

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 24 MAY 2023

WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST INDEPENDENT FOSTERING SERVICE OFSTED INSPECTION

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Assistant Director of Safeguarding Services have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection carried out in February 2023.

Background

2. WCF Independent Fostering Agency (WCFF) is an independent Fostering Agency and was registered on 1 October 2019. The Fostering services were previously part of Worcestershire County Council (the Council). However when WCF was formed, the fostering services were required to form as an independent Fostering Agency and as such are subject to a separate Ofsted inspection.
3. WCFF offers emergency, short and long-term foster care placement to children in care. The carers include mainstream carers and connected persons otherwise known as kinship.
4. The agency provides placements to children in the care of the Council/WCF only.
5. During Ofsted Inspections, WCFF as an Independent Fostering Agency must meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011, and the Fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011. Ofsted use recommendations to indicate where practice can improve, and these are always related to the relevant NMS and regulation/s mentioned.
6. An Ofsted Inspection of WCFF took place between 20 - 24 September 2021 and received a judgement of 'Requires Improvement'. The inspection identified 9 Requirements and 4 Recommendations that needed to be addressed for WCFF to improve. The Service has since received a further inspection from 6 – 10 February 2023 (the link to the Inspection Report is included as Appendix 1) and is pleased to report that overall, the Inspection judgement given was "Good".

Fostering Service Improvement Plan following the 2021 Ofsted Inspection

7. To address the requirements and recommendations raised in the 2021 Ofsted Inspection report, a Fostering Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was developed. The Level 1 "plan on a page" (attached at Appendix 2) and a more detailed document, the Level 2 Plan sitting below it (at Appendix 3) outlines milestone activity and measures.
8. The SIP was overseen by the Assistant Director - Permanency – Care Proceedings, Fostering & Adoption (Responsible Individual).

9. There were 7 workstreams in the Action Plan:

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

10. A Fostering Team Manager was identified as a Lead for each workstream and all workstreams had a membership to include children, young people, carers and staff.

11. Progress and activity were tracked during a monthly WCFF Fostering Service Managers meeting, where any issues/risks were escalated as required and managed to ensure outcomes and deadlines were met.

12. Progress reports on each of the workstreams were made available to WCF Executive under the monthly executive business planning Programme, and to the WCF Board meetings on a quarterly basis.

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

14. The Fostering Plan is not submitted to or agreed by Ofsted. The Ofsted Inspection in February 2023 reviewed recommendations from the September 2021 Inspection as a primary focus but not exclusive focus.

15. A summary of progress can be seen in the table below. All other actions within the Fostering Improvement Plan have been completed.

Workstream (WS)	Completed
WS1: Safer Caring Plans & Risk Assessments	Safer Caring Plans and Risk Assessments data added to the WCFF Performance Dashboard.
WS2: Notifiable Events	Audit completed of active allegations against carers/Schedule 7 events. WCFF current schedule 6/7 notifiable events policy and forms reviewed and updated.
WS3: Fostering Information & Performance Dashboard	Statement of Purpose updated and published. Foster Care Register developed and embedded. Complaints and Compliments Policy updated and published. Complaints and Compliments Tracker developed and embedded.

WS4: Safer Recruitment, Foster Carers & Workforce Development	Safer Recruitment: Audit of all existing WCFF staff HR files to identify gaps/missing information completed. WCFF Safer Recruitment Policy and guidance agreed for implementation.
WS5: Voice of the Child	Quarterly meetings arranged with Who Cares We Care Forum to positively engage with Children and Young People. Practice Standard implemented for Fostering SW to complete regular Direct Work sessions with Children in foster care placements.
WS6: Foster Carer Recruitment, Assessment & Support	Reviewed all marketing and promotional materials hard copies and online. Reviewed current assessment process focusing on the journey of the Foster Carer. WCFF Recruitment Strategy launched. Launched Carer Ambassador Scheme to support Foster Carer's, incorporating the Voice of the Carer.
WS7: Approval & Matching Foster Carers	WCFF Carer Agreement updated and launched. Review the ADM Process completed. ADMs invited to upcoming Fostering Panel as opportunity to observe and learn.

Ofsted Inspection Report 2023

16. During the 5-day inspection in February 2023, inspectors recognised that good progress had been made in areas of the service identified for improvement in the last (and first) inspection in September 2021 and all requirements had been met.

17. Inspectors reported that the overall experiences of children and young people are "Good" and the level at which they are helped and protected were also "Good." The Inspection noted the importance of recruiting a Registered Manager for the independent agency but noted interim management and leadership had been effective and had led to the improvement. The Registered Manager has been recruited to and will be in post in July 2023.

18. The Inspection of fostering services is reviewed in three key areas, and each is graded independently with an overall judgement reached.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account:	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires Improvement to be Good
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Purpose of the Meeting

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

- Note the outcome of the WCFF Fostering Service full Ofsted Inspection (February 2023) and the Worcestershire Children First Fostering Improvement Plan progress.
- Consider whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families; and
- Determine whether any further information or Scrutiny is required.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – WCFF Fostering Ofsted Inspection Report 6 - 10 February 2023
[Link to Inspection report](#)
- Appendix 2 - WCFF Independent Fostering Agency Improvement Level One Plan 2021- 22
- Appendix 3 - WCFF Independent Fostering Agency Improvement Level Two Plan 2021 - 22

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

[Agenda for Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on Wednesday, 23rd February, 2022](#)

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