength'. The report said, 'Leaders have done much to improve on how they listen to children by broadening the range of children and young people with whom they consult. Relevant issues are now discussed at the corporate parenting board and this is resulting in a positive impact for children in care and care leavers'.

36. Areas of improvement include:

- Greater involvement of young people in setting the agenda and providing evidence. In particular a 'take over' of the annual board meeting (which was particularly challenging)
- Greater involvement of a wider number of districts and district councillors (both at Board meetings and their locality)
- The emphasis placed on 'looked after children' by the former Chairman of the County Council during her year in office, helped by councillors who arranged local events.
- An approach which has been in the main collegiate
- Attention and accurate reporting from the local press.

37. A recent training session was used to formulate ideas to develop the Board, further increase the status of its district members and encourage involvement of associated organisations.

Serious Case Reviews

38. A serious case review (SCR) takes place after a child dies or is seriously injured and abuse or neglect is thought to be involved. The review will look at the actions of agencies (e.g. county, health and police) and lessons that can help prevent similar incidents from happening in the future. The outcome of any SCR is considered by Worcestershire Children Safeguarding Board.

39. There have been two SCRs involving Worcestershire children in the past two years.

Children's Centres

40. Multi-agency services for our youngest children (including health, education and support) continue to be provided utilising facilities in the community and include using places built under the children's centre programme.

41. The focus is on ensuring these community facilities are appropriately managed and used in a sustainable way. Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Panel has received updates and will be considering the latest report tomorrow (14 September 2018).

Short Breaks Respite for Children with Disabilities

42. The Local Authority is required to provide services designed to give respite for parent carers of children with disabilities in order to assist them to continue to provide care or to do so more effectively.

43. Short breaks form part of a continuum of services which support children in need and their families. This can include the provision of a range of care that can take place in the community or in the child's own home.

44. During this year we have extensively reviewed and consulted on short breaks respite. This has resulted in an increase in the number of providers available to deliver 1:1 support and we are commissioning for group based activities to be widely available in the community.

45. In July, Cabinet approved the next steps for redesigning residential overnight short breaks. Officers are working with the parent carer forum Worcestershire (Families in Partnerships) and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust to progress the recommendations. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel received an update at the beginning of August 2018.

Adoption Central England

46. Following the Government's commitment to redesign adoption services across the country, the local authorities of Coventry, Solihull, Warwickshire and Worcestershire set up a new regional adoption agency called Adoption Central England (ACE). It officially launched on the 1 February 2018 and Worcestershire staff members have transferred to ACE under a secondment arrangement.

47. ACE is hosted by Warwickshire County Council and is not within the scope of Worcestershire Children First. The local authority retain a clear governance arrangement for ACE and strong links with the safeguarding service to ensure there is high quality and timely transitions of work between the two services.

Strategic Commitment, Investment and Leadership

48. Ofsted has noted the clear buy-in and investment from elected members and senior leaders with significant financial investment to enable implementation of change. It considered that 'elected members and senior managers have done much to improve how they listen to children and take positive action as a result'.

Andy Roberts

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

(b) Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills

49. It gives me great pleasure to present my first report to Council as Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. I very much welcome the decision taken in 2017 for the split of the portfolio from Children's Social Care as Education and Skills is a large area in its own right and it allows Councillor Andy Roberts and I to focus more specifically on these very important areas.

50. Despite the changing shape of Education since the drive on academisation by David Cameron's Conservative Government in 2010, we as the Local Authority still have a wide range of duties and powers laid down in a variety of education legislation and associated statutory guidance. In brief some of the main responsibilities include:

51. Place planning - we have to make sure there are enough early years, school and specialised places and provision for 0-19 year olds and up to age 25 for young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

52. We must ensure the places that are available are of a high standard and achieving high outcomes for every child. Our role is to create the environment where schools are responsible for their own improvement, and are able to draw from a range of coordinated support and challenge. The emphasis is on collaboration, with the ultimate goal of improving individual school outcomes and the performance of the education system across Worcestershire.

53. We must ensure all children and young people are able to access provision through transport arrangements, disability access and effective admissions arrangements. We retain responsibility for home to school transport policies and for ensuring that there is sufficient access to provision within a reasonable distance for all children and specifically for children and young people with disabilities. We currently have a net spend of £13.7m for Home to School Transport (£8m for SEND and £5.7m for non-SEND).

54. We have responsibility for operating the admissions arrangements for our maintained schools and for coordinating the admissions arrangements for all schools.

55. A key responsibility for us is to ensure that vulnerable children are adequately supported. The phrase 'vulnerable children' means identified groups of children who are often likely to have poorer outcomes than their peers.

The Schools Landscape

56. We have a diverse range of 242 schools across Worcestershire. This is made up of 1 nursery, 176 Primary/First schools of which 52 are academies, 19 Middle schools of which 10 are academies, 30 Secondary and High schools of which 25 are Academies and 16 Special/Alternative/Free schools. We have 16 pyramids, some operating 2-tier primary and secondary and some 3-tier first, middle and high and some where there is a mixed picture.

57. The latest national statistics for the recent overall effectiveness for schools inspected at 31 July 2018 show of our 242 schools 85% are rated as good or better by Ofsted, which is broadly in line with the England average of 86% and the West Midlands average of 84%.

58. Currently we have 46 schools rated as outstanding by Ofsted, and 160 rated as good. We have 19 schools who require improvement and 17 who are rated as inadequate.

59. Babcock Prime Education continue to work in close partnership with Worcestershire County Council in seeking to ensure a high proportion of good/outstanding schools, raise outcomes for pupils at all phases, especially for vulnerable learners and build capacity for a school-led improvement system.

60. In 2018-19, the school improvement and early years teams will be working on an increased district level footing to deliver its services for schools that are judged by Ofsted 'to require improvement' or 'inadequate' by Ofsted and those at risk of such judgements. All such schools will have access to a series of leadership development seminars through Babcock's Aiming for Outstanding policy and to initial and follow-up reviews by attached improvement advisers. There will be district-level delivery of a comprehensive programme aimed at raising standards in English and Mathematics and access to specialist reviews, for example around early years, governance or inclusion, where advisers and school leaders identify a need.

61. For schools requiring intensive support, a school-to-school support package may be arranged. These schools will be subject to close monitoring as well as support with the goal of ensuring overall effectiveness is good or better within tight timescales. In terms of the wider audience of maintained schools and academies, Babcock Prime will be working closely with Phase Head Teacher representatives, the Local Authority, Worcestershire Teaching Schools and other partners such as the Diocese of Worcester and Wychavon District Council in support of wider partnership working with groups of schools in support of school improvement.

School Places

62. During the last academic year over 1,400 applications were made for school places across Worcestershire. This year over 97 % of applications were made electronically, making the process more convenient for residents and much more efficient to run.

63. For high schools almost 6000 applications were received with over 90% being offered places at their first choice school. A further 5 % received offers for their second choice school. For Primary schools over 6000 applications were received with almost 93% being offered places at their first choice school. Over 97% of children received offers for one of their first 2 choices. At Middle schools the performance was even better. Of the 2259 applications received over 99% received offers for one of their top 2 choices. 97.5% were given offers for their first choice school.

64. In terms of Worcestershire's performance national comparative data is available for Year 7 1st preferences, which for Worcestershire are 89% against the England average of 82% and the West Midlands average of 79%, showing that we meet much more 1st preferences than are met both nationally and regionally.

65. Also, over the last few years, Worcestershire has been promoting applying online via the County Council's website. When this service began in 2007, 4% of applications received were made on line. As stated, this year achieved 97% of all Worcestershire applications being made online.

66. At every phase no children were left without an offer of a primary, middle or high school place.

School Funding Issues

General Context

67. The Department for Education (DfE) continues to set the national policy direction for school and other provider funding.

68. From 2018-19, this has culminated in the introduction of a National Funding Formula (NFF) arrangement for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for Schools, Central School Services and High Needs. The DSG for Early Years has already been subject to a NFF from 2017-18.

69. The NFF is allocated to Local Authorities (LAs) by the DfE on a national formula with parameters set by them. As a consequence, Worcestershire has seen increases in 2018-19 compared to the 2017-18 baselines for the Schools Block of +£10.7m and High Needs Block of +£1.3m. Indicative allocations from the DfE in July 2018 are predicting a further +£3.7m for the Schools Block and +£1.7m for the High Needs Block in 2019-20, compared to 2018-19.

70. For mainstream schools funded from the Schools Block DSG, LAs are able to continue to set a local schools funding formula in the period 2018-19 to 2020-21 prior to the full NFF, which has to be based upon and comply with the DfE NFF parameters in the School and Early Years Funding Regulations. After an extensive consultation with all mainstream schools in the Autumn Term 2017, schools were supportive of moving to the NFF parameters in this period and this was approved by Cabinet in December 2017 to operate. The additional Schools Block DSG through the NFF is required for mainstream schools to implement the NFF formula parameters.

71. For Early Years 3 and 4 year olds, the setting by the DfE of a NFF national hourly minimum rate and other changes, including the increase of the universal entitlement of 15 hours a week to 30 hours a week for working parents, has resulted in changes in funding.

High Needs

72. The NFF for High Needs is allocated by the DfE to LAs.

73. Unlike the Schools Block there is no local formula requirement apart from the funding of commissioned places at £10,000 as prescribed by the DfE. LAs are free to determine the funding of any additional needs above this level through their top up systems.

74. The majority of LAs, including Worcestershire, are experiencing significant financial pressures on their High Needs DSG. This is as a consequence of increases in the overall number of pupils with SEND; increased placement demand in specialist providers e.g. special schools, pupil referral units and alternative provision; increases in the complexity of need; demand pressures for more post 16 provision for general and more complex placements and to reflect the age range for support is now 0-25; and increases in independent schools SEND placements.

75. There has been some increase in the High Needs DSG as a consequence of the NFF but this will only partly cover these cost pressures and LAs are pressing the DfE through their respective networks for additional funding as well as discussing local solutions.

76. Following the outcomes of the joint Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection in March 2018, of the effectiveness of the Worcestershire area in implementing the SEND reforms Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) required that a Written Statement of Action between the LA and the area's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) be submitted. The statement prepared included a detailed action plan demonstrating how the local area will tackle the areas for improvement identified by the inspection. The action plan sets out how the County Council and the CCG will work together with partners, parents and young people to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. A pervasive theme throughout the plan is to build trust and confidence amongst parents, carers, children and young people with SEND. The plan was considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8 August 2018 and approved by myself on 10 August 2018 before the required submission to OFSTED and the CQC by the due date.

F40 Group

77. The County Council has, for a number of years, been a key member of the F40 Group which represents the lowest funded LAs and continues to take an extremely active part in the group's work being represented on both the Executive Committee. LA officers play an integral part in the Finance Research Group supporting the development of NFF options for consideration.

78. The group recently made a submission on School Funding to the Education Select Committee as part of the call for evidence in their review, which highlighted continuing issues and areas that still need to be addressed in the NFF as well as significant school and LA cost pressures.

Budget

79. The 2018/19 gross expenditure budget for Education and Skills, including Home to School Transport (HTST) is £33.541m. Education and Skills makes up £18.084m of this whilst the HTST element is £15.457m

80. This is funded by grants and other income totalling £15.512m.

81. This leaves a net expenditure budget for 2018/19, including central support charges, of £18.029m

Education and Skills	£4.337m
HTST	£13.692m
Total net expenditure budget	£18.029m

82. There are 49 FTE employees. (This figure excludes staffing for commissioned out services, HTST and Adult Education.)

Babcock Prime Education Services

83. In 2015 the council commissioned Education Services from Babcock Prime. Services have been maintained whilst achieving a savings target of 50% of the core budget. The core budget was £2.3m in 17/18 with further savings ambitions on target to be met. Services are funded from grants out of all of the DSG funding blocks and County Council base budget.

84. The contract is subject to a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which are monitored as part of the contractual arrangements. Officers have good governance and monitoring arrangements in place, which are being made more collaborative and robust, adopting a 'One Worcestershire' approach that builds relationships between Council Group Managers and Service Managers at Babcock. Officers are currently revising all KPI's for October 2018, to be more reflective of the changing education landscape since the original award of the contract 3 years ago, these KPIs will be more monthly reportable and easier to monitor for progress. The current KPIs are more a measure of educational performance in Worcestershire, rather than the contribution Babcock can provide as the contracted provider. We will be having joint 'One Worcestershire' KPI's as well as those contractually for Babcock.

85. We are now moving into a critical phase of the agreement and need to look at our future options. The contract was issued for 5 years and the initial term will end on 1st October 2020. These will be presented to Councillors in due course.

Attainment

Key Stage 2

86. Year 6 is the final year of studying the key stage 2 curriculum for pupils and they usually reach the age of 11 during the year. Over 6000 children in Worcestershire have recently completed year 6.

87. Since 2016, pupils at the end of key stage 2 have been assessed in reading and maths using a scaled score system. Writing is assessed by teachers and externally moderated based on work which pupils have completed in class.

88. In 2018, 61% of pupils in Worcestershire achieved the expected standard in all three subjects (reading, writing and maths) compared to a provisional 64% nationally. This represents an increase of 4% locally and 3% nationally since 2017.

89. Provisionally, 73% of Worcestershire's year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in reading in 2018, 76% achieved the expected standard in writing and 72% in

maths. Although these figures lie below the national average they do show an improvement of between 2 and 3 percentage points compared to last year.

90. Pupils in Worcestershire appear to have average scaled scores of 105 in reading and 103 in maths compared to 105 and 104 nationally. In the case of reading this indicates a small increase whilst maths in the county has remained more or less the same.

GCSE/Key Stage 4

91. GCSE results for the county this year were an improvement on 2017 which is great news and great reward for the county's students and staff who continue to work tirelessly. Initial data provided by 30 schools shows 67% of students in the county achieved a standard pass in English and Maths. In 2017, the figure was 65.5%. A grade 4 (or standard pass) indicates a similar level of achievement to the old C grade. A grade 5 (or strong pass) under the new system is similar to a high C or low B in the old system.

92. There will be further comparative information available when the overall national position becomes available later in the new academic year.

A level results

93. This year around 1200 students sat A-levels within Worcestershire. Based upon initial data provided by 23 schools to the County Council the average grade achieved by A level pupils in Worcestershire is better this year compared with 2017. The average A-level grade across the County Worcestershire was between a B and a C, which represents a slight improvement from last year (2017) when the average grade was a C grade. Based on each student's best 3 grades, Worcestershire's average points per entry appears to have fallen slightly compared to last year. In 2018, the average point per entry is 31.4 compared to 32.6 in 2017. This appears to be in line with the national trend following changes to the exam structure.

94. There will be further comparative information available when the overall national position becomes available later in the new academic year.

Education and Skills Board

95. WCC administer the Employment and Skills Board (ESB) on behalf of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP). The Board has a number of priorities but the main focus has been around the Connecting Schools and Business Agenda and developing career planning of education establishments in Worcestershire. Highlights from the past 12 months include:

96. The Worcestershire skills show - Worcestershire County Council's largest annual event - this year involved over 80 employers and was attended by 2900 young people aged between 13 –19 . The event offered a number of have a go activities and interactive presentations to students around Entrepreneurship.

97. The Careers and Enterprise contract focuses on improving the levels of employer interaction with schools. We became the first LEP area in the country to engage all of its Educational establishments to commit to the programme.

98. Over the year our flagship Apprenticeship brand has gone from strength to strength, achieving over 15000 interactions with young people through its partners and engaging with over 500 employers.

99. The brand, offers an impartial website for young people, parents and employers in conjunction with Worcestershire Training Providers Association.

100. The LEP is supporting innovative approaches to encouraging young people into STEM careers including the pilot of a Science Technology Engineering & Maths (STEM) Primary Schools Challenge, rolling out to 90 schools and the development of a Junior Internship Programme for 16-18 year olds. WCC is itself offering placements to young people under this scheme in Civil Engineering.

Virtual Schools

101. The role of the Virtual School Head teacher within the Local Authority is to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children. There are currently around 550 Looked after Children of School age within the County.

102. The Virtual Head and wider virtual school team have identified the main areas to develop this academic year will be attendance, exclusions and those in receipt of less than 25hrs of education. As a team they will continue to challenge and support schools to raise attainment through monitoring and evaluating progress for all Children in Care. I Chair the Virtual School Governing Body.

103. Earlier this year I had the pleasure of attending the Children in Care Awards celebrates the accomplishments of our young people in care. The event was an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the many impressive things that our pupils have accomplished in often difficult circumstances.

104. The awards were hosted by performance poet Spoz, while Chief Executive Paul Robinson was also on hand to congratulate the 72 young people receiving awards.

105. Currently 21 of our Care Leavers are attending University.

Worcestershire Schools Forum

106. The County Council continues to service and advise the Worcestershire Schools Forum (WSF) and consults the group on school funding matters. In addition WSF members play an active part in communicating required issues to the schools and providers they represent. I attend the meetings of the WSF as regularly as I can.

Governors

107. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals who serve as governors at schools and colleges in Worcestershire. The role of governing bodies has never been more important than now. The governing body plays a crucial role in providing senior leaders at each institution with support and challenge. We are very keen to do all we can to encourage further volunteers to join governing bodies across the County, bringing with them a wide range of expertise and local insight.

Conclusion

108. The responsibilities of the Education and Skills portfolio are wide and diverse. Our highly committed staff, continue to strive to improve the educational outcomes of all Children across the county. While the challenges over the next 12 months are considerable we will work with school and other partner organisations to give our children and young people the best possible support to achieve their full potential and to live happy, healthy, independent and prosperous adult lives.

109. Can I place on record my thanks to our Director of Children, Families and Communities Catherine Driscoll, Interim Assistant Director for Education and Skills Nick Wilson and all of the many other officers who support me.

Marcus Hart
Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills