

Worcestershire Children First

Social Care & Safeguarding Services Quality Assurance and Performance Management Framework

Introduction:

In Worcestershire we want to achieve sustainable improvement to services for children, young people, and families. This focus on improvement is a shared priority across the organisation from our Lead Member, Chief Executive and DCS through to our front-line practitioners and support staff.

This is our Social Care & Safeguarding Quality Assurance and Performance Management Framework; this is the Framework that includes our approach to Quality Assurance for Social Work Services including our Family Front Door, Child Protection & Child in Need case work, Through Care Services including Children looked after, Care Leavers, Worcestershire Children First Fostering, Adoption Services and Residential Services.

Our Vision, Mission and Values is for all children in Worcestershire to be Happy, Healthy and Safe and Worcestershire is a wonderful place for children to grow up, and this is the foundation stones of our approach to Quality Assurance in Social Care & Safeguarding.



Ofsted (2021) said of our Quality Assurance Framework

“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”



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1. Our Services

Social Care & Safeguarding is a collection of Services for children in Worcestershire, the structure is made up of:

Early Help Family Support: Our Worcestershire Children First, Early Help Family Support teams work with both level 2 and level 3 needs where there is an identified role for a family support worker and the child / young person permanently lives in Worcestershire.

Family Front Door: This is the central point of contact for all referrals on children and young people where there is a cause of concern. The team provide information and support and manage the Triage processes and MASH case discussions.

Assessment Teams: The teams complete all new section 17 & section 47 enquiries on referrals received from the contact and referral team. They hold cases until ICPC, first CIN meeting and step down to targeted family support where identified. They will accommodate and issue proceedings in emergency cases.

Supporting Families First: The service offers multi-disciplinary support to children and families. The service aims to keep children together with their families, without the need for the child or young person to come into local authority care, where it is safe to do so. The service will provide support to parents and their children to manage risk, improve relationships and develop strengths.

Locality Safeguarding: Care planning for Children in Need and those subject to child protection and care planning including legal proceedings for children in Local Authority care; this service also includes our Multi-Disciplinary Family Safeguarding Team and our Specialist Family Support Team.

Through Care: Care Planning to permanency for children in Local Authority Care; this service also includes Children's Participation, Supervised Family Time, and the Emotional Health & Wellbeing Service for looked after children.

Care Leavers: Providing support and advice to young people leaving care, to enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood; this service also includes our Outreach Service, this team prepare young people for independent living and to provide independent living accommodation and intensive support for care leavers who need higher levels of support.

Residential & Short-Break Services: Providing a range of 52-week Ofsted regulated residential placements across Worcestershire for looked after children and young people.

Fostering & Kinship Services: Assessment of new carers, supervision of approved carers and in-house placement service. Also, kinship assessments, support, and supervision of kinship carers.

Adoption Services: This team works to ensure that every child has the right to a permanent and stable home. The primary focus of permanency planning is to prevent children drifting in care. The team supports children with care plans of adoptions, ensuring that as the corporate parent for Looked After Children, we work diligently to find permanent, safe homes for children in care in a timely manner.

Safeguarding Quality Assurance: This service includes the IRO Service that oversee the child's care plan and ensure everyone contributing to the care plan fulfils their legal obligations to the child. Also, the Independent Chairs for facilitating the multi -agency initial and review child protection conferences in line with Working Together guidance, Independent Chairs also undertake the role of the LADO, to co-ordinate complex cases where an allegation has been made against a person in a position of trust who works with children.

2. Practice Standards

Practice Standards and Procedures - it is the single point of reference for Social Workers, Social Care Workers, and Team Managers to check what is expected of them in relation to specific Social Work tasks; this includes our Practice Standards, Policies and Guidance.

Why do we need practice standards?

- So that all managers & practitioners have clear guidance on roles and responsibilities
- We have a consistent approach to our work
- There are clear expectations for staff to measure themselves against
- There is a focus on the quality of practice and not just timescales
- We are a confident professional service, respected by families and professionals that will champion and where necessary challenge others to promote children's welfare
- There is a set of standards that quality assurance work can be measured against

3. Our Framework:

Worcestershire Children First has a whole service approach to Quality Assurance, this focuses on three domains, there are:

- How much are we doing – Performance Management
- How well are we doing it – Audits
- What difference are we making – Outcomes for Children and Young People

4. How much are we doing - Performance Management:

The performance reports and datasets available to Social Care & Safeguarding Services provide a clear line of sight on practice from the Lead Member and DCS and throughout our Managers and Practitioners. We have several reports and dashboards that enable our staff to understand practice, celebrate achievements and target areas for improvement.

We want the experience of children and young people and their parents and carers to be positive. As a minimum this means doing what we say we will do in the timescales we are expected to do it.

We want to ensure that children and young people receive appropriate services to support them to achieve positive outcomes. Reports can be accessed via our Management Information Hub.

A summary of these reports:

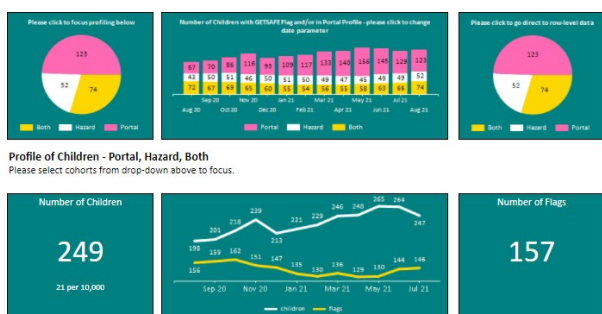
Team data/dashboards

- 'Live' data available online to team managers and workers
- Key operational data
- Tailored to specific areas
- Drill down to individual cases



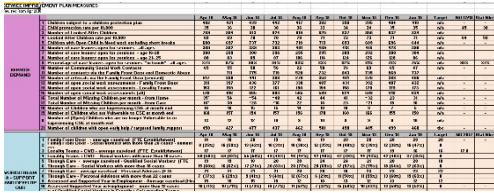
Get Safe Dashboard & Reports

- Live data available to the Get Safe Team and Managers/Workers across the service
- Key operational data, themes, and trends for children at risk or vulnerable to Exploitation
- Patterns & Performance in relation to children who go missing from home or Care
- Weekly Reporting



Business Monthly Indicators (BMI)

- Main performance indicators at overall and service level
- Designed to provide detailed view across the whole



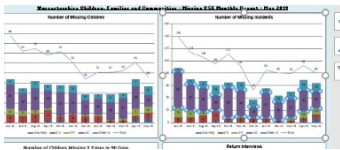
WCF Key Performance Indicators – monthly

- Small set of key performance indicators agreed with commissioners
- Focus for dialogue with commissioners



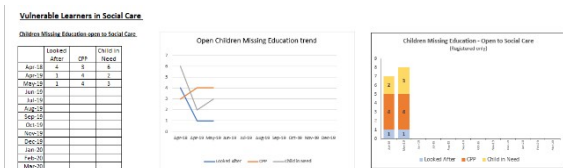
Monthly Missing and CSE Report

- Regular monitoring report
- Trend and child level data



Monthly Vulnerable Learners in Social Care Report

- Sections for Missing Education, Electively Home Educated, EHCP
- Trend and child level data



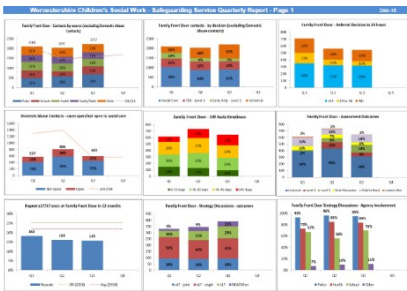
QAPP Dashboard

- Monthly & Quarterly Analysis Dashboard
- Reporting of Multi-Agency KPIs



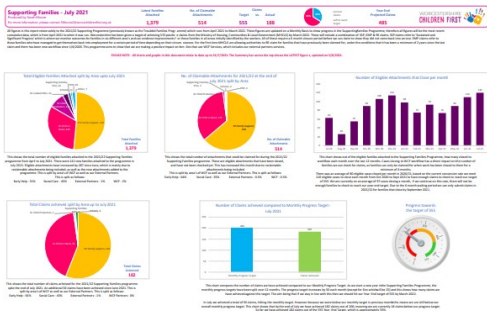
Quarterly Safeguarding Report

- Overview of performance across the service broken down by main operational areas
- Series of quarterly charts plus commentary on each main area
- Used widely within and outside WCF



Supporting Families

- Live, Monthly and Quarterly Dashboards
- Designed to provide oversight and tracking of our SF Claims and progress set against our targets



Other

- Detailed data sets covering specific areas eg. Referrals via Portal.
- Specifically, tailored data sets provided to bodies such as Corporate Parenting Board, Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Safeguarding Children Partnership.

5. How well are we doing it – Audits:

This section describes our audit arrangements. These arrangements are intended to ensure that the standards are being met and positive outcomes are being achieved for children and young people.

5.1 Case File Audits

In Worcestershire we undertake a quarterly programme of Case File Audits, Safeguarding Quality Assurance identify the case sample for Audits using Annex A, audits are then allocated to managers across the service, below details how this process works in each specific area of our business.

Early Help, Social Work & Social Care Teams: Our Early Help, Family Front Door, Assessment Teams, Locality Safeguarding, Through Care and Care Leavers Service undertake monthly peer/moderated Case File Audits. This provides an overview of the quality of case work and supports issue specific analysis. Audits are structured around our Practice Standards which are informed by legislation, regulation and local policies and procedures. The audit specifically focuses on:

- Voice of the Child
- Assessments
- Plans
- Management Oversight
- Partnership Working
- Strengths & Relationship Based Practice
- Embracing Diversity

The Audit Tool includes an Action Plan which is followed up by the Case Responsible Team Leader and it is available via the Practice Standards web page.

The audit is conducted by two auditors, the first auditor is the case responsible Team Manager – they are known as the Lead Auditor. The second auditor is known as the Peer Auditor and will be another Team Manager within the specific service area. The Peer Auditor is encouraged to seek the views of the child or young person and their parent or carer(s) when completing a Case File Audit unless this is not possible. The Peer Auditor also have a case discussion with the allocated worker to gain their views on the child's circumstances and our involvement.

Cases for audit are selected by the Safeguarding Quality Assurance Service and are circulated to the relevant managers and group managers on the 1st of each month.

These audits are Moderated by the Group Managers once completed to agree the final grades and learning. Team Manager record on a case note the review of the audit and that audit actions are completed & learning shared with the relevant practitioners. The outcome of an audit is recorded in the Quality Assurance Form on Liquid Logic by Safeguarding Quality Assurance.

The Advanced Social Work Practitioners Team reviews cases eight weeks after the audit is moderated to ensure actions are completed and will footprint this on the child's file,

evidencing how we have closed the loop on our individual case learning.

Learning is collated and presented in a Quarterly Quality Assurance Report, each area of the service will have a dedicated section of the report to drill-down the specific learning for that service area. This learning is also shared through Newsletters, Briefings and Learning Presentations.

Worcestershire Children First Fostering: WCF Fostering Services follow a similar approach to the Social Work Teams, they follow the peer/moderated audit process, and actions are reviewed by ASWPs at the 8-week point following the completion of an Audit. The service specific learning is shared with the service through the QA Reports, Newsletters and Presentations. Audits are saved within a Specific Form within Liquid Logic on the Foster Carers Record.

In these audits, the Peer Auditor will seek the views of the Fostering Social Worker and will also seek Service User Feedback from Foster/Kinship Carers; the questions are specific to the Fostering Service. The Audits are also specific to the Fostering Service and Regulations, the Audits specifically look at:

Voice of the Child
Support & Supervision to the Carer
Safer Caring Plans & Risk Assessments
Quality of Matching
Approval, Annual Reviews, Panel & ADM
Management Oversight

These audits also include opportunities to hear feedback from children in placement, the carer and the birth family experience and views on the care their child receives.

Residential & Shortbreaks Services: Residential & Shortbreaks Services undertake monthly Case File Audits, these do not follow a peer process, however, all audits are undertaken by a peer manager within the Residential Service. These Audits have a similar learning process to ensure this is shared with the service, the Audits look specifically at:

- Voice of the Child
- Care Planning & Quality of Plans
- Management Oversight
- Partnership Working

Audits also include a visit and observation of the Residential Setting, a meeting with the child's allocated key worker and wherever possible, feedback from the child or young person the Audit is specifically considering. Audits are saved on a specific form on the Child's Record.

Adoption Services: We are now introducing a peer/moderated audit procedure for our Permanency Planning & Support Team and children with Plans of Adoption or who are placed with Adoptive Parents. The audits follow the same procedure, however, are saved within the Adoption Audit Form on Liquid Logic, feedback is sought from the Adoptive Parents and discussions are held with the Adoption Service, there is learning for both the Adoption Service and Social Work Team. The Audits specifically look at:

- Voice of the Child / Child's Adoption Journey
- Timeliness in Permanency Planning

- Quality of the CPR
- The Matching Process
- The quality & timeliness of Life Story Work
- Management Oversight

5.2 Targeted Audits:

Targeted Audits look at specific areas of practice and impact. Topics for targeted audits are identified by relevant Group Managers/Assistant Directors linked to issues being identified through supervision, complaints, or Service Dashboard indicators. All Targeted Audits outcomes and learning are recorded on the Targeted Audit Template and sent to Safeguarding Quality Assurance; these are saved centrally, and the learning captured within the Quarterly Quality Assurance Report. Group Managers are responsible for ensuring the targeted learning is disseminated with their Team Manager Group to embed learning.

5.3 Multi-Agency Audits:

Partnership working is key to positive outcomes to children and families and connecting our learning through the Safeguarding System supports our learning & development as a partnership.

We undertake Multi-Agency Audits across our Services; these are lead through our Quality Assurance Practice & Procedures (QAPP) Group of the Safeguarding Partnership. These feed direct learning into our services and to share learning across agencies, this is through Learning Briefings and Partnership Newsletters, learning is also fed into Partnership Training provided by the Local Safeguarding Children’s Partnership. QAPP is mandated to:

- Multi-agency Audit Programme
- Multi-agency Learning and Development Programme
- Monitoring of Multi-Agency Key Performance Indicators
- Inter-Agency Policy and Procedures

Multi-Agency Audits are also undertaken throughout Family Front Door Leadership Group and Get Safe Partnership. Learning from audits is shared via the Safeguarding Partnership Newsletters & Resources at: [WSCP Learning & Development - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](https://safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk)

5.4 Safeguarding Quality Assurance

- **Mid-Way Audits:** Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs undertake monthly Mid-Way Audits. Midway Audits are completed on children’s case records and are recorded directly into the Mid-Way Audit Form on Liquid Logic. Mid-Way Audits include Service User Feedback from the child, parent and/or carer. An alert is sent to the case responsible Team Manager to acknowledge the audit being completed and to complete any required actions. Learning from Mid-Way Audits is captured within the Quarterly Quality Assurance Report. Mid-Way Audits also specifically ask questions on the IRO/CP Chair footprint and engagement – enabling the Quality Assurance of Safeguarding Quality Assurance.

- **DRPs:** Independent Reviewing Officers have a central role to provide support and challenge to the people involved in the life of a child or young person who is looked after by Worcestershire Children First to make sure that they are well and safely cared for, and that their wishes and feelings are always considered.

The Dispute Resolution Process allows IROs to resolve disputes at the earliest opportunity through a process of escalation to the Team Manager and ultimately the Director. In all circumstances any concerns should be resolved with the responsible Social Worker or Team Manager. DRPs are monitored and are an indicator that of measure of the independence of the role and its focus on achieving the best services for children in care.

- **Targeted Audits:** Practice Managers undertake Quarterly Targeted Audits on the Quality of Practice of Independent Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers, including Practice Observations. Audits are also identified for completion through KPI Analysis and Learning from feedback & complaints.

Learning from SQA Quality Assurance Activity is shared through the Quarterly QA Reports, Newsletters and Learning Presentations.

6. What difference are we making - Outcomes for Children/Young People:

This section describes our approach to gathering the views and experiences of children and young people and their parents and carers, so we can understand the impact of our services, areas of practice to celebrate and areas for improvement.

6.1 There is a range of activity to gather views from children and their families, these are:

- Feedback within Case File Audits
- Feedback within the Assessment/Case Closure feedback calls
- Targeted Feedback Reports
- Mid-Way Audits
- End of Placement Feedback
- Have Your Say – virtual feedback opportunities

Findings and Learning from Service User Feedback is reported within the bi-annual Quality Assurance Reports & Voice of the Child Reports.

6.2 Worcestershire Webstar

We want to know if the work we do with children and their families is making a positive difference to them feeling happy, healthy, and safe. We have developed Worcestershire WebStar to engage with families and enable them to tell us their view about certain areas in their lives, we will do this with both children and their parents. We will do this at the beginning of our work and again at the end, for some families we may also do this at a mid-way review.

Findings will feature in our quarterly reporting & Voice of the Child Reports, learning is shared through Newsletters and Learning Presentations.

6.3 Learning from Compliments and Complaints:

It is a requirement of Children's Act 1989 and National Health Service Act 1990 for local authorities to establish a procedure for representations for complaints, compliments, or comments. The statutory complaints procedure can be used by service users, carers, or their representatives. Compliments are accepted from external sources. This includes service users, parents, carers, and other organisations. To promote identification of good practice IROs/CP Chairs can formally record a Practice Acknowledgement on a child's record for good practice using – they record this using the Practice Acknowledgement form and an alert is sent to the Team Manager.

An explanation of the process for compliments, comments and complaints including the three stage complaints procedure is available on the Council's website, the guidance can be read here: [Children's Social Care - Make a Compliment, Comment or a Complaint | Worcestershire County Council](#)

The Consumer Relations Officer offers help and advice to staff about the process through training sessions. Advice to staff about the handling of complaints is provided when/if required.

Advocacy services are available to support Children and Young People wishing to make a complaint – this service is commissioned by WCF and is provided by Coram Voice.

Information is collated from complaints and compliments for Quarterly and Annual Reports. Specific learning is shared through the Principal Social Worker Newsletter and issues relating to individual staff capability or competency will be taken up by the relevant line manager through supervision or when necessary other formal processes. Complaints are tracked jointly between Senior Managers and CRU in a joint tracker.

7. Workforce Development

Our workforce is our most valuable-asset in successfully delivering services that make a positive difference for our families in Worcestershire. We strive to be the 'employer of choice' for children's services staff, and we approach this through a culture that values the impact that our staff have in improving children's lives. We have high expectations and have created the conditions where professional expertise is valued and can flourish.

As a company our overall aim is to build a workforce with the personal and collective resilience to drive us forward in these challenging times, to develop our staff, give them clear career pathways, and provide them with the leadership, skills, and knowledge they need now and, in the future, to deliver excellent services to the children, young people and families in Worcestershire.

We are delighted to see that Worcestershire is ranked 1st in the region and 12th nationally in a survey completed by social workers against the refreshed 2020 employer standards, in the review commissioned by the Local Government Association in 2021. Our Workforce Vision ensures that, as a service, we continue to have strong front-line management and that we

have the capacity and ability to flex in response to changes that are inevitable, whilst keeping a good level of stability and quality. Our strategy will be managed and monitored through our WCF Workforce Board and is supported by financial investment and through staff feedback and performance reviews.

Our Workforce Strategy has five key priorities, they are:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Recruitment & Retention
- Diversity & Culture
- Leadership & Management
- Building Skills for the Future

8. Governance

There are a range of Governance Structures over Early Help Quality Assurance in Worcestershire Children First, these are:

8.1 Ofsted

Ofsted is the regulatory body that has responsibility for the inspection of our:

- Children's Homes
- Fostering and Adoption Service
- Private Fostering Arrangements
- Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services, including Services to Care Leavers

These inspections will consider key aspects of a child's journey through the social care system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person and the effectiveness of the help and protection they are offered. The inspections are intended to identify areas of strength and for further development.

8.2 Self-Evaluation Framework

Worcestershire is committed to the production of an annual self-assessment as part of its learning cycle. This process enables the organisation to understand the progress being made over a 12-month period and to inform its annual business planning cycle. Our Self Evaluation Cycle will commence in April and the final report will be produced in September each year.

8.3 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership

The Partnership has a crucial role in understanding multi-agency practice and quality assuring this; the Quality Assurance Practice & Procedures Group (QAPP) takes this responsibility and reports directly to the Executive Group of the Partnership. Link to the Partnership: [WSCP - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](https://www.wscpsafeguardingboards.org.uk)

QAPP evaluate the effectiveness of Early Help through the monitoring of multi-agency KPIs, Multi-Agency Auditing Activity and feedback from children & families, but also partner agencies across the Safeguarding system.

8.4 Overview and Scrutiny

The role of Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is to provide challenge to support service improvement and sustaining this improvement. The group forms part of the governance arrangements within the Council and receives performance information via a Dashboard on the key information to enable it to provide support and challenge.

8.5 Corporate Parenting Board

Data is generally provided to the Corporate Parenting Board as part of thematic reports presented by managers. This allows the Board to look in more detail at specific aspects of the Council's work with looked after children, with context and analysis included as part of the report.

For example, the Independent Reviewing Officer's annual report includes information on looked after children and information about the timeliness and participation in reviews. Other areas where thematic reports have been or will be presented include Care Leavers, Placements, Virtual School, and Adoption/Fostering which will include the relevant data sets.

8.6 Worcestershire Children First Board:

As a wholly owned Council Company, WCF has a contractual relationship with Worcestershire County Council to provide statutory children's services.

These contractual arrangements, between Council and Company, are overseen by a Quarterly Review Board and a Performance and Commissioning Group to ensure contract compliance, within the terms of reference of the Company Board (appendix 1)

Our contractual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as shown in appendix 1 hold WCF to account for delivering social care, early help and education services. Similarly, we monitor support from 'buy back' services through Support Service Agreements (SSA's)*. The formalities are managed day to day by WCC's Commissioning and Partnership Management function, working positively and proactively with WCF's Resources Directorate. The relationship is based on partnership, support, challenge, evidence, and achievement of outcomes. During the COVID-19 pandemic the contract performance arrangements were paused recognising that services needed to prioritise the emergency response, however regular performance and financial updates are provided to the Council and elected members. There has been a continued, strong, effective working relationship between WCC and WCF which goes far beyond the formal contractual monitoring arrangements, and these add the most value to improving outcomes for children and young people.

The WCF board consists of 12 Executive and Non-Executive Directors with a wealth of public sector expertise in supporting families and communities. Executive Directors are those employed by WCF to lead and manage delivery functions and teams, whilst Non-Executive Directors do not have responsibility for day-to-day operations but provide input and challenge via Board meetings and sub-board meetings throughout the year.

To maintain rigour, WCF's internal governance takes the form of monthly WCF Board meetings (with an Annual General Meeting and every third Board meeting held in public when conditions allow). Additionally, there are two subgroups reporting into the Board of Directors focusing on improvement of services.

The Quality Assurance Board

The Quality Assurance Board typically meets four times a year (or more frequently if required) and oversees the quality and performance of our front-line services in improving outcomes for children. This includes actively seeking the views and opinions of children and young people on the impact our interventions have had on their lives and how we continuously learn and improve to be even better.

The Risk Governance and Audit Board

The Risk Governance and Audit Board typically meets three times a year (or more frequently if required) and maintains an oversight of our governance, risk management, internal control, and value for money framework. This Board ensures strategic compliance, management, and performance of WCF as a whole with an unwavering focus on children and young people at the heart of our Company's purpose. Internally, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), who are responsible on a day-to-day basis for running the business, meet regularly to ensure service improvement continues with momentum, and to ensure all areas of WCF have strategic oversight. Regular reporting and monitoring impacts positively on outcomes for children and young people and is the core and demonstrable Company purpose. Their ambition for Worcestershire Children First is to be rated as 'Good' in provision of services.

9. Review of the Framework:

This Framework will be reviewed on an annual basis and amended accordingly.

Tina Russell
Chief Executive WCF & DCS

Date: February 2022