

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

23 FEBRUARY 2022

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST INDEPENDENT FOSTERING SERVICE OFSTED INSPECTION

Summary

1. The Panel is to be provided with a report on the Worcestershire Children First (WCF) first independent Fostering Inspection Report which was carried out between 20-24 September 2021 (attached at Appendix 1).
2. Overall, the Inspection judgement given was “Requires Improvement to be Good”. The inspection of fostering services is reviewed in three key areas, and each is graded independently with an overall judgment reached.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:	requires improvement to be good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate

3. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Chief Executive/Director of Children’s Services have been invited to attend the meeting.

Background

4. WCF Independent Fostering Agency (WCFF) is an independent Fostering Agency and was registered on 1 October 2019. The Fostering services were previously part of Worcestershire County Council, however when WCF was formed, the fostering services were required to form as an independent Fostering Agency and as such are subject to separate Ofsted inspection.
5. During Ofsted Inspections, WCFF as an Independent Fostering Agency must meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011, and the Fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011. Ofsted use recommendations to indicate where practice can improve, and these are always related to the relevant NMS and regulation/s mentioned. The recent Inspection identified 9 Requirements, and 4 Recommendations that need to be addressed for WCFF to improve.

6. WCFF offers emergency, short and long-term foster care placement to children in care. The carers include mainstream carers and connected persons otherwise known as kinship.

7. The agency provides placements to children in the care of Worcestershire County Council (the Council)/WCF only.

8. To address the requirements and recommendations raised in Ofsted's inspection report, a Fostering Service Improvement Plan has been developed. The Level 1 "plan on a page" (is attached at Appendix 2) and has a more detailed document – the Level 2 Plan sitting below it (at Appendix 3) which outlines milestone activity and measures.

8. There will be a presentation on the SIP at the meeting, (attached at Appendix 4).

9. The SIP is overseen by the Assistant Director - Permanency – Care Proceedings, Fostering & Adoption (Responsible Individual) and Interim Group Manager (Registered Manager).

10. There are 7 workstreams in the action plan:

- Safer Caring Plans and Risk Assessments
- Notifiable Events
- Quality Assurance & Performance
- Safer Recruitment/Foster Carer-Workforce Development
- Voice of the Child and Views and experience of parents
- Foster Care Recruitment, Assessment & Support, and Voice of Foster Carers
- Approval and Matching of Foster Carers

11. A Fostering Team Manager has been identified as a Lead for each Workstream and all workstreams have a membership to include children, young people, carers and staff.

12. Progress and activity are being tracked during the monthly WCFF Fostering Service Managers meeting, where any issues/risks will be escalated as required and managed to ensure outcomes and deadlines are met.

13. Progress reports on each of these workstreams are made to WCF Executive under the monthly executive business planning programme and to WCF Board meetings on a quarterly basis.

14. The action plan was completed on 30 November 2021 and was presented by the Fostering Team to all services on 8 December 2021 and to Corporate Parenting Board on 1 February 2022.

15. The Fostering plan is not submitted or agreed by Ofsted. The next Ofsted inspection will review recommendations from its last inspection as a primary focus but not exclusive focus.

16. A summary of progress since the Inspection can be seen in the table below. All other actions within the Fostering Improvement Plan are in progress.

Workstream	Completed
WS1: Safer Caring Plans & Risk Assessments	Safer Caring Plans and Risk Assessments data added to the WCFF Performance Dashboard.
WS2: Notifiable Events	Audit completed of active allegations against carers/Schedule 7 events. WCFF current schedule 6/7 notifiable events policy and forms reviewed and updated.
WS3: Fostering Information & Performance Dashboard	Statement of Purpose updated and published. Foster Care Register developed and embedded Complaints and Compliments Policy updated and published. Complaints and Compliments Tracker developed and embedded.
WS4: Safer Recruitment, Foster Carers & Workforce Development	Safer Recruitment: Audit of all existing WCFF staff HR files to identify gaps/missing information completed. WCFF Safer Recruitment Policy and guidance agreed for implementation.
WS5: Voice of the Child	Quarterly meetings arranged with Who Cares We Care Forum to positively engage with Children and Young People. Practice Standard implemented for Fostering SW to complete regular Direct Work sessions with Children in foster care placements.
WS6: Foster Carer Recruitment, Assessment & Support	Reviewed all marketing and promotional materials hard copies and online. Reviewed current assessment process focusing on the journey of the Foster Carer. WCFF Recruitment Strategy launched. Launched Carer Ambassador Scheme to support Foster Carer's, incorporating the Voice of the Carer.
WS7: Approval & Matching Foster Carers	WCFF Carer Agreement updated and launched. Review the ADM Process completed. ADMs invited to upcoming Fostering Panel as opportunity to observe and learn.

Purpose of the Meeting

17. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Note the outcome of the WCFF Fostering Service full Ofsted Inspection completed between 20-24 September 2021, and the Worcestershire Children First Fostering Improvement Plan development and progress;

- Consider whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families; and
- Whether any further information or Scrutiny is required.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – Worcestershire Children First Fostering Ofsted Inspection Report 20 to 24 September 2021 ([Link to Ofsted Full Report](#))
- Appendix 2 - WCFF Independent Fostering Agency Improvement Level One Plan 2021- 22
- Appendix 3 - WCFF Independent Fostering Agency Improvement Level Two Plan 2021 - 22
- Appendix 4 – WCFF Presentation on Service Improvement Plan 2021-22

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

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