

# Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services Worcestershire

Overview and Scrutiny September 2019

Safeguarding  
Inspection of  
Local  
Authority  
Children's  
Services  
January 2016

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*There are widespread and serious failures in the services provided to children in Worcestershire who need help and protection and children looked after*

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Judgement : Overall Inadequate

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Placed under direction by secretary of State to form an alternative delivery model for the delivery of children's services

Inspection Local  
Authority  
Childrens  
Services  
Worcestershire  
July 2019

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The local authority has made considerable progress in improving the quality of services to children and families since 2016.

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Essential steps have been taken to meet the goals in the service improvement plan.

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Senior Leaders and elected members are ambitious for and committed to, ensuring the well being, safety and outcomes for children in the county.

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Senior Leaders have successfully created a strengthened workforce of stable and permanent workers who know their children well.

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As a result, outcomes for many children and their families are better, the changes are embedded on core practice and there is evidence of a sustained trajectory of improvement.

# Judgement

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## Judgement

## Grade

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

Requires improvement to be good

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Requires improvement to be good

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

Requires improvement to be good

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement to be good

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# Children In Need of Support and Protection

- The Targeted Early Help undertaken with families is making a positive difference to their lives
- Thresholds are applied appropriately and most children receive a proportionate response to need
- Consent is understood - sought and dispensed with appropriately.
- Social work assessments are comprehensive in gathering information and views of the child, parents and partners. They are up to date, completed in a timely and they analysis risk effectively
- Decision making at the FFD is usually prompt and timely, informed decisions, with appropriate contribution of partners, are made where serious safeguarding concerns are identified and safe plans made for children
- Effective partnership working between police and social workers for children vulnerable to exploitation means the response to these concerns is strong and the multi agency in Domestic Abuse triage is effective in safeguarding children

# Children In Need of Support and Protection

- Social workers know their children well, they understand what life is like for them and their views are informing assessment outcomes and plans
- Child Protection Conferences and Child In Need meetings are timely and children, families and partners well engaged in them
- Monitoring of outcomes in child protection cases is good. When concerns reduce cases are appropriately “stepped down” enabling the families to maintain progress with support and when concerns escalate swift action is taken to safeguard the children
- Legal advice is usually sought promptly and good use of time limited pre proceedings takes place

# Children In Need of Support and Protection

- Work in the disabled children teams demonstrates and understanding of risk and the needs of children they work with.
- Smooth transitions between Children and Adult services, are facilitated by work the between Young Adults and Children with Disability teams
- Across the services Signs of Safety is well embedded and used effectively with professionals and families to identify risk and measure progress
- Emergency duty services provide effective out of hours
- Concerns and allegations about professionals are managed well by the designated officer service
- Arrangement for Privately fostered children are effective

# Children In Need of Support and Protection

- Partnership work with police and multi agency information sharing in response to children experiencing exploitation have improved and creation of Missing Children Officers has made a positive impact.
- Social workers understand specialist areas of safeguarding and exploitation. Young People at risk of Radicalisation, Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage are well supported
- Active responses to the rise in both children missing in education and those Educated at Home is taking place
- LA effectively monitors and provides appropriate support and challenge to Alternative Provisions and is effectively working with schools to reintegrate pupils where this is appropriate

# Children in Care and Care Leavers

- Decisions made for children to come into care are appropriate and where necessary immediate action is taken to safeguard children
- Assessments for children in our care are timely, comprehensive and care plans are appropriate and Care plans for are comprehensive, up to date and reflect the needs of children well
- Effective parallel planning for young children ensure they achieve timely permanency
- Majority of children in care are settled, are in placements that meet their needs and are making progress
- Care planning for siblings groups is done in the best interests of children. Siblings are placed together when it is in their interests
- Children in care “benefit” from supervised family time with parents, siblings and family

# Children in Care and Care Leavers

- Long term stability for most children has improved as a result of proactive management and service development to introduce “consolidation meetings”
- Looked After Child reviews are well chaired by IRO’s, Records are written in a supportive meaningful way and in most cases IRO’s are active in ensuring quality and timeliness is identified and addressed.
- Children and Young People in care are making good educational progress and this is effectively monitored by social workers and schools through Personal Education Plans
- Assessments of Foster Carers are timely, thorough and analytical.
- Supervising social workers understand the needs of the children and help foster carers to develop their skills necessary to meet those needs.
- Planning for children with a plan of Adoption is a strength. ACE and the local authority work effectively to identify where Adoption is an appropriate permanence plan early and then family find without delay.

# Children in Care and Care Leavers

- Personal Advisors build positive relationships with young people and they know them well. They are aspirational for their young people and consistently encourage them to achieve in education and employment
- All care leavers have a PA to the age of 21 and the LA ensure they offer services, and are in contact, with most up to the age of 25 years
- Pathway Plans are detailed, up to date and have clear actions and timescales. Good participation from young people in completing their own plans and our “plan on a page” provide a good straightforward overview
- Access to support across the districts is positive and helps maintain contact and reduce isolation for these young people
- Most Care Leavers live in suitable accommodation and our outreach services engage young people in independent skills course that is effective in increasing confidence and enables them to progress through stages to independent living

# The Positive Impact of Leaders on social work practice

- Since Oct 16 the Local Authority has made considerable progress improving the quality of services; essential steps have been taken to meet the goals of the service improvement plan and Corporate Parenting has been strengthened
- The combination of; restructure of services; focused investment and the “end to end” approach of service improvement has ensured changes are embedded in core practice and the trajectory for further improvement is established.
- Quality Assurance system has established a range of performance information that allows senior managers to better understand practice
- Effective work has strengthened the workforce and Staff are positive about working for Worcestershire
  - Stability and permeance in recruitment and retention
  - Career opportunities in the structure
  - Strength based model of intervention
  - Reduced case loads overall
- Good Strategic Partnerships have created conditions for improvement in practice and reputation in the Local Judiciary and has enabled the development of an encompassing “Get Safe”<sup>2</sup> strategy to address exploitation

# Challenges to the Impact of Leaders on social work practice

- A Small number, a Minority, a Few v's Usually, Most, the Majority – We know we need to continue our work to achieve full consistency in high quality services for all children
  - Comprehensive analysis in assessments, Effective use of Chronologies and Family friendly and outcome focused plans are not yet in place all the time for all the children
  - Team Managers and Independent Chairs are not always proactive or effective in identifying and improving quality or timeliness in all cases.
  - Robust case management and timely reflective supervision is not yet in place for all social workers all the time.
- Partnership working in Early Help is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure all partners take active leadership roles in the provision of early help interventions
- Joint Commissioning with health of mental health services has not yet resulted in a clear pathway or priority of intervention for children in care or care leavers
- Accommodation for Care Leavers and those at risk of homelessness is not yet meeting demand and need and there is still reliance on Bed and Breakfast in the absence of anything more suitable being available.
- Support services to prevent care and sufficiency of placement for young people with the most complex needs who do need to enter care are not yet meeting demand and needs

# Our commitment to continuous improvement

The engagement with partners to deliver early help to families and to ensure that this help is timely.

The quality of intervention with families where there is a risk that children may be received into care if the right support and guidance is not available AND The timely availability of family support when children have a plan to leave care and return home.

Assessments of need for 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, including whether they should come into the care of the local authority. Young people should be told clearly about this option.

Learning from the breakdown of placements for children by the holding of timely disruption meetings.

Evidencing Early Help taking place by partners. Strategic conversation with partners about level of need, roles and responsibilities – how do we structure and deliver support to ensure the right families receive early help when they need it.

Implementation of our multi agency Supporting Families First (Edge of Care) that will enable us to support even more children and young people to stay or return safely to their family

Improvement of the quality of social work practice assessment and planning along with a review of the effectiveness of joint working with partners supporting this group of young people especially at times of crisis

Build on our “consolidation meetings” preventing breakdown and enhance our service learning through reviews post breakdown “disruption meeting”

# Our commitment to continuous improvement

The availability of a dedicated pathway to the provision of mental health services for children in care.

Engage with partners in health to improve the way in which we assess needs of our most vulnerable children and young people and prioritise them to ensure we provide timely direct work to promote their emotional health and wellbeing

The provision of personal assistants for care leavers when they reach the age of 17.

In our Through Care services review how we can provide support and guidance to promote a young persons independence and transition to adulthood at the earliest opportunity.

The availability of suitable accommodation and timely interventions that ensure that care leavers, including those aged over 18 years, are not placed in bed and breakfast accommodation or become homeless.

Work with our Districts, Housing Providers and Partners to increase the availability of suitable accommodation for young people leaving care.

# Worcestershire Children First Business and Development plan

- Plan on a page to be presented