

## **COUNCIL**

**8 SEPTEMBER 2022**

## **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 the Council in November 2020, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) continues to make positive improvements in service delivery. An Ofsted focused visit to the Family Front Door in July 2021 noted *“the local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practice for children and families in receipt of services at its ‘Family Front Door’ since the inspection in June 2019.”*
2. This was followed by the removal of statutory direction by the Department for Education (DfE) in November 2021 and the early removal of the “Support and Supervision” phase in June 2022. Both a result of significant improvement since Ofsted’s 2016 inspection, evidenced throughout the monitoring and focused visits by Ofsted and the quarterly monitoring reports overseen by the County Council (WCC) and the DfE.
3. This is not to say there is not great challenge and much work to do in Children’s Social Care. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care was published in June 2022 and its findings and recommendations strongly endorse the approach of WCF. The approach taken since 2016 has been well embedded in our improvement journey to date. Cabinet approved the 2022/23 Business plan in March 2022, a report that sets out how Worcestershire County Council (WCC) will support WCF to “Sustain, Innovate and Improve” our Children’s Services in Worcestershire.

#### **Ofsted**

4. Ofsted’s approach to Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services follows a programme of inspection that includes a Full Inspection (once every three years) and between those three years the Local Authority will also have two Focused Visits (a day inspection on a specific area of the service).
5. Ofsted’s last Full Inspection was undertaken in June 2019, the Local Authority was graded ‘Requires Improvement to be good’ with seven recommendations. These were incorporated into the Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Business Plans to focus our improvement. This was a notable achievement as we were the first service under a statutory direction to achieved this improvement grading before moving into company, reinforcing the services drive and commitment to make improvements at pace.

6. Due to Covid-19, Ofsted did not undertake Inspections following the same system in 2020. Many inspections did not take place and were replaced with Assurance Visits which focused on areas of most concern. Worcestershire did not receive an Assurance Visit. In 2021, Ofsted resumed some of their Inspection activity, and in July 2021, Worcestershire had a Focused Visit with specific focus on our Family Front Door, including decision-making on new referrals, quality of Social Work Assessments and the quality of Early Help decision-making and assessment.

7. Ofsted reported; *“the local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practice for children and families in receipt of services at its ‘Family Front Door’ since the inspection in June 2019. Leaders have established a positive culture of commitment to continuous improvement across this service area, supported by particularly strong quality assurance arrangements. The early help partnership is now well engaged in the delivery of services, and most schools in Worcestershire have an early help offer, bespoke to the needs of their community.”*

8. As of 2022, Ofsted have now resumed their inspection programme as normal practice; Worcestershire are due a Full Inspection this year, this can take place anytime during the 12-month period so is expected between July 2022 and July 2023.

### **Worcestershire Children First**

9. On 1 October 2019, following a two-year programme of activity, WCF officially took over the operational responsibility for the delivery of Children’s Services on behalf of Worcestershire County Council. The company has been running successfully for nearly three years and has performed well against its contracted Statutory Key Performance Indicators and its agreed contract value is currently £134.2m

10. WCF’s 2022/23 business plan was approved by Cabinet in March 2022 and highlights the aims, objectives, financial and operational context, the continuation of development, innovation and sustained improvement in conjunction with the priorities within the County Council’s Corporate Plan.

11. The strong strategic partnership working of WCF and WCC was positively highlighted in the External Auditor Annual Audit report to Audit and Governance Committee in March 2022, stating ‘a real commitment to work together to get the best outcomes for young people and their families.’ The report also acknowledged a clear understanding of different roles within the Council and company, that governance is appropriate, and arrangement is in place to analyse business and performance information on a regular basis, therefore this gives me assurance that we have got this right in Worcestershire.

12. An equally strong and essential partnership of professionals working in the field of Children’s Services was noted in the recent LGA research on “Structural changes in Children’s Services: Form and Function” in the Ofsted focused visit July 2021 and in the Newton research on care prevention “The future of Children’s Social Care”.

### **The impact of the global pandemic: Covid – 19**

13. During the past two years Children’s Safeguarding Services across the country have experienced an unprecedented rise in demand. WCF have seen a rise of over 1,000 contacts per quarter to the Family Front Door (FFD).

14. The service also reports a rise in the complexities of need and risk being experienced by adult parents. The trio of harm, “Substance Misuse, Mental Health and Domestic Abuse” existed in 10% of assessed cases in 2019/20, (pre Covid), rose to 12% in 2021/22 and has risen to 14% in Quarter 1 of 2022/23. For children and young people emotional health is the highest risk factor of need assessed in Quarter 1 of 2022/23, a rise to 20% from 17% the previous year. In short, the needs and risk in families are increasingly multi-faceted.

15. As the impact and aftermath of the pandemic comes to the fore, we see an almost 50% rise in families claiming free school meals and the national coverage of the heart-breaking cases of child abuse reported in the media. Children’s Services have been through its biggest review in years under the Care Review led by Josh McAlister, Chair of the independent review and there is a well reported crisis in sufficiency and costs of placements for children in care.

16. This was captured by Charlotte Ramsden, the previous Chair of ADCS (Association of Directors of Children’s Services) in her November 2021 conference address:

*“The independent review of children’s social care published its case for change. It reiterates a series of very important issues that ADCS has been raising with government over the last few years - the value of early help, the impact of poverty on children’s lives and outcomes, the marketisation of services for vulnerable children, the slow pace of change in youth custody responses, funding and the lack of coordination for child and family policy across government.*

*As well as highlighting concerns, which the report does in spades, we must also recognise the incredible work undertaken by our social workers, and the wider workforce, on a daily basis. Social workers operate in a grey space bound by a strict legislative framework and under intense scrutiny from many different angles. Yes, the workforce must be empowered to make the best decisions for children and families, but appropriate and measured checks and balances are also needed to support this life changing work, which can be absolutely transformative for children and families. For too long external influences have driven risk averse cultures and we need to challenge this.*

*We have one of the safest child protection systems in the world and it is vitally important to work to keep families together where that is right for children and keep children and young people close to their supportive networks. However, whilst by no means perfect, care can be and is the right place for some children and we must work to make it the best place possible for those who need it.*

## **Early Help**

17 WCC made the decision to include Early Help, often referred to as Family Support, in its Children’s Services company, understanding the inter-relations between the levels of need i.e. level 1; universal services to all children and families, level 2; support to all families, level 3; targeted support to families where more complex issues exist and level 4; where a child is deemed to be in need of social care support, care or protection services. Social care services need to be able to “step down” support for families when

they have made good progress against social work plans and “Early Help” needs to be effective to prevent risk and needs increasing.

18 Early Help is the provision that lies between universal (level 1) and safeguarding services (levels 3/4). It is delivered by a wide range of agencies including universal services, the voluntary and community sector and specialist services. A review of this Early Help provision, its approach and model was launched October 2020.

19 The outcome of the review highlighted that the current arrangements for the delivery of Early Help were not consistent in meeting the changing needs of families, there was inequality in access across the county and professionals found it confusing / unclear.

20 The outcome of the review and wider Early Help partnership work has led to the development of the “Early Help Family Support” service, launched in April 2021 which provides support to children and young people aged 0-18, with a focus on both preventative and targeted support to prevent escalating needs to statutory intervention and to offer a service across all districts.

21 Within WCF this sits under the Director for Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door (FFD) and is delivered and overseen by the Early Help multi-agency partnership board that sits under the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership. The membership was reviewed and revised to ensure we had the whole system 0-18 years represented. There is one central point of “*request for service*” for professionals and families, and young people aged over 13 years can self-refer directly into their district team via the telephone.

22 In the last year the new Early Help Family Support service has worked with 2,806 children at level 2 and 3 needs and has developed the following:

- September 2021 - the new Early Help support booklet was published as a resource for families.
- November 2021 - the new “Early Help in the community” portal was launched which allows partner agencies to submit their agency Early Help assessments and plans to the Local Authority.
- December 2021 - the new Early Help strategy was signed off and launched which was also a recommendation from the July 2021 Focused visit by Ofsted.
- In 2022, new face to face partnership training on Early Help was launched and is co- delivered by WCF and partners to the Worcestershire Early Help partnership workforce.
- January 2022 - we launched the “Worcestershire Virtual Family Hub” It is a requirement of all Local Authorities to have both a virtual and a place based “Family Hub”. This site has on average 3,000 views a month and is a great resource for both families and professionals.
- June 2022 - the Early Help partnership hosted “Early Help in the community” marketplace events in each of the six districts with partners and practitioners attending to further understand how they can support families in their community.

- September 2022 - there is an event being hosted by the Early Help partnership for partners to look at place-based Family Hubs in the 6 districts, a government initiative recognition of best practice.

### **Troubled Families (now known as Supporting Families)**

23 In 2021, the government changed the programme name from Troubled Families to Supporting Families, which is a payment by results programme. In June 2021, the responsibility for the delivery of Supporting Families was transferred to the Director of Early Help, Children in Need, Family Front Door and Chair of the Early Help Partnership.

24 In 2020/21, Worcestershire was set the target of 555 claims for families. This was achieved early on in Quarter 4 and submitted with 100% successful and approved.

25 The Supporting Family's data and progress is reported in a bi-monthly meeting with partners, chaired by the WCF Early Help Partnership Manager and reported directly into the Early Help Partnership meeting.

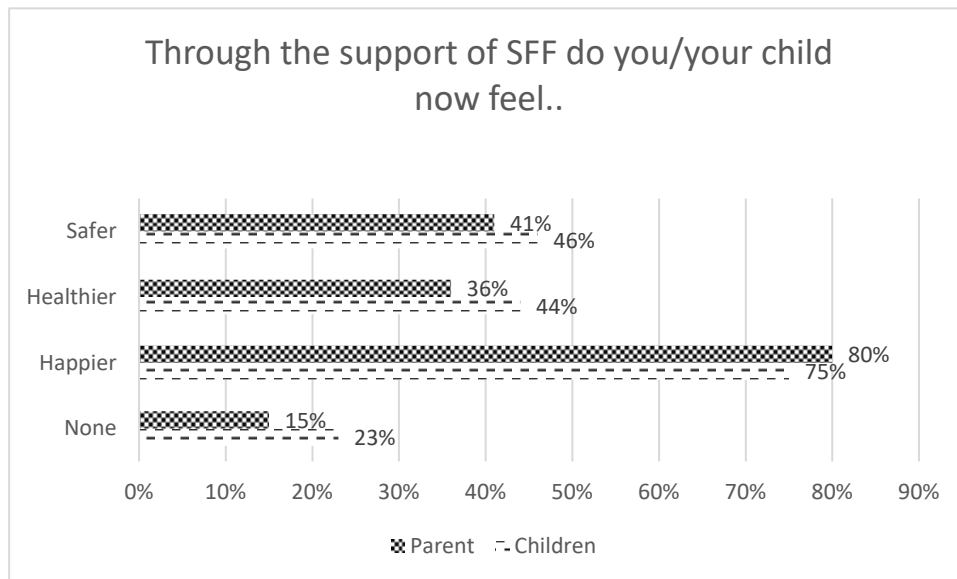
### **Children in Need (CIN): Supporting Families First**

26 Our overall CIN cohort at 261 per 10,000 is in line with statistical neighbours and a little below England average of 314. A focus on our CIN has been the expansion of our Supporting Families First, our "Edge of Care/Child Protection" multi-disciplinary team.

27 In Quarter 1 we continue to see positive outcomes with 66% of cases closing after and intervention, 3% of children becoming looked after and 26% progressing to child protection. The team manage a range of complex risks that exist within these families and a percentage escalation to Child Protection/Care is to be expected if we are working at the right threshold.

28 The service user experience tells us most families and children and parents feel happier, healthier and safer following intervention in their lived experience. At the start of an intervention children and parents are asked to rate from 1-10 on specifics and then again at the end of an intervention to measure impact.

29 The chart below shows how much children and parents reported things had improved i.e. 46% of children and 41% of parents reported feeling "safer" at the end of an intervention.



30 By tracing the sustainability of outcomes achieved for Children In Need we can see from 50 children worked with, now 12 months on, that 40% of children have remained closed sustaining the positive outcomes, 26% remain at the Children In Need level only. Only one child has since become looked after and six escalated to child protection.

31 Tracking the original cohort of 51 children who were deemed on the “edge of care” at the January 2020 data 25 months on, 69% remain closed to Children’s Social Care, one child escalated and remains on a child protection plan and eight children (16%) are looked after. This demonstrates positive long-term outcomes for 69% of edge of care children who have remained at home safely with their families without the need of further statutory support at level 4 needs. This model of multi-disciplinary work is effective in care and child protection prevention in both the short and longer term for edge of care children.

**Child Protection**

32 Through 2021/22, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Worcestershire has slowly risen, taking our number now to 41 per 10,000 which puts us in line with England averages.

33 Back in 2015, reports that we were significantly below England average were interpreted as a positive. Then we had our Ofsted inspection and we understood this was not necessarily a measure of success. We now use our data with greater sophistication and measures such as “sustainability outcomes” in care prevention and “service user feedback”, help us better understand what we are achieving and how children and young people experience the interventions.

34 As we work effectively to prevent care, children will for periods of time, need Child Protection plans to provide a multi-agency framework for working with parents to address risk. On average 80% of child protection plans end with successful outcome of risk being reduced.

35 Whilst all family courts have seen a reduction in timeliness of care proceedings through the Covid and post Covid period, WCF continue to demonstrate good

performance at 25 weeks average before case completion compared to the national average of 46 weeks.

## **Looked After Children and Care Leavers**

36 At Quarter 1 2022/23, there are 916 looked after children, who we act as corporate parents to. At 76 per 10,000, this means we have slightly more than the England averages. However, WCF has been in the lowest two local authorities in the region for three consecutive years for children entering care and Quarter 1 data for new entries is consistent with last year, so at this stage on trend.

37 There are slightly more children placed in a foster care placement in WCF at 72% compared with an England average of 71%, however there is a decreasing number of children in WCF's internal foster care provision, which is now at 16%, a continued declining trend seen through 2021/22. This is a major area of work but is seeing insufficient outcomes as foster carers leave the profession to retire or find it too challenging. WCF is not immune to the national difficulty in recruiting new carers, specifically carers willing to care for the very complex children entering care.

38 Positively, kinship carers are increasing and represent 23% of Worcestershire Children First Fostering (WCFF) children in foster care. There are much better outcomes for young people in kinship placements, with only a minority breaking down and requiring residential care.

39 Overall, there are 18% of children in residential/semi-independent and secure provision, which is in line with statistical neighbours, although above the England average of 14%. Broken down, this represents a good news story with an increase to 7% of young people in supported semi-independent living. This is reflective of work to support children aged 17 to have a supported year of semi-independent living as they transition from residential care to independence.

40 However the number of children in residential care at 12%, is up from 11% at year-end 2021/22. The sufficiency challenge for this 13-17 age group exists where there is breakdown with birth family or previous placement. With a lack of foster care provision able to meet need, leading to demand for residential care.

41 Whilst WCF has achieved significant cost avoidance in procuring and reviewing external placements (over £2.3m in 2021/22 and over £0.85m since April 2022) placement spend remains the highest budgeted cost for WCF. 11% of WCF's total looked after population are currently in externally commissioned residential provision.

42 Residential care is commonly not providing stability or positive outcomes for young people and as Josh Macalister's Independent Care Review illustrated, the market is provider led with inconsistent quality. WCF commonly experience notice being served by residential providers when a young person's behaviour becomes challenging, which in turn leads to heightened difficulties in identifying a suitable alternative provision. At times, as reported by local media, this lack of sufficiency in placements has resulted in children under 16 being placed in unregulated settings. This is unlawful practice that we do not condone, though we do recognise this as a national challenge and understand for WCF, case by case we must find placements.

43 During 2021/22 a total of 61 young people needed a residential placement:

- 33% came from an existing residential provision
- 34% from Foster Care: 5 children from Worcestershire Childrens First Fostering (only one being from a kinship foster care placement) and 16 coming from external foster placement breakdown
- 22% breakdowns from birth family with eight being with children with disabilities and 14 with SEND

44 Worcestershire Children First placement sufficiency strategy continues to look at reducing the need for residential provision by:

- Developing services to support young people with SEND to remain at home and support their independent living experience/preparation for transition to adulthood
- Supporting foster carers to prevent placement breakdown
- Recruiting and supporting foster carers and 'buddy' carers for teenagers
- Continuing to focus on promoting Special Guardianship and Placement with Parents arrangements
- Utilising DFE grant funding to develop a one bed crisis residential home to be opened in the new year – to address the level of breakdown from external residential homes and the challenge in thereafter procuring a registered provision
- Above all else, key to reducing demand for residential provision is prevention of care and thereby a continuing focus on WCF's successful edge of care Family Support - see above section on Children In Need, Supporting Families First

## **WCF Fostering and Adoption Independent agencies**

**45. WCFF – Independent Fostering Agency** - Worcestershire Children First Fostering (WCFF) offers placements for children who are looked after by WCF on behalf of the Local Authority. WCFF, registered in October 2019, was required to register as an independent fostering agency when WCF became a company. It provides fostering families to 360 children, made up of both kinship/connected person and mainstream fostering families.

46. In September 2021, Ofsted carried out a full inspection of WCFF. The inspection of fostering services is reviewed in three key areas, and each is graded independently with an overall judgment reached. Overall, the Inspection judgement given to WCFF was "Requires Improvement to be Good" although the effectiveness of leaders and managers was found to be "inadequate". The inspection identified nine requirements, and four recommendations that are addressed in the service improvement plan.

## **Independent Permanency and Adoption agency**

47. Following the government's commitment to redesign adoption services across the country, the local authorities of Coventry, Herefordshire, Solihull, Warwickshire and Worcestershire set up a new regional adoption agency called Adoption Central England (ACE). It launched on the 1 February 2018.

48. ACE carries out key adoption functions in relation to the recruitment, assessment, approval and support of prospective adopters.



49. WCF have a separate team called the Permanency Team who undertake the adoption functions in respect of children. An Ofsted requirement was this service was registered as an independent child adoption service and as such it was registered on the 17th of November 2021.

50. Ofsted Inspection of this services took place in June 2022. The Ofsted Inspection found that the service provides effective services that meet the requirements for children with a care plan of adoption and therefore was graded as Good in all three areas:

- Overall experiences and progress of service users – Good
- How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected – Good
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers - Good

### **Corporate Parenting Board**

51. I chair the WCC Corporate Parenting Board as Lead Member for Children's Services, with membership representation from all six districts as well as key stakeholders including Young People, Housing, Police, Youth Justice and Health.

52. Pledges have been agreed with our care experienced young people and represent a commitment from "corporate parents" to actively promote and contribute to the resolution of the challenges they face.

53. The Pledges include:

- We will listen to your voice and support you to be involved in decisions about your life.
- We will support you to have a safe, positive, secure, and stable home to live in.
- We will help you stay in touch with family, friends, and anyone else who is important to you and support you to return home if able to do so.
- As your corporate parents, we will celebrate your progress, personal milestones, and achievements.
- We will help you to build and develop positive relationships with your support network.
- We will encourage and support your learning and development of life skills, while helping you to access opportunities, to engage those young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET).
- We will help to promote good fostering environments that cater for all individuals and their personal needs, particularly promoting the fostering of teenagers.
- We will support you to access services and resources that maintain your physical and emotional wellbeing.

54. Local District Councillor's, as members of the Corporate Parenting Board, have become 'Champions' to promote and develop key issues for young people - feeding back to the board and sharing positive outcomes that can be promoted in the other districts. Champions lead on one of the following:

- Housing and Council Tax
- Employment
- Leisure and Cultural Activities
- Fostering
- Education

- Being a Care Leavers Ambassador

55. There is a National Review for care experienced young people and adults and a regional DfE funded *Children’s Social Care Covid-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better* (CRABB) review. These have looked at best practice and consistency in the offer across the West Midlands. **Feedback by the DFE from the regional survey describes Worcestershire’s local offer as “comprehensive”.**

56. Ofsted consultation is underway regarding the creation of a separate graded judgement for Care Leavers within the ILAC framework.

### **Quality Assurance in Children’s Services**

57. Our approach to Quality Assurance (QA) is well embedded across Social Care & Safeguarding, following a framework of three key elements.

- Key Performance Indicators (how much are we doing?)
- Audits (how well are we doing?)
- Feedback from children & families (what is the impact of what we are doing?)

58. In July 2021, the Ofsted Focused Visit said; *“the quality assurance framework is a strong area of practice, well embedded internally and across the safeguarding partnership. In particular, the audit approach is very effective”* and since the visit Ofsted have recommended a number of other LA’s contact WCF for input to their own QA frameworks and practice.

59. In Autumn 2021, WCF appointed a Head of Quality Assurance to lead on developing this Quality Assurance approach across the whole service to include WCF Fostering, Early Help and SEND, giving quantitative and qualitative information and assurance about the company and the services it provides.

### **Serious Case Reviews**

60. There have been five Child Safeguarding Rapid Reviews undertaken in the past 12 months. These are undertaken following an unexpected child death or serious harm to a child where abuse and neglect is a possible factor. These reviews are completed by the multi-agency Worcestershire Child Safeguarding Review Group on behalf of the Worcestershire Children Safeguarding Partnership (WSCP) and decisions are fed back to the National Review panel for audit. Of these reviews, one was progressed to a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR).

61. Worcestershire Child Safeguarding Practice (WSCP) currently has four live Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in progress. One is completed and due to be published imminently.

62. One of the current CSPR’s relates to the death of a child in February 2021, where abuse and neglect is suspected. Both mother and mother’s partner have been charged with offences in relation to this incident and are awaiting trial (set for October 2022). On the advice of CPS this review has been placed on hold pending completion of the trial.

## Partnership Working

63. 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.'

64. 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. These were implemented in September 2019.

65. Our Safeguarding Partnership have written an Annual Report which was presented to Scrutiny (10 May 2022), Health & Wellbeing Board (15 February 2022) and Cabinet (21 July 2022).

66. Our 2021 Ofsted Focused Visit also reported on strengths within partnership working and quoted as saying: "*The early help partnership is now well engaged in the delivery of services*", "*the local authority and wider partnership have planned and delivered a well-coordinated and effective response to the pandemic*" and "*the quality assurance framework is a strong area of practice, well embedded internally and across the safeguarding partnership*". All evidencing independent validation of the effectiveness and impact of partnership working across services but also the strategic direction and support of leaders.

67. The Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) has been refreshed for 2022 - 2024. This sets out how organisations in the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) will work together to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families.

68. The CYPP supports the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the children's outcomes of the Integrated Care System (ICS). Outcomes and measures for the CYPP have been developed and will be led by the four groups reporting to the CYPSP - Early Help Partnership; Children & Young People's Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Partnership; 0-25 All Age Disability Partnership and the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership. Progress reports will be presented regularly to the CYPSP and a biannual update given to the Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB).

**Andy Roberts**

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

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

### **Introduction**

69. It gives me great pleasure to present my first report to Council.

### **Schools Context**

70. As of 31 August 2022, Worcestershire has a total of 243 State-funded schools, of which 127 are Academy or Free schools and 116 are maintained. These are made up of 1 nursery, 177 Primary/First schools (of which 81 are academies), 19 Middle schools (12 academies), 31 Secondary and High schools (27 Academies), 9 Special Schools (4 academies), and 6 Alternative Provision / Pupil Referral Units of which 3 are academies.

71. 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.

### **Ofsted Outcomes Summary (7 July 2022)**

#### **Maintained Schools (116)**

Outstanding	22	19%
Good	82	71%
RI	10	9%
Ofsted Category	2	2%
No Ofsted Judgement		

90% of maintained schools either outstanding/good

#### **Academies (127)**

Outstanding	18	16%
Good	79	72%
RI	11	10%
No Ofsted Judgement	1	2%

88% of Academies either outstanding/good

This figure removes those schools that have been subject to an academy order - 18.

### **School Places**

72. During the last academic year approximately 14,700 applications were made for school places at the normal point of entry across Worcestershire.

73. For high schools almost 6,200 applications were received with almost 89% being offered places at their first-choice school. Just over 5% received offers for their

second-choice school. For middle schools, of the 2474 applications received almost 96% received offers for one of their top 2 choices. For Primary schools almost 6,100 applications were received with almost 91% being offered places at their first-choice school. Over 96% of children received offers for one of their first 2 choices.

74. Worcestershire's application performance against national comparative data is available for Year 7 first preferences, which for Worcestershire is 84.7% against the England average of 83.3% and the West Midlands average of 83.2%, showing that we meet more 1st preferences than both nationally and regionally for year 7 transition.

75. At every phase, no children were left without an offer of a primary, middle or high school place. On 1 June 2020, WCF began the co-ordination of in-year applications, that is those children moving schools outside of the normal starting point for a school. The numbers of in year applications are increasing from 3462 in 2020/21 to 4150 in 2021/22.

### **School places for children arriving under re-settlement schemes**

76. DfE have collected from every local authority across England, data collections in relation to overseas arrivals. At the end of May 2022, 374 applications for school places had been made for families arriving from overseas in the UK, not including arrivals from the Ukraine.

77. As of June 2022, a total of 214 applications have been received from Ukraine arrivals. 201 children have been offered a school place, and 13 applications were being processed.

### **Early Years Sufficiency of Places**

78. Worcestershire currently has 496 settings offering Nursery Education Funded provision. This number has remained relatively consistent during 2021/22.

79. Take-up of funded places for 2-year-olds has increased substantially to 81% over the past year and has been higher than the national average of 62%.

80. Take-up of 3- & 4-year-old funded places within Worcestershire remains at around 97%, which is higher than the national average of 92% and slightly above statistical neighbour average of 96.5%. The funding for this is through the Early Years Block of the DSG which is £35.4m.

81. According to the most recent Early Years Sufficiency Assessment (September 2021), Worcestershire has sufficient childcare and high-quality early education places for funded children spread across its six districts.

82. Challenges in recruitment and retention of staff within early years is a national issue, this experience is reflected in Worcestershire. The Early Years team has linked up with WCC Skills and Investment Team to identify the pathways that support entry into the Childcare workforce.

## **Education Provision Planning Capital Programme**

83. The DfE also launched last year the Rebuilding Schools Programme that prioritises part or full rebuild based on conditions assessments. Waseley Hills School will be fully rebuilt as part of this programme and Pershore High School will have a partial rebuild.

### **New First / Primary schools**

84. Work is underway to secure school places through section 106 funding to meet the demand anticipated over the next 6 years as a direct result of new housing on the South Worcester Urban Expansion, West Worcester Urban Expansion, Foxlydiate Redditch Urban Expansion, Perryfields Bromsgrove, Kidderminster Lea Castle and Mitton housing developments.

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

85. The new Worcester City Secondary school scheme funded by WCC is progressing for delivery by September 2026. Land negotiations and design and build contractor bids are progressing well, an Academy Sponsor competition has been completed and a recommendation made to the Secretary of State.

### **New Primary Alternative Provision Free School**

86. Unity Academy Free school, Kidderminster, is due to open in September 2023 run by the Rivers Academy Trust as a 60 place Primary Alternative Provision. The build and delivery of the school has been funded by the DfE and is intended to operate using a preventative and outreach model.

### **New Primary Free School**

87. A new Primary Free School was approved by the DfE in 2021 to open in September 2024 in Rubery. WCF and WCC Officers are currently working with the DfE and Bromsgrove District Council to identify a suitable and viable site.

### **Specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

88. Place forecasting and the SEND Accelerated Progress Plan recognise the need and focus for ensuring capacity and appropriate use of specialist provision for SEND.

89. A new Enhanced Primary Mainstream Autism Base was opened in April 2022 at Chaddesley Corbett Primary School, Kidderminster offering 10 full-time equivalent places.

90. A new Enhanced Secondary Mainstream Autism Base is planned to open in a Worcester in this academic year at Christopher Whitehead Language College.

91. Work is underway to review the demand for specialist places across the county for September 2023 including reviewing Special School Nursery / Nursery

Assessment provision, Special School places and Mainstream Autism Base provisions.

92. The Local Authority has submitted a pre-registration bid to the DfE for a new ASD Special Free School. The full bid must be submitted in October 2022.

93. £1.5m of High Needs Provision Capital has been identified to support the development of additional Post 16 Specialist provision in County. In Autumn 2022 expressions of interest from providers will be requested to meet the demand and needs.

### **Attainment**

94. In 2022, Key Stage 1 (KS)1 and KS2 SATs, phonics and multiplication tests, alongside KS4 and KS5 exams were all reinstated following the pandemic.

Statutory duties for moderation and monitoring recommenced in 2022. WCF School Improvement Team undertake the moderation and monitoring role reporting to the Standards and Testing Agency.

95. Performance tables are suspended again for the 2021/22 academic year.

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Worcestershire</b>
KS1 Reading	67.1%	68.1%
KS1 Writing	57.8%	58.7%
KS1 Maths	67.8%	68.7%
KS1 RWM	53.2%	54.2%

### **Attendance**

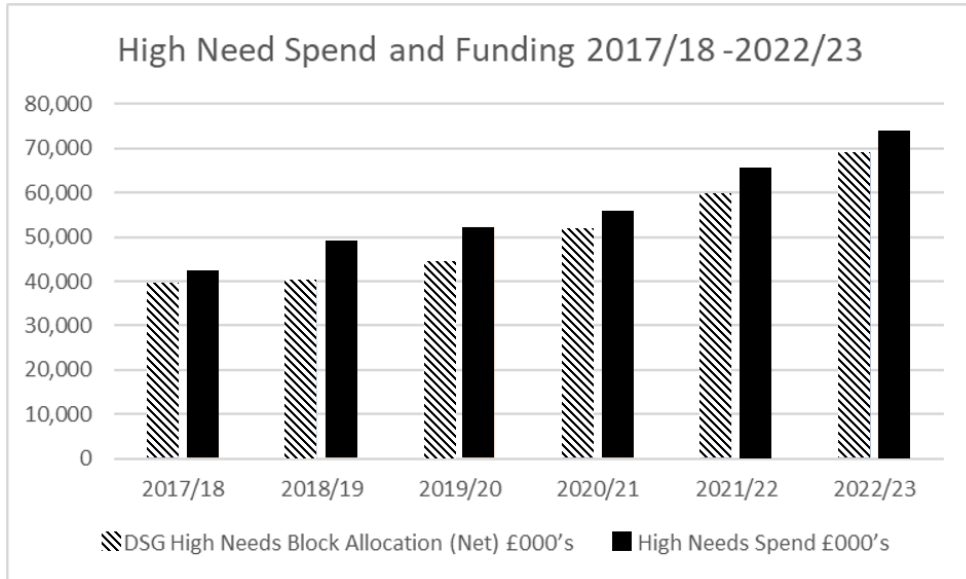
96. Year on year, attendance has previously been the same or better for each phase and this is also reflected in National figures (approximately 94-96%). March 2022 figures showed a return to almost pre-Covid rates at approximately 92-95% following a significant drop attributed to the disruption of the pandemic. WCF Education Welfare Service currently provide services for schools to improve their attendance.

97. New attendance guidance has been published by the DfE, replacing all previous attendance guidance. This places new responsibilities on Local Authorities and schools in improving school attendance from 2022. The guidance is effective from September 2022 and will become statutory from September 2023. WCF is developing a plan alongside schools to focus and work together on improving attendance.

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

### **High Level Needs Funding**

98. Nationally the provision of High Needs funding for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability and vulnerable learners is a significant area of concern. In Worcestershire the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) High Needs block is currently forecast to spend £73.7m in 2022/23. This is a forecast overspend of £4.5m on a £69.2m budget. Worcestershire is not unique on this issue.



99. Q1 data for 2022/23 showed that 4,776 currently children have an EHCP in Worcestershire. This means that broadly, each EHCP draws from the High Needs block an average of £15,426 per year (£297pw) to arrive at a total spend of £73.7m (the forecast spend as at 31 June 2022).

100. There continues to be an increase in the prevalence and complexity of SEND nationally. Whilst this is 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.

101. Worcestershire has been invited to be part of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme that was announced by the Department for Education (DfE) in February this year. The DBV programme is designed to provide dedicated support and funding to help 55 local authorities with deficit issues in their high needs block to reform their high needs systems.

### **SEND Improvement**

102. Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out a revisit inspection in November 2021. It was confirmed that the local area had made sufficient progress in eight of the twelve weaknesses identified at the initial inspection in 2018. The four areas where sufficient progress was not being made are:

- The variation in the skills and commitment of some mainstream schools to provide effective support for children who have SEND.
- The lack of suitable specialist provision to meet the identified needs of children and young people.
- Fragile relationships with parents and carers and a lack of meaningful engagement and co-production and collaboration.
- The poor quality of EHCPs and limited contributions from health and social care along with the process to check and review the quality of EHC plans.



103. In response to the inspection report, the DfE and CQC required an Accelerated Progress Plan, covering the four identified area. The APP was signed off by Ofsted and CQC and the six-monthly review of progress is scheduled for 22 September 2022.

104. Following Cabinet approval in February 2022, the All-Age Disability Service (0-25) was developed. The Young Adults Team (YAT) TUPE transferred from WCC to WCF on 1 June 2022. In addition, the Director for All Age Disability came into post on 6 June 2022 and will continue to lead and deliver the necessary changes to improve the experience and outcomes for those children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

### **Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)**

105. As illustrated below there has been an increase year on year since the 2014 SEND reforms.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Children and Young People with an EHCP</b>
<b>2017 / 18</b>	<b>3295</b>
<b>2018 / 19</b>	<b>3879</b>
<b>2019 / 20</b>	<b>4308</b>
<b>2020 / 21</b>	<b>4484</b>

### **SEND Green Paper**

106. On 29 March 2022 the Government published the SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time, a consultation on the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision system in England. The consultation set out proposed reforms to the SEND and alternative provision (AP) system that seek to address the following three key challenges:

- Poor outcomes for children and young people with SEN or in alternative provision.
- Navigating the SEND system and alternative provision is not a positive experience for children, young people and their families
- Despite unprecedented investment, the system is not delivering value for money for children, young people, and families.

### **Vulnerable Learners**

107. On 30 June 2022, there were a total of 407 children who are identified as missing education with investigations underway to establish school status or interventions in place to get children back to school. 758 Children Missing Education (CME) investigations have been completed and closed since September 2021.

108. There are systems in place to prioritise children with an EHCP and those open to Children's Social Care who are missing education. The Fair Access Protocol implemented in September 2020 is now embedded and children without a school place are being placed more quickly through FAP Panel with schools working together to meet needs. The continuation of the multi-agency Missing Mondays ensures that children are missing from education for the shortest amount of time possible.

109. The number of children who become electively home educated has experienced a slower rate than last year following the pandemic. As of 30 June 2022, there are a total of 935 electively home educated children across Worcestershire, compared to 1071 in June 2021. This academic year we have seen 165 EHE children return to school.

110. The number of permanent exclusions across Worcestershire has returned to pre-pandemic levels. At the end of July this was 152 CYP with the most common reason being persistent disruptive behaviour. In 2021 there were 83 permanent exclusions. The Exclusions Officer and Vulnerable Learner Team supports Schools and families to act at the earliest point possible when notified of a permanent exclusion and promote early intervention for young people at risk of exclusion. New “Promoting Inclusion in Schools” guidance has been produced and will be formally launched in September. The guidance provides a pathway for schools to prevent exclusions.

111. From September 2022 a new approach to procuring alternative provision will be in place providing both WCF and schools with a directory of quality assurance checked provision that can be used to procure places for children when needed.

112. A reintegration plan is now required for all children who have been permanently excluded to reintegrate back into either mainstream school or another placement that meets their needs. This process is monitored through the Fair Access Protocol and overseen in localities by head teacher groups and WCF.

113. Nearly half of schools in Worcestershire have undertaken the Trauma Informed Schools Training to establish a whole school approach and support for children.

## **Virtual School**

114. The Virtual School has continued to support Worcestershire Children Looked After (CLA) ensuring 100% have undertaken a termly Personal Education Plan (PEP). All CLA aged between 2-18 years have been supported through the PEP process, to achieve their potential. Child/young person views have been gained throughout this process.

115. Current overall attendance for CLA (statutory school age) for 2021-2022 academic year is 91%. Attendance is 1% above national comparator. Attendance for CLA with an Education Health Care Plan is (85%), this is 4% above all Worcestershire pupils with an EHCP.

116. Permanent Exclusions for CLA remain the same as last year (2 pupils). There has been a 5% reduction from last academic year, in the number of suspensions for CLA placed in Out of County schools. Combined in and out of county suspensions is 4.5% of the CLA cohort, this is 1% better than the previous academic year.

117. In June 2021, the Virtual School was successful with a Post 16 bid to DfE for Pupil Premium Plus grant to support CLA young people attending colleges of Further Education and this has been extended for 22/23.

118. From September 2021, the Virtual School Head's role has been extended to include the strategic leadership of promoting the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker (CWSW).

119. Outcomes achieved this year include improved overall data and intelligence on the education outcomes for these children, improved staff professional development with social care and school staff for example improving parental engagement. The Supporting Families First (SFF) and Virtual School Joint Project was successful in increasing attendance for identified children. 40 visits to schools have been carried out to learn from good practice.

120. I am pleased to have taken on the role of Chair of the Governing Body (GB) of the Virtual School and welcome Cllr Boatright to the GB who represents elected membership of the Corporate Parenting Board. The Governing Body scrutinises and supports the self-evaluation of the virtual school and improvement planning. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Colette Maynard, the Virtual School Headteacher for all her excellent work with the Virtual School.

### **Education White Paper “Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child”**

121. The White Paper published in March 2022 sets out 4 chapters:

- An excellent teacher for every child
- Delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance
- Targeted support for every child who needs it
- A stronger and fairer school system.

**Tracey Onslow**  
**Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education**