

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

3 NOVEMBER 2022

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST QUALITY ASSURANCE

Summary

1. An update on the Social Care and Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework from Worcestershire Children First (WCF) is provided for the Panel.
2. The Cabinet Member with responsibility (CMR) for Children and Families, the Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First and the Group Manager Safeguarding Quality Assurance & Principal Social Worker have been invited to attend the meeting.

Background

3. The Social Care and Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework was first established in 2018 and there has been continuous work to develop and consolidate this. The framework was extended to include SEND in 2021 and WCF Fostering in 2022.
4. The Quality Assurance Framework covers the following three dimensions:
 - i. Key Performance Indicators
Analysis of business and performance information on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis – this enables an understanding of how much is being achieved and how timely this work is managed.
 - ii. Feedback from Children, Young People and Families
WCF is committed to understanding the experiences of their work and services directly from children and families; striving to learn from these experiences and building it into future practice. This learning is brought together from compliments and complaints, but there is also a programme of quarterly feedback mechanisms to hear about children and families' experiences which supports an understanding of the impact of the work and the difference being made.
 - iii. Audit Activity
Completion of case file audits (using a peer and moderation approach) and targeted audits; each area of the service has a programme of quarterly audits which supports WCF to know the quality of its practice.
5. The Frameworks are attached at Appendix 1 (Social Care), Appendix 2 (SEND) and Appendix 3 (WCF Fostering).

6. In 2021 Ofsted undertook a focused Inspection Visit to Children's Social Care evidencing independent validation of WCF work, in respect of the WCF quality assurance framework. Ofsted 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. Children's case file audits are well moderated and identified actions followed through to completion, making a real time difference to improving interventions in case work. Collective learning from quality assurance activity, including extensive child and family feedback, is used well to inform service improvement".
7. The WCF SEND Framework was identified by NHS England as *"The quality assurance framework and all the supplementary info and evidence is absolutely the best I have ever seen"*. WCF have been approached to present its work at the Council for Disabled Children Regional Conference to showcase this work, this is recognition of the work and achievements of the SEND QA Framework. WCF are awaiting the fostering re-inspection for an independent view of the work in this service.

Audit

8. The Audit Programme follows a 'peer and moderation approach'; this is when two managers in the service audit the same case. One Auditor is known as the 'lead auditor' this is the 'case responsible manager'. The other Auditor is known as the 'peer auditor', whose role, in addition to the audit, is to speak with the allocated worker to gain their views, but to also seek feedback from the child, parents and/or carer. Following the two audits being completed, these are then moderated by a senior manager for the respective service. This manager will agree the key grades, learning and required actions. This approach supports joint learning, manager reflection and to ensure WCF are being consistent in 'what good looks like'.
9. Social Care and Safeguarding, Fostering and SEND have specific areas of focus within their audit templates, ensuring that these are relevant to the service. The Case File Audit programme is complimented by additional Targeted Audits, these are themed on specific areas of practice identified through learning or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), this will look at a larger sample of cases but on that specific area of practice; for example, Quality of Decision Making by Managers.
10. In all service areas Audits and Outcomes are tracked to ensure that there has been a reflective discussion between the Manager and Practitioner and to ensure that agreed actions have been completed.
11. In Social Care, 22 case file audits have been undertaken across Quarter 1 and Quarter 2; for each case there is an "overall judgement" recorded. Of the 22 audits completed year to date 41% were judged to be 'Good', 55% were judged to be 'Requires Improvement' and 4% (1 case) 'inadequate'. This year key strengths have been seen within Partnership Working and Strength and Relationship Based Practice.

12. Comparisons of the outcome grades of 2021/22 of Social Care Case File Audits show the continued sustained and improving practice in this service area, with 55% graded as good this year compared to 38% last year.
13. The audit tool also breaks down the audit into key areas of practice; these are Voice of the Child, Assessments, Plans, Management Oversight, Partnership Working, Strengths & Relationship Based Practice and Embracing Diversity.
14. A full breakdown of 2022/23 is attached at Appendix 4 (Social Care & Safeguarding Case File Audit Exec Summary).
15. WCF have undertaken an analysis report of the previous four years of Quality Assurance activity, this evidences year on year improvement, this can be found at Appendix 5 (Quality Assurance Highlight Report Four Year Analysis).
16. WCF launched the Fostering Audit programme in Quarter 1 2022/23 and the SEND Audit programme in Quarter 4 2021/22. Full reports on both services are presented to WCF Executive Leadership Team, WCF Board and are part of their respective improvement programmes.
17. The SEND Quarter 2 Quality Assurance Report at Appendix 6 and the WCF Fostering Quarter 2 Report at Appendix 7

Service User Feedback

18. Seeking the views of children and families is a key area of the Quality Assurance Programme; this supports Officers to understand how individuals experience the services. This is done through all the services and a range of activities is undertaken to do this, these include within the audits to have targeted approaches such as direct calls to parent carers to seek their views following case closure. Links and QR codes in letters are also used to enable families to access different mechanisms to share their views.
19. In Social Care, feedback is sought through case file audits, feedback calls following case closure and targeted feedback opportunities. Across Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2022/23 Social Care have received the views of 470 families.
20. Key messages from this feedback include:
 - 95% of families (Social Care) felt the worker gave them the opportunity to share their views and opinions
 - 94% of families (Social Care) felt the worker spoke to the right people (agencies & family members) to inform the assessment and plan
 - 80% of parents reported that they felt happier as an individual/family through the work of our Supporting Families First Service
 - 99% of parents reported (Children with Disabilities Service) that the worker engaged with their child and understood their experiences
21. In WCF Fostering feedback is sought from within the case file audits and a programme of feedback calls to carers and birth parents is undertaken each quarter. To date 60 pieces of feedback have been received from parents and carers. Key areas of feedback include:

- 100% of carers felt that they had access to good quality training and resources to support them in their role
- 95% of carers felt that they were well supported by their Supervising Social Worker
- 83% of parents felt that the carer supported family time arrangements well
- 67% of parents felt that they had opportunities to share their views

22. In SEND feedback is sought within the case file audits and following the issuing of a final Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or annual review. To date, 46 families have shared their views with WCF. Key areas of feedback include:

- 78% of families felt they had opportunities to be involved & share their views within the Assessment process
- 81% of families felt they had been asked about aspirations for their child
- 78% of families felt that they were included in decisions made
- 59% of families felt that they were able to contact the case worker easily when they needed to

23. From Quarter 4 2021/22 to Quarter 2 2022/23 improvements can be seen as follows:

Question	Quarter 4 21/22	Quarter 1 22/23	Quarter 2 22/23
Did you feel you had opportunities to be involved and share your views and opinions in the assessment process?	62%	85%	100%
Have you been asked about your aspirations for your child and were these included in the plan?	70%	100%	100%
Do you feel your child had opportunities to share their views and opinions?	56%	85%	67%
Do you feel the needs of your child were fully understood and reflected in the plan?	63%	85%	100%
Do you feel the needs of your child are being met, or are being worked towards, within the provision of the plan?	76%	71%	67%
Do you feel you were included in any decisions made?	70%	71%	100%
Was it easy to contact the SEND Case Worker/Officer if you needed to?	70%	71%	50%
Do you think the professionals working with you and your child/children are working well together?	63%	85%	100%

24. WCF always strives to use feedback to inform learning. This Quarter a new Communication Framework has been launched within SEND to provide a structure to communicating with families, this sets out the expectations to support this work and is in direct response to what families have told us.

25. The team shares learning from feedback through briefings, presentations, and posters to share with the service both the difference being made to families, but

also where there is identified learning for the service. The experiences of families are considered and used when developing new Standards or approaches to work.

Voice of the Child

26. The voice of the child is sought in daily work with the children, hearing their voice on their experiences in assessments, plans and direct work, which is evidenced through individual case work. However, feedback is also sought from children and young people of their experiences of the services, to also evidence the impact and outcomes for children. This is done through a variety of mechanisms such as feedback in audits, feedback as closure, direct contact by Conference Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), and for Children Looked After within Outreach or in respect of how they experience a placement.
27. In 2020/21 an annual voice of the child report was developed that brought together the feedback that had been received over the year. **720 children and young people** shared their experiences and the impact of the work with them.
28. From the feedback it can be seen that WCF is doing well in that:
 - The-majority of children gave positive feedback saying that they have had opportunities to share their views, wishes and feelings and that as children they feel listened to.
 - Young people said that workers were easy to talk to, they felt their views were taken seriously and they understand why they are being helped.
 - Young people gave positive feedback in respect of participating in their meetings, being able to share their views and how the meeting heard and considered them.
 - Children who gave feedback reported positively in most areas in respect of placements, including support in education, sharing their views and keeping in touch with those who are important to them.
29. There are some key messages and areas of focus for moving forward with learning, these are:
 - A small number of young people advised that they did not fully understand the outcome of their meeting, how the meeting was going to work or the IRO's specific role.
 - Not all children were always feeling included in their assessment or their plan, children were advising that they were not receiving copies of their assessments and plans. It is known that children have opportunities to share their views of the work and feel listened to, however there is a disconnect with this work and how the outcomes and involvement within assessments and plans were explained.
 - In respect of placements children shared that they were not always having opportunities to visit placements before moving there. Although usually associated with emergency moves, creative thought is needed on how this can be supported, such as virtual visits or photos.
 - There is specific learning from children's feedback about their placement experiences, for some children there is a need to improve things and ensure

these are being considered and discussed in statutory visits, Looked After Child Reviews and placement planning meetings.

- There is a continued focus on ensuring a higher level of children's feedback is gained and heard, specifically within the Early Help and Child Protection work.
30. A full breakdown of 2021/22 can be found at Appendix 8 (Voice of the Child Report).
31. This is now a Bi-Annual report; for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 (2022/23) feedback has been received from 460 children and young people. Key messages included:
- 96% of children felt listened to by their worker (Early Help)
 - 94% of children felt that having a worker made a positive difference to them and their family (Early Help)
 - 95% of children said that they were happy with how their looked after review was held and understand the role of the IRO
 - 95% felt that they were able to contact their social worker/outreach worker or personal advisor to get help and support with their emotional wellbeing (looked after children and care leavers)
 - 92% felt included in their Pathway Plan (Care Leavers)
32. Some individual comments from the above children and young people were as follows:
- "Made me feel supported and understood"*
- "Helped solve the issues that I was struggling with and put me in a position where I feel happier than ever before"*
- "To my social worker, I want to say a big thankyou to you too, I believe you all have gone above and beyond to help me and for that I am really grateful"*
- "I have my own social tenancy and I feel safe because of where it is situated"*
33. The Voice of the Child work in Fostering has been launched this year and to date the service has heard from 28 children in WCF placements. All of these children and young people have provided feedback that carers support them with their education, keeping in touch with people who are important to them and that they can talk to the carer about anything that is worrying them. Some of their comments are shown below:
- "They are kind and friendly. They help me. They moved to a larger house so we could keep living with them long term. I feel happy and safe there"*
- "That I have somewhere to live and can go out and play"*
34. Developing the Voice of the Child work within SEND is the next focus of quality assurance activity in that service area.

Compliments & Complaints

35. In Worcestershire every complaint is looked at as an opportunity to learn; to change and develop the experiences of the individual or others using the services.
36. In Social Care and Safeguarding the Advanced Practitioners Team undertake Stage 1 complaint Investigations and responses. Firstly, this takes this work from frontline managers supporting their capacity. Secondly, the advanced practitioner brings an element of independence to the investigation and resolution as they are not operationally working or managing the case. It is ensured that all learning is shared with individual practitioners and managers and shared wider to support service learning through briefings and presentations.
37. In terms of compliments, 82 were received in 2020/21 and 92 in 2021/22. Only compliments from external parties are counted in this formal data. Compliments are received from partners, courts, as well as parents, children, and young people. Most common compliments related to engagement with children and families.
38. Quarterly reports are presented to the service that track quarter-on-quarter / year-on-year analysis of the complaints work.
39. See Quarter 1 Children's Social Care and Safeguarding at Appendix 9 (Quarter 1 2022-23 Complaints and Compliments).
40. In SEND a dedicated Complaints Officer role has been developed and appointed to in April 2022. The Complaints Officer role is to centralise the recording and tracking of complaints, to undertake the investigation and complete the responses to complainants. A quarterly Report has now been introduced evidencing the breakdown of the volume, service area, category etc. of complaints to help staff to understand the themes and focus our improvements. Moving forward quarter-on-quarter comparisons will be available to evidence the impact of this work.
41. Learning Briefings on complaints have been developed and introduced to evidence service learning and themes. Quarter 3 (22/23) will see the introduction of Quarterly Learning Sessions to the service on key themes from complaints.
42. See Quarter 1 SEND Analysis Report at Appendix 10 (2022-2023 Quarter 1 SEND Complaints Report).

Closing the Learning Loop

43. Closing the learning loop is a key attribute of our quality assurance programme; through all the activity Officers act to respond to the learning both individually and as a service.
44. At an individual level it will be ensured that direct feedback is shared with the respective practitioner and manager, supervision policies and templates are developed to include the individual discussions and reflections on learning.

45. Learning from the work is shared through newsletters, briefings, presentations, and posters – these run throughout the year and are designed to be service specific to ensure learning messages are relevant.
46. Learning is used to shape the development of Practice Standards and Procedures, for example the guidance on how in-direct family time arrangements for looked after children are tracked has been recently updated and new leaflets for families on Child in Need and Child Protection Meetings have been developed. These have been in direct response to service learning.

Purpose of the Meeting

47. The Panel is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the approach and effectiveness of WCF Quality Assurance Processes and the approach to learning
- Determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required
- Agree any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Supporting Information

Appendix 1: Social Care & Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework
Appendix 2: SEND Quality Assurance Framework
Appendix 2a: WCF Annual Review Audit Procedure
Appendix 2b: WCF New Education, Health & Care Plan Audit Procedure
Appendix 3: WCF Fostering Quality Assurance Framework
Appendix 4: Social Care & Safeguarding Case File Audit Exec Summary
Appendix 5: Quality Assurance Highlight Report Four Year Analysis
Appendix 6: WCF SEND Quality Assurance Report Quarter 2
Appendix 7: WCF Fostering Quality Assurance Report Quarter 2
Appendix 8: Voice of the Child Report
Appendix 9: Quarter 1 22-23 Complaints & Compliments
Appendix 10: 2022-2023 Quarter 1 SEND Complaints Report

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)