

Feedback from the Safeguarding Children Peer Review

As you are aware, the County Council recently asked for a Local Government Association (LGA) facilitated Safeguarding Children Peer Review to take place as part of our desire to be a learning organisation. This review consisted of a team of external colleagues working in the field from local authorities and relevant bodies acting as 'critical friends' to help us evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and our focus on priorities. Ahead of the review we identified key areas that the County Council wanted the reviewers to focus on. These included:

- Have we got the right structures, systems, processes and management focus to deliver children's social care services moving forward?
- Are the current strategies and plans for improvement having impact?
- A view on corporate support for children's safeguarding.
- The quality of front-line practice specifically focusing on how the front door is working.
- A view on the multi-agency partnerships and partners engagement with supporting the improvement of outcomes for children and families.

The reviewers spent time with senior managers, front-line staff, members and partners to have open and honest conversations about our services and how we protect and support children and families in Worcestershire. They identified the following key points in their feedback:

Key strengths

- We have a committed workforce who are keen to make a difference to children and families.
- We have an overall sound strategy and backing from the whole council to make any necessary changes within our service.
- From observations made during their visit, timely decision making at the Access Centre was found and there is good evidence of the rationale of decision making.
- There are many examples of how our work is having a good impact. For example, the POD social work model in our schools, our in-house social worker recruitment drive and the Stronger Families programme.
- We have strong and committed partners and tangible examples of partner engagement.
- We have prioritised resources and there is a commitment within our financial strategy to address cost pressures within children's services.

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Key areas for consideration

- Our social care practice is open to further improvement to help keep children safe moving forward.
- Our Family Front Door needs simplifying and there needs to be a clearer understanding of where the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub will fit in.
- We need to look at the difference between the Worcestershire-wide early help strategy and the council commissioned early help services.
- The Health and Well-being Board could do more to add a unique children's focus in their current strategy.
- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) requires more pace and scrutiny, with some multi-agency areas slow to develop.
- We need to further develop consistent financial projections based on forecast demand and complexity.

It is important as a Council we immediately address these areas, again demonstrating we can learn from the review's findings. Therefore with this valuable feedback, we are now going to focus on the following:

- Renewing our focus on safeguarding practice to demonstrate absolute compliance and seek to achieve excellence.
- Addressing confusion about the Family Front Door.
- Creating detailed forecasts to enable a robust financial plan and;
- Reviewing and defining the role of Early Help.

Whilst all of the above will not be achieved in coming days, it will require us to step up our pace and focus in these areas. The reviewers also identified potential 'quick wins' for us to consider and there are a number of actions our teams will now develop and implement. The progress against these will be reported via existing governance arrangements, through the Worcestershire Children's Safeguarding Board and the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel.

Finally, I wanted to thank those of you who have contributed to our Peer Review. It can be hard sometimes to hear challenging feedback but essential if we are to learn and improve. A very clear message from the review is that we have staff that are committed and capable of delivering these improvements and I am confident that we can make these necessary changes. I know you will all support us to us to move into focused action, do the things that need doing and positively move away from activities and debates that further complicate or distract us from this.

Regards,

Gail Quinton
Director of Children's Services

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