

**COUNCIL**  
**12 NOVEMBER 2020****REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY**

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

1. Since I last reported to Council in September 2018 there have been advances on two strategies, improving services for children and families and complying with the government's direction to create an Alternative Delivery Model (ADM)
2. Improvements in service were recognised by Ofsted in the months prior to the set-up of Worcestershire Children First (WCF). This unique success was thanks to the dedication of the Director of Children's Services, the Safeguarding Director, social and throughcare staff and those who support them.
3. In January 2020 the direction from the Department for Education was amended and is now limited to the County working with WCF, taking assistance as may be required and providing quarterly reports.

**Ofsted**

4. In June 2019 Ofsted undertook an inspection of Children's Services. The report stated the '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'. To improve practice further topics for focused work was identified, which has informed the subsequent agenda.

**Worcestershire Children First**

5. WCF, a company wholly owned by the Council, was launched on 1 October 2019 to the timescale agreed with the Department for Education. On the same date WCF Fostering registered with Ofsted as an independent fostering agency.
6. Over 800 staff transferred to the company and there was a smooth and successful transition of service responsibility. WCF's present business plan was reviewed during August 2020 to assess the effect of the pandemic on delivery of service priorities. Whilst Covid - 19 has impacted on the speed of progress in some areas, it has been possible to continue with development and innovation.

**Covid – 19**

7. To protect and support vulnerable children social care services remained operational throughout the pandemic. The model of operation changed as set out in the

April 2020 Emergency Covid - 19 Service Delivery Protocol for Social Care and Safeguarding Services, focusing on a risk-based approach to face-to-face assessments and contacts.

8. Performance measures for 2019/20 remained very positive, although Covid - 19 impacted on some areas. The DfE selected some key issues of performance to monitor during the pandemic. When compared regionally and nationally Worcestershire has consistently performed very well throughout this monitoring period.

9. Operationally there has been a continuing increase in demand for contact and social work assessments at the Family Front Door, and conversion rates (from contact to social work assessment) have reduced. This arises, respectively, from the threshold not being met by partners, and a reduction in the percentage in the need for Children Social Care intervention (social worker assessments being undertaken).

10. The causes include social worker and partner agencies fearing missing ‘hidden harm’, as well as a professional anxiety about managing risk and the effectiveness of early help provision. Whilst these are legitimate concerns, it is important to understand it leads to children’s safeguarding services not being properly focused. Instead there is a struggle with demand, which can affect quality, potentially becomes oppressive to families and leads to a failure to provide early help in a timely way. Strategic managers in WCF are working with senior partners in Police, Health and Education to address the concern and a review of Early Help is underway.

11. Looked after children numbers continue to rise, although prevention of care work completed by Strengthening Families First (see below) remains positive. New accommodations this year and in 2019/20 have been lower than the previous year. Worcestershire remains within the top two Local Authorities in the region for the lowest number of newly accommodated children. However, the number exiting care has still not reached normal levels due to the impact of Covid-19 on care planning for children returning to community and in-care proceedings work. This impacts on the overall numbers of children in our care. Cases open to care proceedings have all now been identified with court dates, so we will see care and permanency planning for these children progress over the next few months.

12. Child protection numbers are now above statistical neighbours and England averages. This reflects our Covid - 19 protocol where children were not removed from child protection plans April – June 20, due to the more limited ability to complete direct work and incorporate partnership contributions to the social work assessment. Maintaining child protection plans in place for these children during Covid - 19 (and specifically during the early national lockdown and school closures) is ‘safe practice’.

### **Early Help**

13. Early Help is the provision that lies between universal and safeguarding services. It is delivered by a wide range of agencies including universal services, the voluntary and community sector and specialist services.

14. The current Early Help Services provided by WCF are the Early Intervention Family Support Service – level 2, and Targeted Family Support Service - level 3. These services have financial contributions from Public Health, DSG and Troubled Families PBR Grant. A review of this Early Help provision, its approach and model were launched October 2020.

## **Troubled Families**

15. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring delivery of the programme, through strong partnership working and provision of quality services that bring about sustained change to improve the lives of families.

16. 2019/20 was the final year of Phase 2 of the five-year Payment by Results programme, though this has been extended by a year. The target was to make claims for 3,180 families.

17. At June 2018 Worcestershire had completed 9% of the programme and faced losing significant income. A recovery plan was implemented and in September 2019 it was agreed that the authority was no longer 'in recovery' having 'turned the programme around'.

18. By the final quarter of last year evidence was provided of significant and sustained change for families, mainly through the delivery of support and intervention via early help. £2.049m, 81% of the total programme income, was achieved. A further £426,400 is available in the extension year.

## **Supporting Families First**

19. The Supporting Families team went live on the 20 January 2020, offering multi-disciplinary support for children and their families. Where required the team will also support parents independently. The team works with young people aged 10 to 18 years of age. Supporting Families First predominantly works with families on a Child in Need basis or where young people are subject to a Child Protection Plan.

20. The key element of the Supporting Family team's work is based around understanding the context of behaviours by linking this to the thoughts and feelings of each person within the family home.

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

21. Ofsted found that 'Since October 2016 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'.

22. Representation at Corporate Parenting Board meeting by Districts has now improved. However, membership and engagement of Children in Care and Care Leavers at the Corporate Parenting Board is under review to ensure we engage with as wide a group as possible to hear the voice and lived experience of these children and young people.

23. The Board has considered and continues to focus on apprenticeships, accommodation for care leavers and access to mental health provision.

## **Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership**

24. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) introduced a requirement for new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to replace Local Safeguarding Children Boards

(WSCB). The responsibility for ensuring implementation of the new arrangements rested with the County Council, Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

25. These were implemented in September 2019. The Partnership meets twice a year. Its Executive Group is mandated to monitor the activity of sub-groups, review any escalated priorities and receive and approve Serious Care Reviews/Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

### **Serious Case Reviews**

26. Worcestershire Child Safeguarding Practice (WSCP) currently has two child safeguarding practice reviews in progress. Both reviews are being overseen by the Worcestershire Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group on behalf of the WSCP and are likely to be published report in 2021

### **Short Breaks Respite for Children with Disabilities**

27. During this year the delivery of community short breaks has been impacted on by the Covid-19 pandemic (as have children's homes). In March 2020 services were initially closed as work was done with providers to review how their services could be delivered safely whilst protecting children and staff from contracting and spreading the virus.

28. From March to August 2020 a crisis home support service was developed for those families that needed an immediate level of support or a holiday support offer (to cover the usual school holiday period). Financial support to the providers has continued to minimise any reduction in services in the medium and longer term.

29. In July 2020 Ofsted approved the increase of our overnight short breaks offer at Providence Road, Bromsgrove from four to six beds. Full new demand for this has not yet been seen. This is a direct result of Covid-19 and parental management of risk to these vulnerable children. However, a number have replaced services to children following the closure of Ludlow Road by Worcestershire Health and Care Trust.

### **Adoption Central England**

30. 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 launched on the 1 February 2018. Worcestershire staff members transferred via TUPE and this was finalised in March 2020, with staff now under the formal employment of ACE.

31. ACE is hosted by Warwickshire County Council and not within the scope of WCF. The local authority retains 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.

32. Local authorities do not have to register their adoption services separately and they are inspected by Ofsted. The requirement of WCC to register ACE as an independent adoption agency following the creation of WCF has been challenged by Ofsted. Legal advice has been sought again. This has been a 'debated point' for all ADM's and whilst not yet resolved we are preparing to register ACE as an independent Adoption Agency.

## **Strategic Commitment**

33. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 outlines that 'Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children'. To do this effectively 'Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs.'

34. The 2019 Ofsted reported found, '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 Safe2' strategy to address exploitation.'

35. Looking forward, a critical factor for future improvement will be the consolidation and greater efficiency of the relationship with partners. The children and Young People Strategic Board is a key vehicle for this work.

## **Andy Roberts**

**Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families**

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

### **Introduction**

36. It gives me great pleasure to present my report to Council. The last time I reported to Council as cabinet member was September 2018.

37. An awful lot has happened since then. As you would expect, Education is an ever-changing landscape and much has happened since my last report not least of all schools closing save for children of key workers and vulnerable children and the cancellation of GCSE and A-Level exams this year. As I write the finishing touches of this report, we are about to go into another national lockdown, but this time schools, colleges and early years settings will remain open.

### **Early Years**

38. Worcestershire currently has 529 settings offering Nursery Education Funded provision. This number has remained stable from the Summer Term, with only 6 group settings closing since April 2020. A recent Worcestershire survey on business sustainability within funded Early Years provision identified that only 23% of respondents are confident that their business would survive another lockdown. However, 45% of respondents have seen no change to levels of demand across their setting as a result of Covid-19 and of those who are seeing a change, almost half have seen an increased demand in at least one age group. The Early Years BusiTeam is providing ongoing bespoke support to any providers that report financial concerns, in addition to the ongoing support, advice and guidance.

39. The sufficiency of two, three and four-year-old funded provision remains positive across Worcestershire as a whole Six wards within the County (Church Hill, Droitwich South West, Evesham South, Foley Park and Hoobrook, Kempsey and Warndon) have been identified as being at greatest risk of having local insufficiency and funding has been made available to support their ongoing sustainability to safeguard the number of places available. National data and local intelligence suggest that sustainability issues will become more apparent over the next 6-12 months as financial support decreases; this is likely to result in the closure of more Early Years providers. Analysis of updated sufficiency data is being completed on a termly basis, rather than annually, to ensure that market changes are monitored effectively.

40. Due to the increase in parents working from home, we have identified a significant risk to the sustainability of out of school provision. A recent Worcestershire support forum for out of school provision supports this concern, as do the results of the Business Sustainability survey. As a result, a second forum has been arranged for the out of school providers, with a focus on business sustainability. The Early Years Sufficiency Assessment is also being expanded to include assessment of childcare in its wider context.

41. Take-up of 2-year-old funding has decreased over the Summer and Autumn terms. Based on estimated numbers of eligible families, approximately 65% of children are now accessing their free entitlement, compared to 73% at the beginning of the year. As the majority of funded two-year-old families are not in work, using childcare is not considered essential and this is therefore not unexpected. Take-up of 3 & 4-year-old

funding is also slightly lower than average, with approximately 93% of all 3-year olds accessing provision during the Autumn Term to date. Whilst this is lower than Worcestershire’s typical take-up, it is on a par with national figures for 2019 and 2020, without any adjustment for the impact of Covid-19. Promoting the take-up of funded places is recognised as a priority and is taking place via a multi-agency response.

42. Early Years settings have requested inclusion funding support for 853 children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) in the Autumn Term 2020. There has been a 35% decrease in Early Years settings applying for inclusion funding to support children with additional needs, in comparison to the Autumn Term 2019. Reduction in demand from parents for NEF places will account for some of the reduction in SEND claims.

### Schools Context

43. The education provision planning landscape in 2020 is a complex one. The Council retains direct responsibility and decision making for a majority of its schools however, the majority of our pupils are educated in academies.

44. Worcestershire has a total of 243 State-funded schools, of which 199 are Academy or Free schools and 124 are maintained<sup>1</sup>. These are made up of 1 nursery, 177 Primary/First schools of which 75 are academies, 19 Middle schools of which 10 are academies, 30 Secondary and High schools of which 26 are Academies and 9 Special Schools of which 4 are academies, and 6 Alternative Provision / Pupil Referral Units of which 3 are academies.

45. These schools operate across 16 Education Planning Areas based around the main population centres of the County. 4 separate tier structures are in operation across the County, with 11 of the 16 areas operating on a 2-tier structure where children transfer from primary to secondary, and 5 operate a 3-tier structure with first, middle and high schools. 2-tier routes also exist within 4 of these education planning areas.

46. The current pattern of Ofsted judgements shows that:

	Maintained schools (124)			Academies (119)			All schools (243)	
Outstanding	24	19%	87%	17	14%	80%	17%	84%
Good	84	68%		78	66%		67%	
RI	10	8%		10	8%		8%	
Ofsted category	6	5%		13*	11%		8%	
No Ofsted judgement				1				

<sup>1</sup> As at October 2020

\* However, it must be noted that this figure also includes those schools that have been subject to an academy order as a result of their inspection, and so have three years from conversion before their next inspection.

## **School Places**

47. During the last academic year approximately 14,500 applications were made for school places across Worcestershire. This year over 98 % of applications were made electronically, making the process more convenient for parents/guardians and much more efficient to run.

48. For high schools just over 6000 applications were received with over 89% being offered places at their first-choice school. A further 6 % received offers for their second-choice school. For middle schools, of the 2242 applications received over 95% received offers for one of their top 2 choices. For Primary schools over almost 6200 applications were received with over 91% being offered places at their first-choice school. Over 95% of children received offers for one of their first 2 choices.

49. In terms of Worcestershire's performance national comparative data is available for Year 7 1<sup>st</sup> preferences, which for Worcestershire are 88.5% against the England average of 82.2 % and the West Midlands average of 82.1%, showing that we meet more 1st preferences than are met both nationally and regionally.

50. By contrast, when this service began in 2007, 4% of applications received were made online.

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

52. On 1 June 2020, we began the co-ordination of in-year applications, that is those children moving schools outside of the normal starting point for a school. To date we have processed over 1500 in-year applications for children moving schools.

## **Ofsted inspections**

53. Of the 52 school inspections between March 2019 and March 2020, 47 received positive feedback in relation to SEND (any theme).

54. Due to Covid no Ofsted inspections have occurred in Worcestershire since 11 March 2020 and are not due to recommence until January 2021. Ofsted visits will occur during the Autumn term. The aim of these visits is to talk about any barriers that the school is facing in managing the return to opening fully, how pupils are getting back into expected routines and their behaviour, and the school's safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors will also talk to school leaders about how remote learning fits into their wider curriculum plans. As these visits are not inspections, they will not result in a grade but a short letter published on the Ofsted reports website. The visits will include schools of different types and of all Ofsted grades. To date 5 visits have occurred:

Chadsgrove Educational Trust Learning Centre (academy), Cherry Orchard Primary (maintained), Foley Park Primary and Nursery (academy), Offmore Primary (maintained) and Westacre Middle School (maintained).



## Attainment

55. In 2020, Key Stage <sup>2</sup>(KS)1 and KS2 SATs, phonics and multiplication tests were cancelled and KS4 and KS5 outcomes were based on Teacher Assessment. Performance tables are suspended for the 2019 to 2020 academic year and no school will be judged on data based on exams and assessments from 2020. Until the new data release is available, all those working with schools, including Ofsted and DfE regional teams, should refer to the 2019 data.

56. In 2021 all statutory assessments are currently expected to take place as per 'normal'. There are some changes to content assessment and timing for KS4 and KS5. For more detail see here – [the outcome of Ofqual consultation](#)

## Attendance

57. Year on year, attendance has previously been the same or better for each phase and this is also reflected in National figures (approximately 94-96%). June 2020 figures showed a drop due to the pandemic but by September the figures had improved greatly due to wider school-reopening, supported by WCF, and are close to pre-pandemic levels (approximately 93-96%).

58. Data is currently collected by the Department for Education (DfE) on a daily basis. Of the schools reporting to the DfE they had opened, 99.6% on 19 October reported as being fully open, compared to a national average of 97.9%. Our head teachers across both maintained and academies reported high levels of attendance, and DfE reporting figures show a 90.0% attendance rate in Worcestershire schools compared to a national average of 86.2% (on 19 October 2020).

59. Special schools reported a lower return for children with very complex needs (82% attendance rate on 19 October 2020) but that is to be expected and as a multi-agency approach there will be intensive planning and support to get children into school and ensure provision of education is appropriate.

## Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) & Vulnerable Learners

### High Level Needs Funding

60. Nationally the provision of High Needs funding for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability and vulnerable learners is an area of significant concern. In Worcestershire the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) High Needs block is currently forecast to spend £54.1m in 2020/21. This is an overspend of £2.0m on a £52.1m budget. This is an increase on the 2019/20 outturn of £52.3m, and £44.6m in 2018/19. This figure is the Dedicated High Needs block only and does not include the cost of the SEND service itself, or any Home to School Transport funding.

61. The High Needs overspend in 2019/20 was £8.7m with the accumulated deficit at 31 March 2020 £6.2 million. This deficit must be carried forward and be recovered from savings in future DSG allocations. A sustainable financial position has not yet been achieved for 2020-21 with the deficit budgeted to grow by a further £2.0 million from the forecast high needs overspend by 31 March 2021. Worcestershire Children First have

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum>

continued to press the Department for Education (DfE) to come up with a sustainable plan, with more funding and a definitive explanation on how the financial management of the high needs block will work.

62. The DfE announced a review of SEND last September but this has yet to be published, therefore Worcestershire must develop a plan that manages demand within the available resources.

63. Q1 data for 2020/21 showed that 4,239 currently children have an EHCP in Worcestershire. This means that broadly, each EHCP draws from the High Needs block an average of £12,456 per year (£239pw) to arrive at a total spend of £52.8m (the forecast spend as at Q1). If the DSG High Needs block was forecast to budget, this figure would be £236pw.

64. All indications point to an increase in the prevalence and complexity of SEND nationally. Over the last 5 years the number of learners with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Worcestershire has increased by 62%. Whilst reflective of need, this increase also in part reflects the change in legislation resulting from the Children and Families Act 2014, which means that Local Authorities are now responsible for meeting the needs of their learners with EHCPs to the age of 25.

65. These factors suggest that need with Worcestershire is not going to decrease, and that in order to mitigate pressures on the DSG High Needs block going forward, relative spend per child would have to reduce. A draft High-Level Needs (HLN) management plan has been agreed with activity that will be undertaken in the 20-21 academic year in order to manage HLN funding. The expected impact of these activities will be:

- a) Increased transparency and visibility of the spend from the HLN budget;
- b) Improved outcomes for Children and Young People; and
- c) Change in spend per pupil.

66. In cases where activities result in increased spend per pupil these are planned in order to reduce spend in other areas or to ensure that statutory responsibilities for vulnerable learners are fulfilled.

67. The draft HLN plan will be discussed with WCF Executive Leadership Team and signed off with the School Forum in November. A current focus for planning to address future spend is our Post 16 placements including students leaving Special Schools in Worcestershire.

68. Changes to the CAP were agreed earlier in this financial year, and schools are reporting positive feedback. The intention is that investment in more local provision will reduce further spend on out of area placements.

## **SEND Improvement**

69. The SEND Improvement programme has continued to make positive progress and improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Feedback from our DfE and NHSE Advisors, through monitoring visits and SEND Structured conversations, has

continued to commend the progress being made including the management of the transfer of the SEND Support Services from Babcock Prime to WCF.

70. At the latest monitoring visit (24 Sept 2020), the following feedback was provided by the DfE:

- a) At the time of this meeting, Worcestershire were focused on the return to school of all children. Strengthened relationships with schools, FIP and partners along with proactive communication have assisted in a strong return. Any pupils not attending are tracked and supported. FIP report increasing parental confidence;
- b) Work has begun with Families in Partnership and SENDIASS to understand how engagement and co-production work can be done differently. Wider engagement is being sought through surveys and planned consultations. Co-production is the norm in the SEND Improvement programme, and they are prepared to invest time in getting this right as demonstrated in the thoughtful approach to developing the SEND Strategy;
- c) Those leading the statutory function in Worcestershire have made impressive gains in timeliness and are determined to match this by the actions they are taking to improve the quality of new EHC plans and then Annual Reviews. Transparency, clarity and communication are the themes coming through in ensuring that they take all stakeholders with them on this journey. Gathering the improved felt experience of parents, schools and professionals will provide strong evidence of what has been achieved and gains still to be made;
- d) The local area has developed a comprehensive SEND dashboard which clearly provides evidence of current position and progression. Concerns raised with the increase and delayed waiting times which have occurred within the therapies during Covid-19; however, impact has been assessed and recovery plans are in place; and
- e) The Strategic Improvement Board continues to have oversight of a well organised and coherent improvement programme underpinned by a strong focus on coproduction and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It continues to be advisable through this period that decisions to delay any actions and mitigations put in place are captured as evidence that Worcestershire has set itself ambitions beyond sufficient progress on the areas of concern.

### **Education Health and Care Plans**

71. Significant progress has been made to the rate of completion of Education, Health and Care plans. Since February 2020, the 20-week completion rate has maintained at 100% providing, except for June 2020 (98%) where one EHCP was not completed on time. This improved timeliness includes improved holistic EHC needs assessment, improved timeliness of advice from health and social care.

### **Medical Education Provision Review**

72. The Review of Medical Education Service timeline was agreed by the Cabinet in June 2020. Surveys to gather key stakeholders' views including a parent / carer survey have been shared to understand the current model - what's working well and what's not. Three task and finish groups have taken place between 2nd and 9th October to help digest and review the information received through the review to produce some options and possibilities for Worcestershire. These task and finish groups include a focus on the following areas:

- a) Prevention, early intervention and “reasonable adjustments”
- b) WCF and NHS interventions; and
- c) Overall model of provision in Worcestershire and creating a coherent end to end offer and experience for children, young people and families.

The review will propose recommendations to Cabinet for decisions in January 2021.

### **Alternative Provision and Exclusion Review**

73. The local and national context with regard to exclusions and alternative provision indicate that approaches in Worcestershire require review. To have the greatest impact on outcomes for children and young people and longer-term sustainability this review will need to consider three aspects of local practice:

- a) Prevention: How to reduce exclusions;
- b) Intervention: How to ensure the decision to commission alternative provision for a pupil is appropriate and that the support put in place by the alternative provision is of high quality; and
- c) Reintegration: How to ensure pupils reintegrate back into mainstream education or onto a different pathway for their education where appropriate in a timely manner.

74. An Advisory Group is set up to ensure that the activity described in the review plan meets the three aims of the review described above and to provide multi-agency advice and perspectives as needed in relation to key themes to be explored during the review.

### **Vulnerable Learners**

75. As of 16 October 2020, there are a total of 43 children who are missing education and a further 195 investigations to establish a child’s whereabouts (123 since September). 248 investigations have been completed and closed since September. This is a similar for the same period in 2019 and shows that although the Covid pandemic has caused an increase in children moving schools, parents electing to home educate and attendance issues, this has not affected the numbers of children missing education other than making investigations more difficult.

76. The Children Missing Education (CME) Team are reviewing recording systems and processes and have just completed an “end-to-end” exercise to review and make changes to ensure that there is no duplication of work at any point throughout the process. There are robust systems in place to prioritise SEND children and those open to Children’s Social Care. The new Fair Access Protocol has just been implemented and the continuation of Missing Mondays to ensure that children are missing from education for the shortest amount of time possible.

77. The number of children who are electively home educated continues to rise – particularly due to the impact of Covid-19. The following table shows the number of referrals since September 2020, in comparison to the number for the same period in 2019:

	04/09/2020	11/09/2020	18/09/2020	25/09/2020	02/10/2020	09/10/2020	16/10/2020	23/10/2020
Number of Referrals since the 01 Sept 2020 - Cumulative	15	25	55	72	117	138	149	175
Number of Referrals from 01 Sept 2019 - Cumulative	8	26	38	49	64	72	81	100

78. The team systems continue to improve including additional resource to lessen the capacity issues. Up until September 2020, all new cases were triaged within 10 days and were being assessed for suitability within our 12-week timeframe. As of September 2020, 100% of annual contacts were up to date. Since September, some triage cases have taken a little longer than 10 days, but work is in hand to combat this, and within the next 2 weeks this will be back to all being within timeframes. The EHE team work much more closely with both SEND and Children's social care, with contact within 10 days, and annual reviews are carried out jointly between SEND and the EHE team. Due to triage and assessment of suitability processes being much tighter, we are able to support children to return to school, where appropriate, in a much timelier manner. There are currently a total of 768 registered EHE pupils in Worcestershire.

### Virtual School

79. The Virtual School has continued to support Children Looked After (CLA) through the Covid period including ensuring all CLA residing and receiving their education out of county have undertaken a Personal Education Plan which has been quality assured by the Virtual School. 92.2% overall attendance of all pupils currently in care (statutory school age), from the beginning of the academic year. This is higher than DfE tracking for all pupils. Also, five CLA pupils identified as Children Missing Education (CME) are all receiving tuition whilst waiting to be placed on a school roll. This is a reduced number of CME from last academic year.

80. The Virtual School Improvement Plan (2020-21) sets out clear priorities including:

- Tracking the development of Children Looked After (CLA) aged 2, 3 & 4, who access education; analyse and evaluate outcomes to inform strategy
- Raising the attainment and improving the progress through targeted interventions following identification of gaps and barriers in learning
- Increasing focus on quality and continuity of welfare and education provision in out of county placements through evaluation and analysis of provision and outcomes to meet individual needs
- Reducing the length of time CLA are not on a school roll

- All CLA with no recorded school are accessing remote (not at a school base) learning
- Attendance is better than national average for CLA pupils
- To provide a coherent plan of CPD for school staff to enhance their support of CLA with Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs
- to provide support, advice and challenge to professionals working with CLA children with SEND to ensure the best outcomes
- Improve communication between Virtual School and Social Care teams (incidents, change of placements, change of social worker & reference to education)

## **Governors**

81. Schools and governors have received regular advice and guidance about the expectations for governors. This has included advice about how to hold virtual meetings and undertake headteacher performance management in light of the Covid situation. This information has been shared via Governors newsletters with all those that have an SLA with WCF, through the Education and Early Help news bulletin to all schools and through the School Improvement Advisors for maintained schools.

82. The Interim Executive Board's (IEBs) at Westacre Middle School and North Bromsgrove High School are moving to shadow boards. Grove Primary School has moved to an IEB.

83. Governor services continually seek to recruit new governors and have made links to Worcestershire Association of Governors and Governors for Schools.

## **Learning and Achievement Services**

84. Since the launch of Worcestershire Children First in October 2019, we have continued our development to improve the services delivered to children, young people and families in our county. We published our Business Plan for 2020-21 which set out our ambition and priorities, with a significant area being the transfer of Learning and Achievement services from Babcock Prime to have one joined up educational service for Worcestershire. On the 1 June 2020 we successfully transferred over 130 staff to WCF with an increased full year contract value of £6.5m. The transfer also delivered the savings required as part of the MTFP. The decision to transfer during Covid-19 and having services that provide support to Schools and Early Years Setting in one place has really helped to us respond agilely to the challenges of Covid-19 and the reopening of schools.

## **WCF Board**

85. The governance structure for the Boards of Worcestershire Children First can be seen in the diagram below:



Monthly board meetings have taken place since go live with the first public meeting held on 18 February 2020, I attend as a Non-Executive Director. Both sub boards have met, with the Quality Assurance Board having an overview of the procedures in the Company and a focused look at SEND and social care in detail.

## Education Provision Planning

### Capital funding

86. Capital projects are primarily funded via three main capital sources for education:

- a) Basic Need - To increase pupil places at all tax funded schools where the need for those places is identified by the Council;
- b) Condition Programme – For highest priority condition work at maintained schools based on condition surveys. This is an annual grant which reduces as schools become academies; and
- c) S106/CIL Developer Contributions – To mitigate school place requirements needed as a direct result of new housing development.

87. In addition, the Government has occasionally released capital funding rounds to support specific initiatives. In the past this has included the expansion of early years provision, Universal Infants School Meals, 14-19, Primary Schools Building Programme, and most recently the Special Provision Capital Fund.

88. As the Council seeks to meet the additional places required as a result of demographic and housing growth, the pressure on these grants in the next five-year period will be high. As such the Council is only able to address the highest priorities and funding prioritised to ensure a sufficiency of places.

89. In the period 2020-25 the table below shows the following confirmed capital funding to meet the requirements of the Education Capital Programme:

*Confirmed Capital Funding Forecast 2020-25*

Year	2020-21 £m	2021-22 £m	2022-23 £m	2023-24 £m	2024-25 £m	Total £m
Carry fwd.	14.0	-	-	-	-	14.0
Basic Need	11.0	4.9	-	-	-	

						15.9
Condition	4.1	2.8	-	-	-	6.9
SPF*	0.4	-	-	-	-	0.4
Estimated S106**	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.7	1.7	6.1
Total	30.3	8.7	-	-	-	43.3

\*Special Provision Fund \*\*To fund new schools

## Capital programme

90. The table below shows the current programme of expenditure required to meet the five-year Education Capital Programme for 2020-25:

*Worcestershire planned expenditure 2020-25*

Year	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Basic Need	5.5	5.1	10.2	28.9	4.5	54.2
Condition	4.5	3.5	2.4	2.0	2.0	14.4
SPF*	1.1					1.1
Total	11.1	8.6	12.6	30.9	6.5	69.7

## New schools

91. Three new schools are proposed over the next 6 years as a direct result of new housing on the South Worcester Urban Expansion, West Worcester Urban Expansion and the Foxlydiate Redditch Urban Expansion.

92. An initial non-statutory consultation was undertaken in January 2020 to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on these proposals for which no negative responses were received.

93. At present we are predicting that the new Primary and Nursery for the South Worcester Urban Expansion and the new First and Nursery for the Foxlydiate development will need to be delivered for September 2024, with a new Primary and Nursery for the West Worcester Urban Expansion delivered 2 years after.

94. These schools will predominantly be funded by the developers. However, in the case of larger housing developments, S106 funding will often be provided in instalments throughout the lifetime of the development, meaning that in the case of these new schools, the LA is required to forward fund this provision in order for schools to be delivered early enough in the development. This creates a substantial additional cost.



## **New schools planned for future housing developments**

95. As part of District Council Development Plan reviews, WCF supports the planning of new educational infrastructure required for future housing beyond 2025.

96. The South Worcestershire District Councils are currently reviewing their Development Plans through to 2041. We have identified the need for the following new schools across Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon which will be delivered alongside proposed new housing through to 2041:

- 1 new First School for Droitwich Town
- 4 new primary schools and 1 new secondary school for proposed Parkway Garden Village
- 1 new Primary school and 1 new all-through school for proposed Throckmorton Strategic Growth Area
- 1 new Primary school at Rushwick
- 1 new Secondary School in Worcester South East
- 1 new Primary School at Mitton (Tewksbury Urban Expansion)
- 1 new First School at Pershore.

97. North Worcestershire District Councils of Bromsgrove and Redditch have not undertaken Local Plan Reviews yet, but the following new schools are proposed as part of the Wyre Forest Review.

- 1 new primary school at Kidderminster East Urban Expansion
- 1 new Primary school at Lea Castle (North Kidderminster).

98. WCF will continue to work with district councils and respond to changes to local plans and applications as they come forward to ensure a sufficiency of school places.

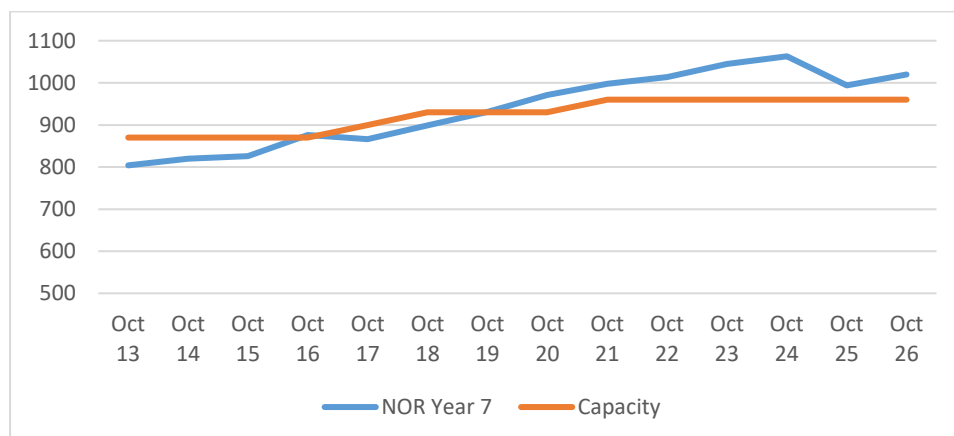
## **South Worcester – new secondary school**

99. Worcester City is expanding quickly, and with it the school-age population. Following increases undertaken to Primary schools to meet the rise in cohort levels entering reception up to 2016, the first wave of requirements for additional secondary provision hit the City in 2017 accompanied by the expansion of 3 secondary schools over the last 4 years, with the further planned expansions of Bishop Perowne in 2021 following the improvement of the school to 'Good' by Ofsted.

100. Despite this, cohorts across Worcester City continue to grow and in Autumn term 2020 there are only just 8 spare places (0.7%) across the 5 Worcester secondary schools, with 1 school taking above Pupil Admission Number (PAN) and 3 at PAN. This provides limited opportunity for in-year movement and meeting our sufficiency duty for any families moving into the City and requiring a place in Year 7.

101. In September 2021 forecasts indicate 10 spare places, even following the expansion at Bishop Perowne. In the period 2022 to 2026 we will have an insufficiency of places, peaking at 37 less places than required across the City. This strain is particularly the case for the 2 Secondary schools in the South East of the City – Nunnery Wood High and Blessed Edward Oldcorne Catholic. The rise in population in this region,

before the South Worcester Urban Expansion is taken into account, shows a significant shortfall in provision that is already affecting pupils in feeder schools.



102. With extensive levels of housing planned within urban expansions, and the proposal to provide an additional 40,000 new homes across South Worcestershire Councils, extensive investment must be made to ensure we can meet our sufficiency duty within Worcester City.

103. Nunnery Wood High is our largest Secondary School in Worcestershire with over 1,400 pupils on roll. Key ancillary and support spaces are now at capacity and the school would require major investment to support additional capacity. Blessed Edward Oldcorne Catholic is on an extremely restricted site.

104. Work undertaken so far to assess the whole Worcestershire school estate has shown that options may exist to utilise space on existing school sites, though further detailed assessment of the options will be explored over the next 12 months.

105. At the same time, the provision of a new Secondary School located within the South East of the City remains a consideration that will be explored further in order for a full options appraisal to meet this need to be considered.

## **Covid 19 Education response**

### **Progress following September full re-opening of school provision**

106. Following Government guidance, all children and young people, in all year groups, returned to school full-time from the beginning of September 2020.

### **Risk Assessments for September full opening**

107. WCF provided all LA maintained schools (including voluntary aided) with a Risk Assessment addendum form including additional questions to highlight risks in relation to; Public Health, Health & Safety, Accommodation, and Staffing).

108. As a part of the continued offer of support for all education settings across the county, specialist teams are now offering to support Academies in their infection prevention and control processes. A checklist, based on our risk assessment addendum

and latest guidance, has been created by specialist teams and will be shared with Academies to support them to conduct a self-assessment. Any queries or concerns raised through this process can then be discussed and addressed through a webinar and series of surgery events that will be available for all schools and include learning from outbreak case examples.

### **The handling of outbreaks in schools and other settings**

109. Worcestershire County Council Public Health team has responded swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic. Publishing a robust Outbreak Control Plan (OCP) which has a Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) at its centre, responding to local outbreaks in settings and communities and working with partners such as Public Health England, Herefordshire & Worcestershire CCG and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to reduce the risk of further transmission of COVID19 as well as the national Test & Trace service. The LORT is now fully operational 7 days a week from 9am to 6pm.

110. The LORT recognised an increase in volume of enquiries from the first week of September as schools returned which impacted on resource capacity. Additional resource was mobilised immediately to assist the LORT and enable the Public Health professionals to focus on infection prevention and control. Through this period, key improvements have been made to the process for schools contacting the LORT, including the refining of the school notification form to create a more streamlined experience for schools.

111. A key role of the LORT is to support schools in the event of a positive case. Upon notification of symptomatic or confirmed positive CYP or staff, the LORT undertake a risk assessment, support testing, provide infection prevention control and self-isolation advice, contact tracing and public health action to prevent any further transmission within the setting or wider community. In schools, this has involved support and advice when school bubbles have to be collapsed to prevent further transmission. To further support education settings, the LORT notify the Education COVID Response Team when a bubble is collapsed so that a Liaison Person can be identified to contact the school and offer further support, advice and guidance. This process has been well received by schools. The process has been refined following each bubble closure and support is now offered to the school to identify issues and offer suggested solutions around themes such as free school meals, vulnerable learners, media enquiries, communication for parents and support for staff.

112. The standard operating procedures for schools are well used and have been refined following feedback through Education Incident planning meetings, with representatives from across school phases and types. On 18th September, a specific scenario planning session was held to review, and stress test a range of potential situations and work through the stages of response and reaction. The scenarios were used to further test the protective measures and controls that schools have put in place, the OCP standard operating procedures and the resilience of both local settings and the wider system. This session was very well received. Breakout sessions were used to work through the scenarios and key learning from the first few weeks of the autumn term was consolidated and built upon.

113. WCC has committed to supporting schools and setting to stay open and provide education in a safe and appropriate way. Additional resource has been earmarked to support the Liaison Person role to assist schools with practical measures when

outbreaks occur and to coordinate the learning and feed this back to schools along with being the education link to the District Incident Management Team meetings that have been established to develop a district specific system wide approach to the management of COVID-19 across each district council region within Worcestershire.

### **Catch Up funding**

114. All schools have been given funding for specific activities to support their pupils to catch up for lost teaching, in line with the guidance on [curriculum expectations for the next academic year](#). Schools have the flexibility to spend their funding in the best way for their cohort and circumstances.

115. Primary, middle, secondary and all through local authority-maintained schools, academies and free schools receive £80 for each pupil aged 4 and over recorded in Reception to Year Group 11 in the October 2019 school census.

116. Local authority maintained special schools, pupil referral units and hospital schools receive £240 for each high needs place recorded on their local authority's [section 251 budget return statement for 2019 to 2020](#)

117. Special, AP and hospital academies and free schools, and non-maintained special schools receive £240 per place from published high needs place numbers for the 2020 to 2021 academic year.

118. SEND pupils placed in independent special settings also receive £240 for each pupil with an Education Health and Care Plan, or SEN support, educated in an independent special setting, as recorded on their January 2020 alternative provision census.

119. The first payment in the Autumn term is based on 25% of these provisional allocations and there will be two further payments in 2021. These will be based on final allocations using pupil numbers from the October 2020 census for mainstream schools. The final allocations could be significantly different to the provisional allocations.

### **Remote Learning**

120. On 1 October the Education Secretary announced further support to help children learn from home if they have to self-isolate. A new temporary Continuity Direction (under the Coronavirus Act 2020) means school have a duty to provide education at home, as they do when children are in the classroom.

121. Part of the Worcestershire Liaison process with schools who have partial or full bubble closures is to ensure that the school(s) enact their Remote Learning plans. The School Improvement Team have written Contingency Planning advice and guidance, and this has been shared with all schools through the Education and Early Help news bulletin. As part of a Covid response package of CPD this team are rolling out CPD to schools on Effective Remote Learning and the first session webinar has been delivered to 29 schools with more sessions planned.

## Education Transport

122. Following significant planning throughout the summer, the transport team have ensured that the provision of dedicated home to school transport is safe, available and compliant with the most up to date guidance issued by both the Department for Education and the Department for Transport. Measures introduced include addition of extra buses, creation of “closed” services which would have been open to the public and coordinated seating plans.

123. Dedicated Schools Transport for Mainstream and SEND pupils has been operating relatively smoothly from the start of the new term. Reports from operators indicate that most pupils have adapted to the seating plans. From Tuesday 6th October young people in year 7 and above are required to wear face coverings on home to school transport unless exemptions apply to them. This measure has been changed to respond to the growth in positive cases and an achievable control measure that promotes a continuity of approach.

124. Monitoring of train use and management of peak services and stations focused on Hagley and Worcester and during the first week of term we received reports from WMT detailing their management of any issues. Reporting continued throughout early September as colleges returned and additional carriages were on hand to be deployed where needed.

## Free School Meals and Holiday Hunger

125. I am delighted to say we worked with our 6 districts across the county to make sure that every vulnerable child in Worcestershire had access to a meal every day during the October half term holidays. We continue to support the Ready, Steady, Worcestershire initiative which combines the efforts of a range of agencies and food banks that provide a community response to holiday hunger. All district councils are providing welfare support services. Anyone still in need of our help was encouraged to get in touch with Here2Help Worcestershire.

## Covid-19 Funding

126. The Council has received money from central government to support the response to Covid-19. One area of pressure was the Early Years sector and we set up regular meeting to address issues and confirmed to early year providers they will receive their full early years funding whether they are closed, partially open, or open as normal, until further notice as per the DfE guidance, through DSG and we set up system for early years providers to consider additional reimbursements for providers who apply to the council for further financial assistance during lockdown or now if a bubble collapses to ensure sufficiency.

## Schools Funding and National Funding Formula (NFF)

127. The funding per pupil for schools have increased to £5,000 in secondary and £3,750 in primary and then £4,000 for primary in 2020/21. The increase is a real testament to the determination of headteachers, governors, schools, parents and the local authority that have continually raised awareness of the need for further funding within education. One of the council’s key priorities for a number of years now, has been to improve the quality of education, help and support for all children and young people

across the county, including those with special educational needs. The funding formula for Worcestershire is closely aligned with the national funding formula.

128. The DfE are not changing Local Authorities role in the distribution of school funding in 2021/22, therefore our local formula will continue and as it is based upon the DfE's National Funding Formula. During 2020/21 we have made some changes to the funding formula for special schools, so that the funding cap that had been applied to some schools to ensure the Minimum Funding Guarantee, is disapplied in the local special schools funding formula from April 2020 to ensure consistency with mainstream schools.

129. The Council in conjunction with all its key partners, particularly the F40 Group representing the lowest funded LAs and the Society of County Treasurer's, continues to lobby central Government for a fairer allocation of the total national allocation of funding as part of the continuing NFF process. Significant financial pressures within Education continues to be a nationwide issue that the majority of local authorities including Worcestershire are experiencing.

### **CMR visits**

130. Over the last two months or so, I have been keen to get out and visit schools across the County, in particular more latterly to meet Head Teachers and discuss how they have implemented a safe school environment and continuing to keep their school open. I have visited Chaddesley Corbett, Blakedown and Heronswood Primary Schools in my own division. In addition, I have visited Wolverley Primary, Cookley Primary, Bewdley Primary, lyford Flavell First, Sedgeberrow First, Fladbury First, Matchborough First, Malvern Wells Primary, Malvern Wyche Primary, North Bromsgrove High, Aston Fields Middle, Catshill First and Middle, Kempsey Primary, Upton Primary and St Peters Primary Schools. I have also visited the all Medical Education provision sites in the County.

131. Finally, I am very grateful for all of the excellent work our school community are doing at this time. Could I also place on record my thanks to all of the staff at Worcestershire Children First (WCF) related to education and in particular, the Chief Executive, Catherine Driscoll and the Director for Education and Early Help, Sarah Wilkins for all of their support.

### **Marcus Hart**

**Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills**