



# WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST BUSINESS PLAN

April 2021 - March 2022

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# 1. FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce the Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Business Plan for 2021/22. This follows the first full year of operation of Worcestershire Children First as a wholly owned council Company and further builds upon our vision, mission and values. With a single unwavering focus on services for Worcestershire's children and young people, WCF are committed to delivering good early help, social care and education services that improve outcomes for children and their families.

Last year, 2020/21, saw significant challenges for us all, where we collectively responded and adapted to unprecedented national change and unpredictable events. We have a dedicated responsibility to ensure our statutory duties to children and young people are fulfilled and we are so proud to have seen the commitment of our workforce to support children, young people, their parents, carers and their families in our communities.

The year ahead will continue to bring further demands and challenges as we undertake recovery and re-set of our services. We will take learning from our experiences and we remain committed to innovation and improvement.

Our Business Plan for 2021/22 sets out our priorities to ensure Worcestershire's children and young people are happy, healthy and safe and how we will work with stakeholders and partners across the county and region to achieve against our vision and mission.

Our work has been proven to be innovative to improve outcomes and deliver value for money within our financial resources. In 2020 we have welcomed early help and learning and achievement services into the company. This strengthens our collaborative work as a company and will provide new opportunities as we develop and deliver services to all children and those most in need.

I would like to thank our staff who do their very best for children and young people, making a real difference to their lives and who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. We would also like to recognise and thank the valuable and essential support of our partners in our work.



**Rob Morrison**

**Chair, Worcestershire Children First**



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First and foremost, we would like to recognise and thank the children, young people and their parents and carers who have worked with us in this past year to help us in our mission to make children happy, healthy and safe. The strength and commitment they have shown, to work through the difficulties that life can present, and to make lives better for the children and young people they love and care for has been amazing.

We would also like to thank our staff and our partners who do their very best for children and young people in Worcestershire, making a real difference to their lives and who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. That commitment and passion is never unnoticed or undervalued.

You will see that following the **Foreword** from our Company Chair, our **Introduction** reminds us all of the vision and mission we have set ourselves as a company to ensure Worcestershire is a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up in, and our mission to ensure they are all happy healthy and safe. We remain committed to these values; to keep children at the heart of everything we do, value family life, provide good education for all, and protect children from harm. This continues to underpin the way we work.

We have included again our **Organisational Structure, Governance and Strategic Goals** for the first five years, so, as you would imagine this section reads similar to that of our business plan of last year.

There is of course the fundamental change in the person holding the Chief Executive role, as Catherine Driscoll has left us in February 2021, but outside of that significant change, the rest of the governance and structure remains the same giving us stability and consistency as a company.

Introducing our **Business Planning – Improvement and Development for 2021/22** sets out the changes in what we are prioritising as we go forward. What is important for us now is to continue the sustainability of improvement. Whilst this is our second year of the company, for many of our improvements this is year three or four in our evolving journey.

As well as sustaining improvement, we want to continue to develop as outlined in the priorities within the Worcestershire Children First Overarching Priorities 2021/22 plan on a page:

- How we are **Working in Partnership with Worcestershire County Council** (WCC) as a wholly owned council company
- How we work within the company of **WCF – A whole service working together** as an entity across the early help, education, and social care agenda
- How we will continue to support **Our Workforce – Our Foundation** who are of course fundamental to us achieving both sustainability and ongoing improvement and development.

**Working in Partnership with WCC (Worcestershire County Council)** we recognise in our plan not just our own priorities and vision for what we want to achieve for children and families but how important it is for people to see those children and families as members of the Worcestershire community. The WCC priorities, COVID-19 Response - One Worcestershire, Open for Business, The Environment and Health and Wellbeing are as important for the children and families that we work with as they are for the whole Worcestershire community.

To thrive our children and their families need to have access to economic opportunity, accessible education and employment, to live in an environment that is a good place to live and grow up as a family and the physical and mental health of this younger generation is what is key to reducing need and demand in any long term plan. We will be working alongside WCC key developments to ensure the voice and needs of children, young people and their families are taken into account and that we take advantage of opportunities to develop our own services. A key WCF/WCC service development initiative is the development of an **All Age Disability Experience** through integrated services for children, young people and young adults 0-25 who have additional needs.



Within the first year of WCF, we have been joined by a number of services across early help and education and we have also had the opportunity to establish the foundation of being a company, and most recently review the initial organisational structures that we put in place.

Now we are in a strong position to pull together key strands as **WCF - A whole service working together** across early help education and social care for example with **Vulnerable Learners**, and we have some companywide developments in **WCF Quality Assurance and Commissioning**.

Our final overarching company priority **Our Workforce - Our Foundation** who are fundamental in promoting good practice.

2020/21 has been the year of the COVID-19 pandemic and yet despite all the additional workload and pressures in demand, we have maintained good quality services evidenced in our quarterly reporting and our particularly strong response in both social care and education provision.

**Our Directorate Service Priorities** sets out the priority plans for **Social Care & Safeguarding** and for **Education & Early Help Directorate services**. This is presented as visual plans on a page, identifying operational delivery priorities for the year ahead.

For social care that is how we plan to develop our work with Children in Need (CIN), those subject to Child Protection plans (CP) and those Children Looked After and Care Leavers (CLA&CL):

- CIN: Prevention / managing risk in the family and in the community, learning from the positive outcomes achieved in our strengthening families first approach,
- CP: Focus on specialist interventions at an earlier stage to prevent risk escalating and into the need for care and repeat care,
- CLA & CL: Focused on improving the care experience through sufficiency in placements and supporting the emotional health and well-being of these children facing additional vulnerabilities of separation.

For Education & Early Help it is how we:

- Plan for future education sufficiency,
- Continue the SEND Improvement Plan,
- Develop Early Help at a universal level and with partners,
- Develop the Quality Assurance of understanding ourselves and the impact we are making.

We have set out how we will manage **Finance** and deliver our services within our allocated budget agreed by WCC. Our plan emphasises the need to ensure we always achieve best value and evidence how our financial spend and investment is making a difference to the lives of children and young people.

Thank you for your interest and taking the time to read the Business Plan for Worcestershire Children First's second year.



**Tina Russell**

**Interim Chief Executive, Worcestershire Children First**

# 3. INTRODUCTION

## Worcestershire Children First Business Plan

Worcestershire Children First (WCF) was launched in October 2019 with a commitment to delivering good quality services to children and young people in Worcestershire as part of the multi-agency commitment made in the current **Children & Young People’s Plan**. Although WCF is operationally independent, we work closely with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to deliver our services on their behalf including the statutory duties and responsibilities as set out in legislation.

Putting children at the heart of everything we do is our “golden thread”. Our purpose, priorities, vision and values permeate throughout our Company’s business; from our Board, strategic leadership, operational plans to frontline delivery of services to the children and families.

## Vision, Mission and Values

### OUR VISION

Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up.



WORCESTERSHIRE  
CHILDREN FIRST

### OUR MISSION

Supporting children and young people to be happy, healthy and safe.

## OUR VALUES



### CHILDREN AT OUR HEART

We will keep children and young people at the heart of everything we do



### VALUE FAMILY LIFE

We will support and empower parents to care for their own children well



### GOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL

We will value education as the best start in life for all children and young people



### PROTECTION FROM HARM

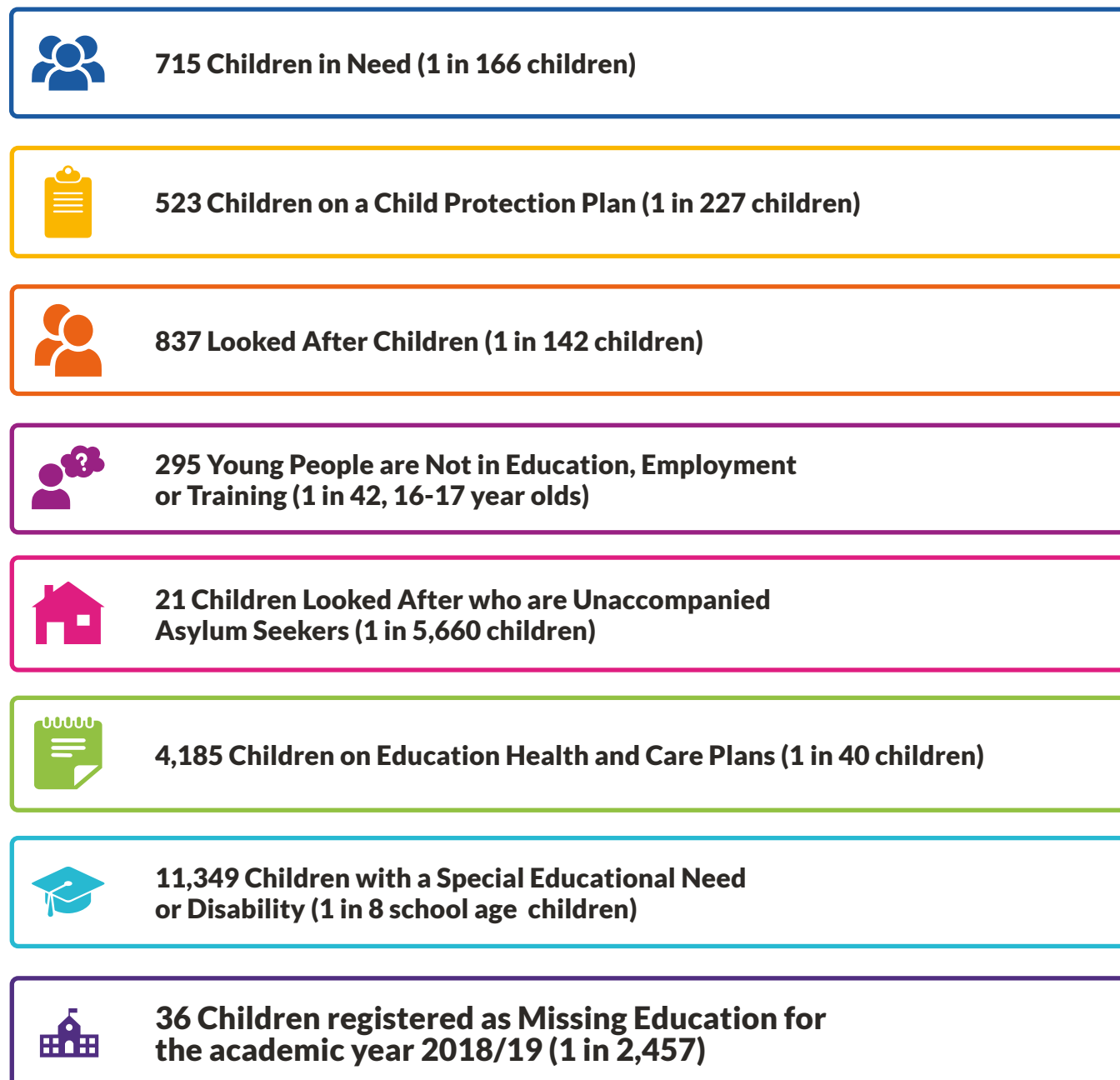
We will act in a professional and timely way to protect children from harm



## Worcestershire Context

Worcestershire has 167,113<sup>1</sup> children and young people aged 0-25. The county is a mix of rural and urban areas with pockets of deprivation where health outcomes are worse than in other areas. WCF provides services to all children and young people but has a specific focus on those who are vulnerable.

Current numbers of children and young people with levels of vulnerability are shown below:



All figures from WCF in-year monitoring as at 31st December 2020 except Children with SEND:

[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2020](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2020)

Rates calculated against ONS Mid-year population estimates June 2020 and Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019/20.

1 **Source:** UK Mid-Year Population Estimates June 2020: [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland)





WCF will relentlessly focus on providing services to the most vulnerable children and young people pre-birth to 25 years of age (for care leavers and those with special educational needs and disabilities). We will work strategically with WCC and NHS partners to support young people to reach independent and fulfilled adult lives. As part of Worcestershire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) we work as a partnership to identify the known needs of our communities. At this current time this also takes into account emerging needs from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Working in Partnership

Children's Services as part of 'Working Together 2018' have a duty, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Local authorities have a duty to make sure that every child whose education they are responsible for is able to access "adequate and efficient" education. Under the Additional Support for Learning Act, there are duties to make sure that children and young people get the additional support for learning they need to reach their full potential.

As a company delivering statutory services on behalf of Worcestershire County Council we will ensure we fulfil these duties and responsibilities. We will do this as a learning organisation and we will work with children, their families and our partners to understand ourselves and the difference we are making.

In the delivery of our wider children's services we recognise and value the essential contribution of our partnership, this includes:

- Children, young people, their families and carers
- Schools and Education providers across Worcestershire from early years through to further education settings
- Worcestershire County Council
- West Mercia Police
- Hereford and Worcester Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG)
- NHS provider trusts and GPs
- District Councils
- Voluntary sector services
- Independent providers

Through a wide range of strategic and operational multiagency forums, we will work together to improve the lives of children and young people in our community, striving to ensure they are happy, healthy and safe, whether they are in their family or in our care.

## 4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC GOALS

### WCF Board Structure and External Governance

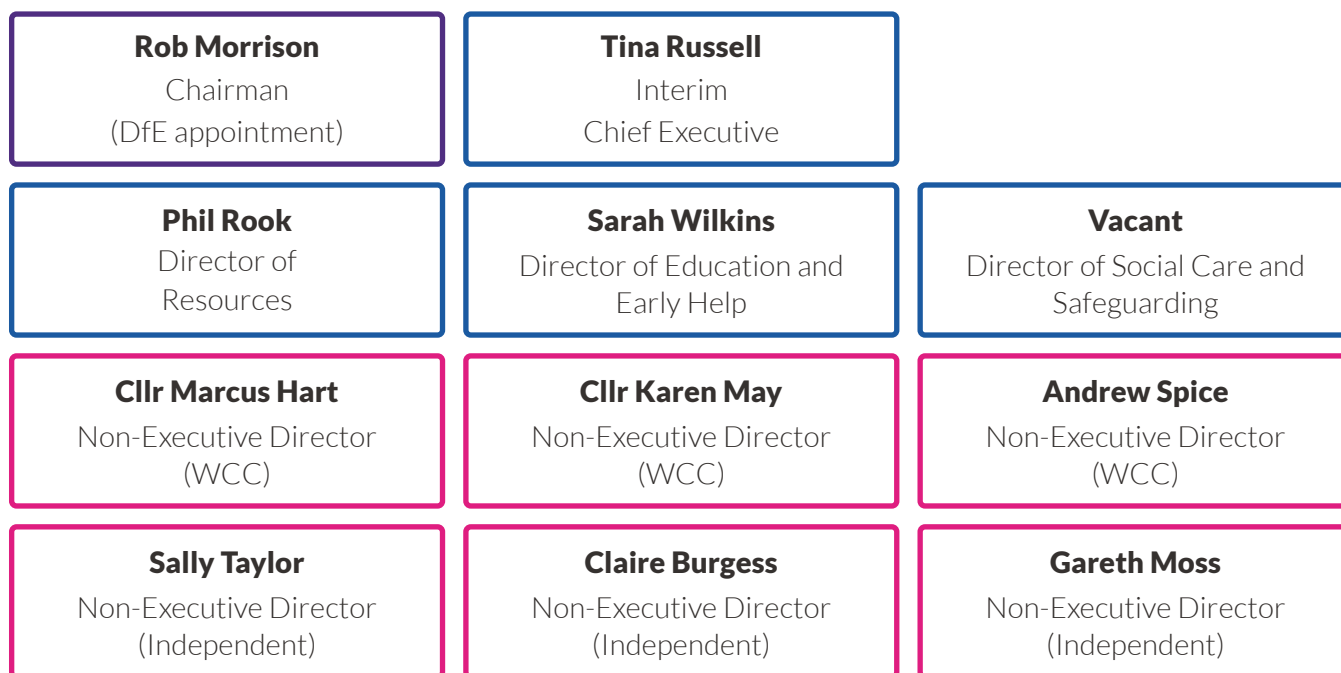
As a wholly owned Council Company, WCF has a contractual relationship with Worcestershire County Council to provide statutory children's services. WCF have a 'buy back' arrangement of 14 corporate support services, delivered by the Council with legal agreements.

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 2** 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.

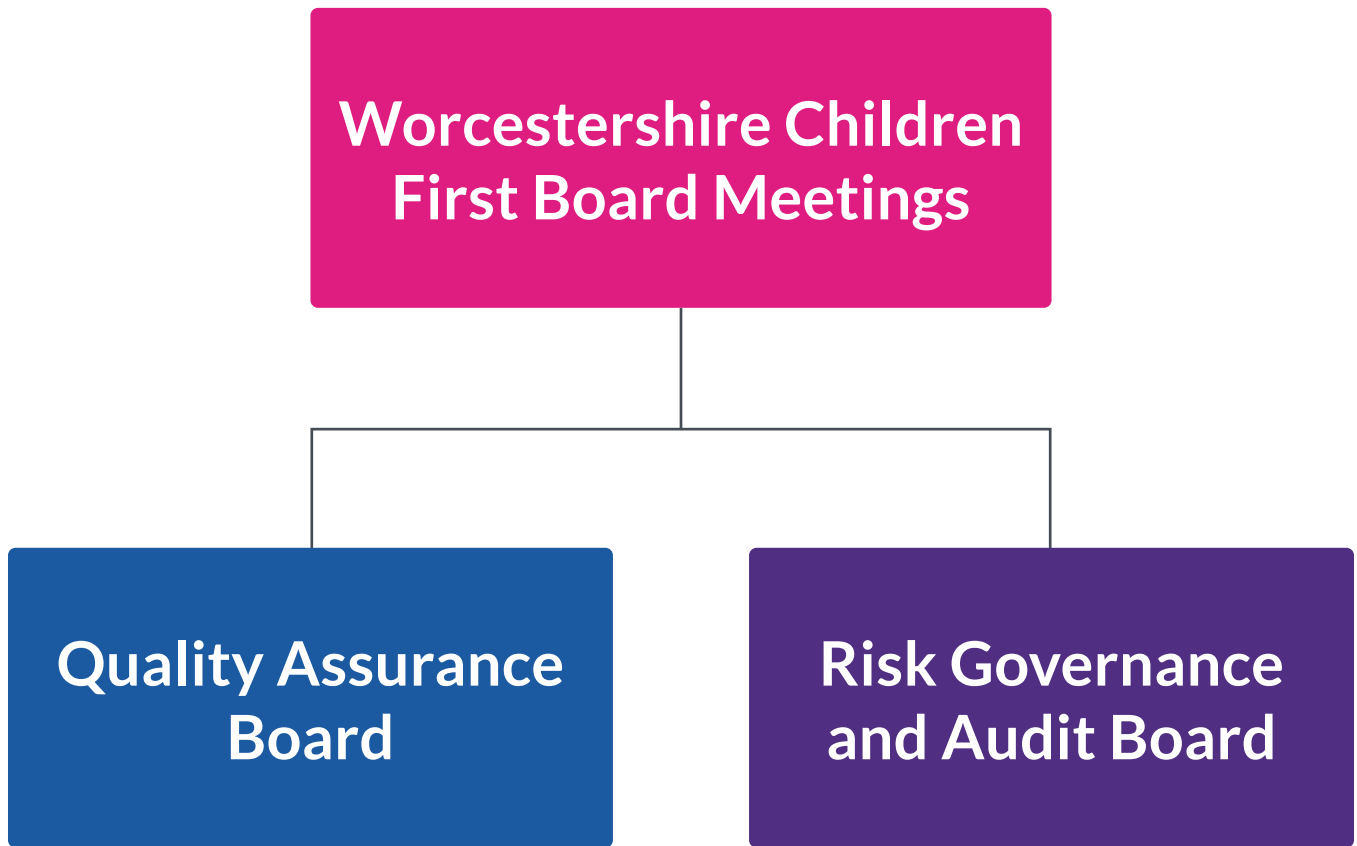
The WCF board consists of 11 Executive and Non-Executive Directors with a wealth of public sector expertise in supporting families and communities. Executive Directors are those employed by WCF to lead and manage delivery functions and teams, whilst Non-Executive Directors do not have responsibility for day to day operations but provide input and challenge via Board meetings and sub-board meetings throughout the year.

The governance structure for the Board of Worcestershire Children First can be seen in the diagram below:



(■ (Pink) denotes Non-Executive Director; ■ (Dark Blue) represents Executive Director.  
The Chairman of the Board is a DfE appointment ■ (Purple))

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.

**Each year we will share our company achievement and challenges through our public meetings. This will be an opportunity for our stakeholders, young people, staff and the public to feedback on company performance and inform services.**

## Directorate Structures and Internal Organisational Structure

Under the Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First, sit three directorates with specific service provision and dedicated focus:

- Social Care and Safeguarding
  - » Family Front Door and Partnerships (the assessment of children in need of support, care and protection)
  - » Locality Safeguarding (planning for children in need of support and protection)
  - » Through Care & Sufficiency (care and placement planning for children who are looked after and care leavers)
  - » Quality Assurance, Independent Review and the Principal Social Worker (monitoring the effectiveness, quality and timeliness of services through audit, key performance measures and service user feedback)
- Education and Early Help
  - » Forecasting and planning to ensure enough good education places for children
  - » Admissions, Governor Services and supporting School Improvement
  - » Supporting schools, education and early years settings to promote welfare and safeguard children
  - » Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) assessment, planning, review and support services
  - » Vulnerable Learners – virtual school for looked after children and inclusion services
  - » Early Help Partnerships, Early Intervention and Participation
- Resources
  - » HR & OD
  - » Funding and Policy for Schools management of Schools Forum
  - » Financial Management
  - » Management Information
  - » Strategic Business, Transformation & Commissioning
  - » Traded Services for Education

For more detail service structure charts can be found in **appendix 3**.

## Quality Assurance and Scrutiny

We promote and engage with rigorous internal and external scrutiny and quality assurance (QA) mechanisms, to ensure we deliver high-quality service provision through:

- WCC Corporate Parenting Board
- WCC Children and Young People's Scrutiny
- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- SEND Improvement Board

In 2021-22 WCF will be pro-actively preparing for recommencement of Ofsted and DfE Regulatory inspections for children's local authority services following the suspension of this activity during COVID-19. This includes:

- Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)
- Residential Children's Homes
- Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)
- Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)
- Regulatory inspections of Schools
- Local area SEND
- Adoption Service

This collective framework ensures that arrangements:

- Have a continuous focus on service improvement at all levels of the organisation
- Embed a culture of learning from quality assurance and performance management
- Show the difference we are making to the lives of children and young people

## WCF Quality Assurance Framework

Our Quality Assurance Framework has three dimensions:

- **Key Performance Indicators** - Analysis of our business and performance information on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis
- **Feedback from Children, Young People and Families** - We are committed to understanding and learning from the experience of our children young people and families. We have a comprehensive service user feedback programme in each area of business and a WCF compliments and complaints service
- **Audit Activity** - Completing thematic and case-file audits (multi-agency included)

We have developed and embedded this framework throughout our services to help us answer the important questions of how our services are being experienced by children, young people and their families and what difference we are making to their lives.



**Feedback from Children, Young People and Families include:**

“You have easily been the most dedicated, determined, hardworking and thoughtful Social Worker we have experienced. You are always willing and able to push the people that need to be pushed and not let obstacles of any kind get in the way”

**(parent)**

“Thank you for all the support and hope you have given me through this process. But more importantly, the understanding and empathy you have shown which helped me move forward. You were never judgemental and were always compassionate”

**(parent)**

“Thank you for everything you’ve done for us – you are an amazing social worker”

**(child)**

“From the start you were always very professional and friendly, and although I was a little defensive at first, I did come to see that you wanted to help everyone involved, and had the children’s best interests at heart”

**(parent)**

“Things have just been so much better in recent years for care leavers”

**(Young Person to Corporate Parenting Board Feb 2021)**

“I am fortunate to have a very supportive school environment for my child.”

**(parent carer of a child with special educational needs and/or disability)**

“Overall we are pleased with how our son is treated when it comes to his SEN”

**(parent carer of a child with special educational needs and/or disability)**

“We have recently had support from a family support worker (X) from early help, and she has been amazing. She is organised, methodical and has provided so much support and problem solving. School have also been wonderful with managing my sons needs.”

**(parent carer of a child with special educational needs and/or disability)**

“I enjoyed my first day at the MET because everyone was nice and it made me feel comfortable”

**(child who attends provision of the Medical Education Team)**

**From Families who shared their feedback in 2020/21:**

- 93% of families reported that the Social Worker spoke to the child or young person and listened to their views
- 95% of families reported that they were given opportunities to share their views
- 100% of children who gave us feedback told us that they felt listened to by their worker (Family Support, Social Worker or Personal Advisor)

**Ofsted said of the QA Framework adopted by WCF**

“The local authority has implemented a quality assurance system and has established a range of performance information, allowing senior managers to better understand its practice. Auditing of work is undertaken on a regular basis and is strengthened by a moderation system that gives the local authority a clear understanding of practice compliance”

## Strategic Goals - Five Year Plan

Our ambition is to make a positive and sustained difference to the lives of children young people and families and to be able to provide a wide range of evidence to support this achievement. The diagram below provides a visual representation of how we plan to develop and improve our services for children, young people and their families over the next five years, and will guide our work in 21/22 (our second full year in operation):

### Year 1 and 2

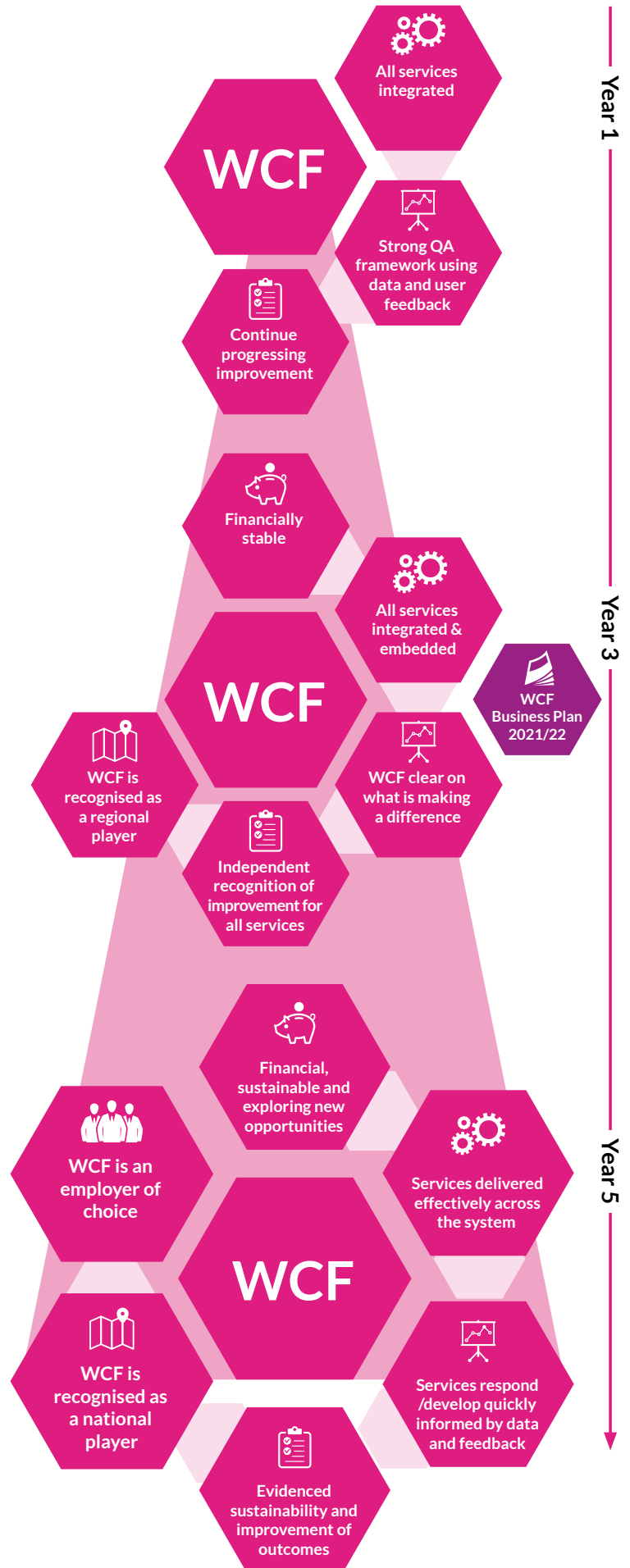
- Service user feedback indicates WCF is making a positive difference to CYPF
- Working under WCF Brand
- Building stable and productive teams, culture and behaviours
- Social care rated Requires Improvement (at point of transfer)
- Commissioner/Provider separation
- Support services tested and operational
- Demonstrate credentials with existing parties and children, young people and families

### Year 3 and 4

- Increasing co-creation with children, young people and families
- Work effectively and efficiently within financial envelope
- Evidence of improved outcomes
- Embedding new culture
- Review opportunities for growth within existing services
- Wider strategic relationships developed
- Gain independent recognition of improvement and performance

### Year 5

- Achieve sustainability and potentially explore new commercial opportunities
- Improved and evidenced outcomes
- Effective and responsive development
- Council and community are proud of WCF
- Begin review of commissioning intentions
- Integrated, effective partnership working across the system
- Support services sourced effectively

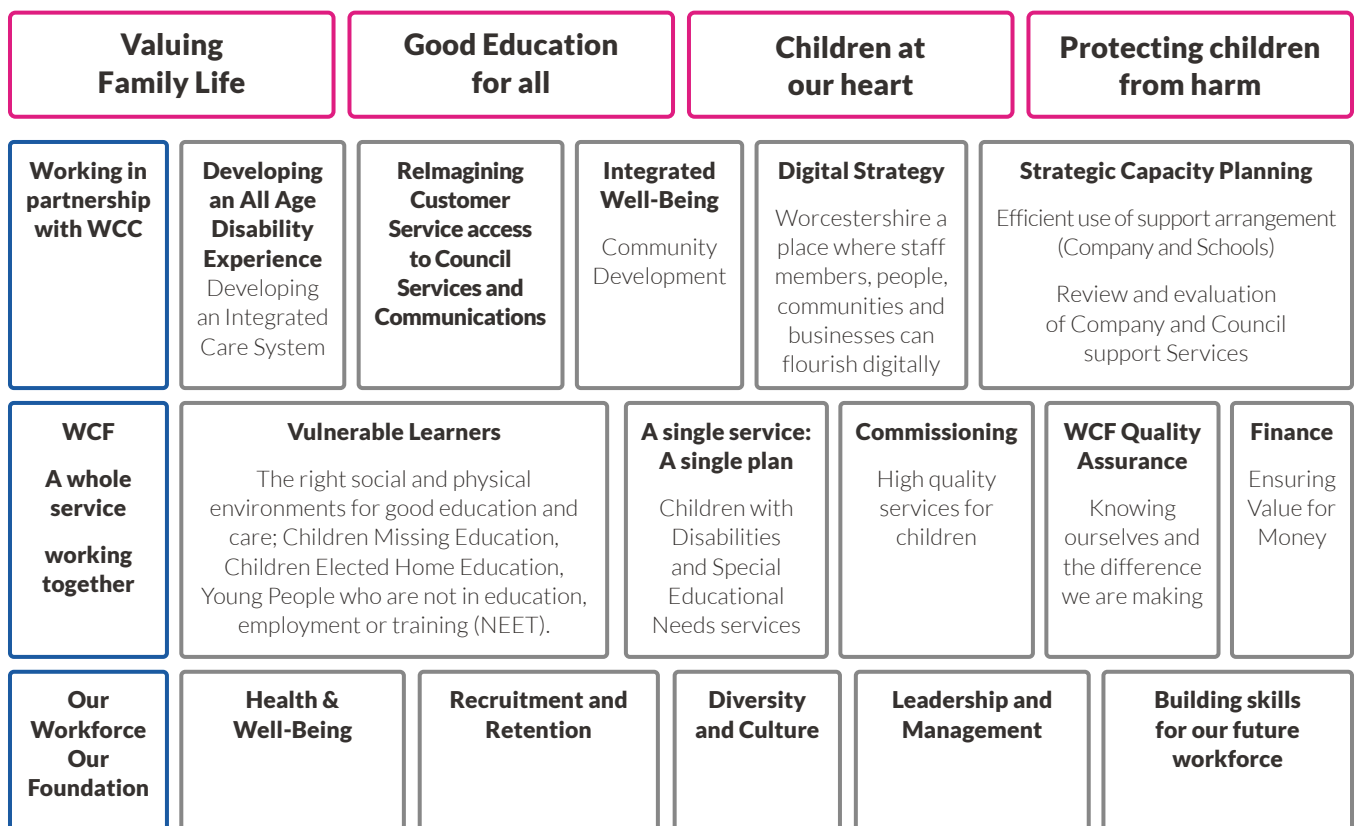


# 5. BUSINESS PLANNING - IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

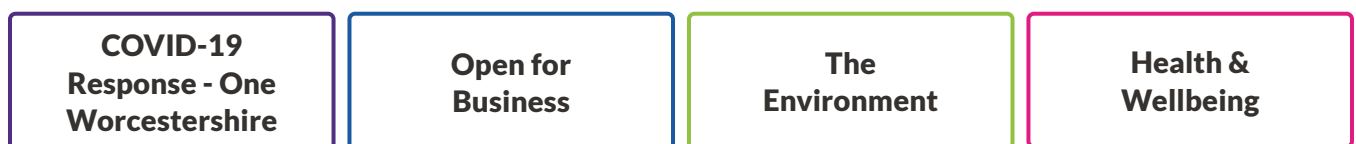
Worcestershire Children First Executive Leadership Team (ELT) are committed to providing the conditions for support, challenge and guidance across the organisation along with the essential organisational structure and monitoring to promote best practice. ELT, supported by the wider assistant director leadership, have prioritised the following company-wide strands to take the company development forward in its second year. These priorities draw on our reflections and achievements in year one and focus on our collaborative work with the council, our company developments across the Early Help Education and Social Care agenda and recognise a good quality workforce is a fundamental requirement to delivering good quality services.

## Worcestershire Children First Company Priorities 2021/22

### WCF Values:



### WCC Priorities:





## Working in Partnership with WCC

As a Council owned company WCF and WCC have an interdependent relationship through the contractual delivery of children's services by the company and 'bought back services from the Council. We acknowledge WCC Priorities in our Business Planning to ensure we align with core areas of focus and access opportunities available for collaboration with our key stakeholder. WCF also have service delivery links with the People Directorate in terms of adult social care, community development and public health.

We demonstrate our wider commitment to multi-agency working via membership at other strategic partnership groups including:

- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Health and Wellbeing Board and its Children and Young People Strategic Partnership
- Safer Communities Partnership
- Worcestershire County Domestic Abuse Forum
- SEND Improvement Board
- Education Partnerships

## Developing an All Age Disability Experience – Developing an Integrated Care System

WCF are working with WCC to develop an improved all age disability experience through provision of a joined up offer of support and coordination of services for those children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Our aim is to offer longer term life and independence planning for children and young people into adulthood without a sharp change in their support at transitional ages of 18 (social care) or 25 (education). Support will be planned early, with young people and their families/carers to ensure ongoing achievement and sustainment of their independence. This will be supported by our SEND Improvement and Strategy work and inform our commissioning needs for education and care. Our work will seek to embed arrangements for 'preparing for adulthood' from the earliest years, supporting young people with SEND to feel included in the community, achieve employment, experience independent living and have housing options, good health, friendships and relationships.

The corresponding benefit for both WCF and WCC is to ensure a better predictive understanding of plans for young people and assurance of ongoing costs and effective support and services of what they need when they get older. The expectation is longer-term financial benefits (still to be quantified) through aligned and joined up commissioning and provider arrangements across children's and adults social care, education and health, with further opportunity to review and ensure appropriate staffing in the new one service, that may offer further economies of scale.

## Reimagining Customer Service access to Council Services and Communications

We will work in partnership with the Council in reviewing our customer service experience and making improvements to meet the needs of Worcestershire's residents. Focusing on the digital accessibility, we will adopt effective customer service and utilise digital technology to ensure greater access and enhancement to our services.

## Integrated Well-Being – Community Development

WCF has supported the Here2Help service created by WCC in response to Covid-19. It has supported thousands of people in Worcestershire with emergency food parcels, medication collections, food collections and delivery. It has also grown the volunteering offer and strengthened relationships with districts, partners and the Voluntary Community Service, who have worked together to provide a One Worcestershire response.

Following the success of the service, WCC is now building on the opportunity to evolve the service into an Integrated Wellbeing Offer with a vision to offer all residents that are in need, early intervention and prevention, empowering and enabling people to find their own solutions within their community-led services to reduce the impact on statutory services.

By enabling community action, there will be the opportunity to create a more community strengthened/ asset-based approach to how Community/Voluntary Community Support is commissioned, supported and responds to meeting local need. This will include learning from the VCS and communities where gaps of support are, and identifying solutions with agencies and partners for areas such as health and wellbeing.

### **Digital Strategy - Worcestershire is a place where staff members, people, communities and businesses can flourish digitally**

WCF recognise the opportunities that present in WCC's Digital Strategy 2021-23 and fully support the digital vision to use modern technologies to fundamentally improve how we support our staff, communities, businesses and visitors. Digitalisation can enable the streamlining of delivery of our services so they can be provided in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible to our children, young people and families. During COVID-19 we have responded to the challenges of a more virtual world enabling remote working and altering our interactions with families and partners, we want to continue to maximise technology to provide enhanced digital services where appropriate.

### **Strategic Capacity Planning – Efficient use of support arrangements (Company and Schools), review and evaluation of Company and Council Support Services**

As part of the contractual arrangements between WCC and WCF, the company 'buy back' 14 corporate services from the Council to support its organisational functions and these include access to HR, Property, Health and Safety, Communications, Research, Legal and Project Management Services. To ensure best use of these services to meet WCF need, we will review and evaluate our usage and forecast our demands to work with Council colleagues who provide them. WCF as a customer also want to ensure engagement with service arrangements that are directly contracted by the Council (e.g. third parties).

During the period of COVID-19 response, all formal Council and Company contractual arrangements were suspended, however provision of services continued with an increase in some areas to support the logistical response to the pandemic. This included direct delivery of support to WCF, and schools as a key partner for educational settings. We will continue to provide enhanced services, regular communications and advice and support for schools as we reset and recover from the pandemic, and WCC services are a crucial part of this.



## **WCF – A whole service working together**

Our improvement journey began in 2016. Since that time we have focused on developing a culture of practice that ensures Children and Young People are at the heart of everything we do. During the development of the Company, we have fundamentally changed how we deliver children's services in Worcestershire from positive changes in systems, to structures and processes, to practice.

Following the transfer of Learning and Achievement services in June and Wyre Forest Early Intervention Family Support in October 2020, Worcestershire Children First now has the strength of fully integrated services for social care and education within the Company. The benefit of this ensures closer working relationships, supporting organisation objectives and sole accountability for the services provided to our Worcestershire families.

### **Vulnerable Learners – the right social and physical environments for good education and care; Children Missing Education, Children Elected Home Education, Young People who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).**

Whilst ensuring 'Good Education for All' as one of our Company Values and acknowledging that education gives the best start in life to all of our children and young people, WCF will focus on our vulnerable learners as a priority to ensure the right social and physical environments are available providing education and care for those children and young people most in need.

We will also have an increased focus on those children missing in education and those educated at home to ensure the educational opportunities and social experiences are sufficient to support their academic potential and holistic needs.

Vulnerable learners are a shared interest for both our Social Care and Safeguarding Services and Education and Early Help Directorates and as such we will have a joint approach as part of the business planning process to ensure we work across company effectively with our expertise and information sharing.

### **A single service: A single plan – Children with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs Services**

The thread of supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities features throughout our priorities and business planning for 2021/22, featuring in joint strategic WCC and Health collaborations of All Age Disability and SEND Improvement, and directorate statutory service provisions in both social care and education.

Assessment and planning forms the basis of our work and intervention of specialist support, applicable to those children in need, who require early help or social care intervention, or have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

WCF want to ensure the journey for our children, young people and their parents and carers is streamlined, understandable and meets their individual needs. Our priority on a single service and plan across our provision will focus on this experience, and promote co-production with families who know their children's needs well.

## Commissioning – High quality services for children

Within WCF we have a dedicated focus on commissioning high quality services for children and young people who need specific support for their needs, in line with our organisational values, vision and mission. In the year ahead we will ensure we:

- Work in partnership to proactively establish need and identify current gaps in provision for children and young people in Worcestershire
- Jointly commission and quality assure health, education and social care all age disability services, ensuring they reflect a timely preparation for adulthood
- Establish ways of increasing value for money within the available budget
- Implement a robust quality assurance framework to evidence positive outcomes and influence future commissioning intentions
- Implement a service-led model of commissioning
- Commit to adopting a co-production approach to the commissioning cycle

## WCF Quality Assurance – Knowing ourselves and the difference we are making

WCF's robust approach to Quality Assurance is described as part of our integral organisational structure. External Inspection provides us with a measure of what "good" looks like and we can incorporate learning into our own service development

We have developed a range of opportunities within our core business practice to ensure we ask children, young people and their parents how they have experienced our services and what difference our interventions have made. Whilst we have been open and proactive in learning from feedback and the experiences of others we know that it is through embedding our own Quality Assurance and Performance (QAP) Framework that we will find a true and current understanding of what we are doing, how well we are doing it and what we need to do differently to ensure we continue to develop and improve our services.

WCF will monitor from individual, team, and service areas, to the Directorate level, the performance of the organisation to enable us to identify gaps and areas for development. We will use this information to inform the development of services and strategies whilst having children and young people at the forefront of every decision made. Despite contract monitoring arrangements with WCC being paused during 2020/21 during the COVID-19 pandemic, our data collections and analysis have continued in order to inform current and future planning and ongoing revision to service protocols.

## Finance – Ensuring Value for Money

In all the services we provide, WCF will ensure that we continually review and prioritise our resources within tighter budgets. By achieving cost reductions, improving efficiencies and streamlining the way we deliver our services, we ensure we target our resources to maximise outcomes for children and families. Our work with WCC and wider partners allows for joined-up opportunities and the best use of effective resources.

## Our Workforce – Our Foundation

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.

The full organisational structure can be found in appendix 3. It 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. Supported by financial investment and through staff feedback and performance review, we have been able to design a Workforce Strategy that has made a tangible difference and monitors Capacity, Capability and Culture. In 2021/22 we will focus on the following workforce themes:

### Health & Wellbeing

We undertake staff surveys and staff health checks, in order to understand the views and experiences of our staff as employees. Throughout the WCF response to COVID-19, our workforce has worked intensively, creatively and flexibly, to provide a service to meet the needs of children, young people and families. Staff have felt the support of their operational managers, senior managers and peers and have worked effectively with partners. The experience of operating remotely is allowing us to explore opportunities for new ways of working in the future.

In May 2020, WCF undertook a COVID-19 employee health check. The purpose of this was to hear the views and experiences of staff across the WCF workforce<sup>1</sup>. Through this survey we heard about the collective experiences of 519 members of staff within the three Directorates. Highlights of the responses are shown below:

Across the Company 95% of staff who completed the survey reported they felt informed by senior and direct managers during the COVID-19 delivery period.

86% of staff felt that they have always been able to access managerial support if needed.

95% of all staff surveyed felt able to access peer support virtually, with 92% confirming that online team meetings had been effective.

In the Social Care and Safeguarding services, 94% of Social Workers felt in most or some cases the combination of the protocol, KIT Calls, Visits and Partnership Working has enabled them to identify risks and needs with the families they are working with.

94% of frontline practitioners felt able to continue a relationship with children they are working with through KIT Calls and Visits, depending on the existing relationship.

Managers and practitioners have made virtual meetings work in the best way possible during the COVID-19 Service Delivery period, with 87% of staff finding multi-agency meetings sufficiently effective.

For the Resources, Education and Early Help Directorates 55% of staff felt online communication with partners had been very effective and 43% quite effective.

Working from home had been possible for 91% of this staff group, with feedback given that as an average in the future 40% of duties could be undertaken at home.

Going forward in 2021/22 there will be a detailed health check for all WCF staff to continue to understand the current workforce experience and respond appropriately to promote good practice, working conditions and well-being.

The importance of Health and Wellbeing for employees is regularly promoted by ELT and WCF management team. Promotion of Public Health initiatives and corporate wellbeing offer is also available to staff which covers online learning, resources, support and the mental health first aid programme.

## Recruitment and Retention

Stability, capacity and the experience of the workforce is a fundamental foundation on which to build good practice. Where staff feel supported, challenged and empowered they are better able to work with confidence in a child-centred way. With permanent Social Workers at 86% and Social Work management posts at 98% (as at December 2020) our data evidences a sustained positive picture on recruitment and retention of social workers, experience of the workforce and caseloads. For Education and Early Help, the Directorate leadership team is in place following revision of the structure and transfer of Learning and Achievement Services.

WCF promotes new practices and transformational projects that deliver our statutory duties in an innovative way to attract new opportunities and appeal to a workforce that share our dedication, enthusiasm and Company values. 2021/22 will see the continuation of many of these projects as identified as priority services in our Directorate plans.

## Diversity and Culture

Worcestershire Children First's leadership team have facilitated an open dialogue across the Company since the highlighted need for promotion of Black Lives Matter in 2020. We want to ensure this remains an important aspect in terms of the diversity of our workforce and communities in Worcestershire and that our values and behaviours are inclusive and where necessary are challenged.

WCF have launched a Diversity and Inclusion Collective to recognise and plan for how we celebrate, promote and further develop diversity and inclusion, widening our understanding and appreciation of all cultures, race and oppression.

We will be developing a calendar of key events that celebrate Diversity and Inclusion, a forum to discuss ideas, and consider how we integrate further understanding of the characteristics that make humans unique and how we embrace these differences in our professional practice.

Some of the practical changes we have implemented to improve Equality and Diversity awareness in our daily practices are explained here: <https://youtu.be/uipUsuA7K-A>



## Leadership and Management

In accordance with Ofsted “Good” and “Outstanding” descriptors for leadership and management, WCF ensures a strong focus on contemporary understanding of what is happening in the business through performance management and monitoring in our three key areas of QA. We can identify what our strengths are and areas of development for improvement.

Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by Members and senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to inform and improve the development and delivery of support, care and protection to children and young people.

Management stability and capacity is a fundamental foundation on which to build a stable workforce where staff feel supported, challenged and empowered to do the best thing for children and families.

During 2019 our social care managers from Team Managers to Director undertook the NAAS accreditation to lead our service as a continuous learning agency and to give our front-line staff assurances through this independent validation of the quality of the management and leadership.

We will continue to support and strengthen our managers and ensure our workforce have the support, guidance and tools to deliver best practice.

## Building Skills for our future workforce

As a workforce we all work together to embrace and flexibly respond to new demands within the transformation still taking place. Colleagues are supported and challenged by the executive leadership team (and their peers) in obtaining the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

We have high expectations of good performance across the Company and in November 2020, we saw 100% of eligible employee mid-year performance reviews completed. For All Qualified Social Worker roles in the mid-year performance review, 92% of employees had a rating of successful or higher, 10% higher than for the 2019/20 mid-year period.

Performance reviews and regular supervision, provides our staff with opportunities for reflection, learning, challenge and personal growth. Health and Wellbeing is part of these conversations as well as support for continuous professional development.

In our Dec 2020 Social Work Health Check 98% of staff reported have regular and reflective supervision. We are committed to maintain this high standard of practice

WCF have access to formal Learning and Development opportunities through WCC’s corporate provision and Worcestershire’s Social Work Academy. With the transfer of Learning and Achievement services we also now have an internal training and conference team supporting education and early years settings with wide expertise.

As a learning organisation, cascade of good practice, resources, learning from Quality Assurance and research is ongoing in all of our services to inform our practices to continue to support our workforce in their roles and improve the experience and outcomes of our children, young people and their families.

We are confident of our future journey and will continue to progress at pace because we have the collective drive, passion, experience and commitment in our workforce and leadership team.

# 6. DIRECTORATE SERVICE PRIORITIES

As part of our Company’s Business Plan for 2021/22 we continue to strive for transformational change to support WCF’s continuous improvement journey. Collectively we have identified key priorities for the year ahead which will need dedicated focus and resource to ensure delivery of projects and ultimately best outcomes for children in addition to our performance focus and monitoring of KPIs.

## Social Care and Safeguarding Directorate Priorities 2021/22

### WCF Values:

<b>Valuing Family Life</b>	<b>Good Education for all</b>	<b>Children at our heart</b>	<b>Protecting children from harm</b>
<b>Early Help and Children in Need</b>	<b>Services to Children in Need</b> Developing models and approaches of multi-disciplinary working to reduce risks to children and effectively meet their needs in family care and the community	<b>Early Help Review</b> Partnership Working Right Service Right Time	<b>Get Safe</b> Supporting and Protecting children and young adults from exploitation
<b>Children in Need of Protection</b>	<b>Worcestershire Safeguarding Families Project</b> Positive and timely outcome for children at risk of significant harm and care proceedings	<b>PAUSE</b> Preventing repeated removal of babies from parental care	<b>Domestic Abuse</b> Supporting & Protecting children living with DA harm
<b>Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers</b>	<b>SUFFICIENCY</b>		<b>Emotional and Health and Well-Being</b> Looked After Children & Care Leavers
	<b>Foster Carers:</b> Meeting demand and complexities of care for older children		<b>External Residential Care:</b> Developing partnerships with private providers and stakeholders
	<b>Transition from care:</b> Semi Independent Support & Housing for Care Leavers		
	<b>Developing the quality and purpose of Residential Care</b> to young people		
<b>Knowing ourselves Impact Independent Validation</b>	<b>Review and Evaluation of the Children’s Safeguarding Arrangement</b>	<b>Ofsted</b> Focused Visits and Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services	<b>Inspection of WCF</b> Independent Fostering Agency Children’s Homes
			<b>Registration of Adoption Central England (ACE)</b>
			<b>Quality Assurance Framework</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Key Performance Indicators</li> <li>■ Service User Feedback</li> <li>■ Audit</li> </ul>





## Early Help and Children in Need

### Services to Children in Need

The learning from the multi-disciplinary approach taken by supporting families first has shown us that it can reduce the risks children face and support them to remain at home where it is safe to do so, valuing family life. Therefore we want to look at how we can develop this approach with our children in need with the aim of reducing the safeguarding risks they are identified at so the impact of their adverse childhood experiences are minimalised/reduced and a contextual safeguarding approach is taken to address their needs at home and in their community. Therefore the risk of them experiencing significant harm or the likelihood of significant harm is reduced and they continue to be supported safely in their community longer term.

### Early Help Review

Looking at the current offer from our WCF family support services to children and young people who are identified as having level 2 or 3 needs as outlined in our Worcestershire levels of need guidance. Ensuring that there is equality in the opportunity to access WCF Family Support across the County for children aged 0-18 where there is an identified need for specific family support at level 2/3 needs. Looking at the core offer available to children, young people and their families and carers ensuring that children receive the right service at the right time to meet and reduce their needs.

### GET SAFE

GET SAFE remains a key priority for the safeguarding children partnership board. We are continuing to develop and progress our multi-agency work on Criminal Exploitation in how we Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Pursue. The partnership continues to develop our work on how we support young people 16plus into adulthood where there are Get Safe concerns or risks, and how we work together to build in protection and support to specific vulnerable groups who are identified at risk of going missing, trafficking and modern day slavery. Delivery of awareness campaigns and GET SAFE training continues to be a key priority in our action plan.

### Positive Outcomes Project

This new innovation project is in its first year and is continuing to strengthen and build on our offer of high quality statutory social work placements in the community working directly with children and young people. There is a strong focus on embedding the contextual safeguarding approach to children and young people and strengthening partnership working. The project plays a key role in promoting WCF as an employer of choice for the social work workforce here in Worcestershire.

## Children in Need of Protection

### Worcestershire Safeguarding Families Project

Positive and timely outcome for children at risk of significant harm and care proceedings. The Worcestershire Family Safeguarding (WFS) Project is an innovation project and a new way of working for Worcestershire Children First which contributes to our vision of supporting and valuing family life, whilst we endeavour to empower parents to care for their own children well. The Project recognises the increased risk factors for children who are aged ten and under who are assessed as at risk of harm from the trio of vulnerabilities (mental ill health, domestic abuse and alcohol or substance misuse). The WFS team will support the work of children's Social Workers by supporting the adults in the household to make the necessary changes, thus reducing the number of children on Child Protection Plans, children being subject to Court proceedings and new accommodations of children in care. WFS launched on 16th November 2020.

## PAUSE

Preventing repeated removal of babies from parental care. Pause is a trauma-informed programme that works with women who have experienced or are at risk of repeated pregnancies that result in children needing to be removed from their care. Pause aims to break this cycle and prevent the damaging consequences of repeated care proceedings and reduce numbers of children being taken into care. Pause Worcestershire launched on 25th January 2021, is delivered by Ripplez, and supported by Public Health and WCF.

## Domestic Abuse

Supporting & Protecting children living with domestic abuse harm. Tackling domestic abuse is everyone's business and demands a multi-agency approach. It is often hidden and living in a home where domestic abuse happens can have a serious impact on a child or young person's mental and physical wellbeing, as well as their behaviour, sometimes lasting into adulthood. WCF will focus on understanding the multiplicity of need, review how we respond effectively to prevention, early identification and early intervention within our social work practice, and ensure that the voice of children living with domestic abuse harm is captured throughout.

## Timeliness & Sustainability in Permanency

Supporting permanency carers: SGO/LTF/Adoption. Permanence is the long-term plan for a child's upbringing and underpins social work intervention with children, their families and their carers. WCF understand that the routes to permanent arrangements will be different for each child, and we are committed to considering the range of options available depending on the age and individual needs of the child or young person. We will review how we support our carers to ensure sustainability of permanence plans, working diligently to find permanent, safe homes for children in care, in a timely manner, and involves giving children security and stability through their childhood and beyond.

## Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers

### Sufficiency

When children and young people are received into care it is a priority for us to ensure they are cared for in interim care arrangements that give them stability and where they feel safe and cared about. Through our sufficiency of care placements we want to be able to care for our children and young people locally and where possible in a family care experience.

An all-encompassing and targeted recruitment strategy will be developed and implemented to redress the shortfall in internal foster provision, and we will work with external providers to provide high quality stable provision enhancing our placement offer where necessary.

The benefits of well supported semi-independent provision, in county, in transitioning young people to independence are self-apparent. As our children in care approach a time of transition to being young adults our demand for semi-independent homes continues to be high so focus is being given to the best use of existing internal resource and engagement with external provision in partnership with housing.

These approaches will all be captured within a 2021 Sufficiency Strategy which is being presented to Cabinet in June 2021.

## Emotional Health and Wellbeing

In addition to any abuse or neglect a child in care may have suffered we also recognise the significant impact on any child's emotional health that being separated from birth /family care has. It is essential we develop our services with health to ensure we assess and review all our looked after children's emotional health and wellbeing needs as part of their Health Assessment and having identified any need ensure there is a clear pathway to services to meet those needs.

## External Residential Care

In Worcestershire we have a number of private providers caring for children and young people placed with them by other Local Authorities. These children access our schools, our health services and if necessary, require intervention from our safeguarding services including the police. It is important to us as residents of Worcestershire, that these children have a positive stable and protective care placement. We will work with providers and parents to achieve this.

## Knowing Ourselves, Impact and Independent Validation

### Review and Evaluation of the Children's Safeguarding Arrangements

In September 2019 we launched our new Safeguarding Partnership arrangements; In 2020 Sir Alan Wood undertook a review of how the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for local areas were key issues outlined in the original Wood Review (2016). Through 2021 we will be feeding into the regional and national developments of the on-going work of the review and the learning from our own multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

### Ofsted Focused Visits and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

We will continue to know ourselves well through our Quality Assurance Framework and programme of audits, feedback and KPIs. However, the independent validation of Ofsted inspections of Children's Services will support us knowing ourselves and the effectiveness and impact of our services to children.

### Inspection of WCF - Independent Fostering Agency & Children's Homes

Similar to the independent validation of our Ofsted inspection of Children's Services, is the process for our Fostering and Residential services. We have had an assurance visit by Ofsted of our Residential Homes and Worcestershire Children First Fostering in 2020. We will embed our learning from these visits and implement the recommendations in preparation for full inspections of these services.

### Registration of Adoption Central England (ACE)

Worcestershire's Adoption Services are delivered through a regional adoption agency (ACE) and through 2021 we will go through the formal process of registering our adoption services with Ofsted.

#### Quality Assurance Framework

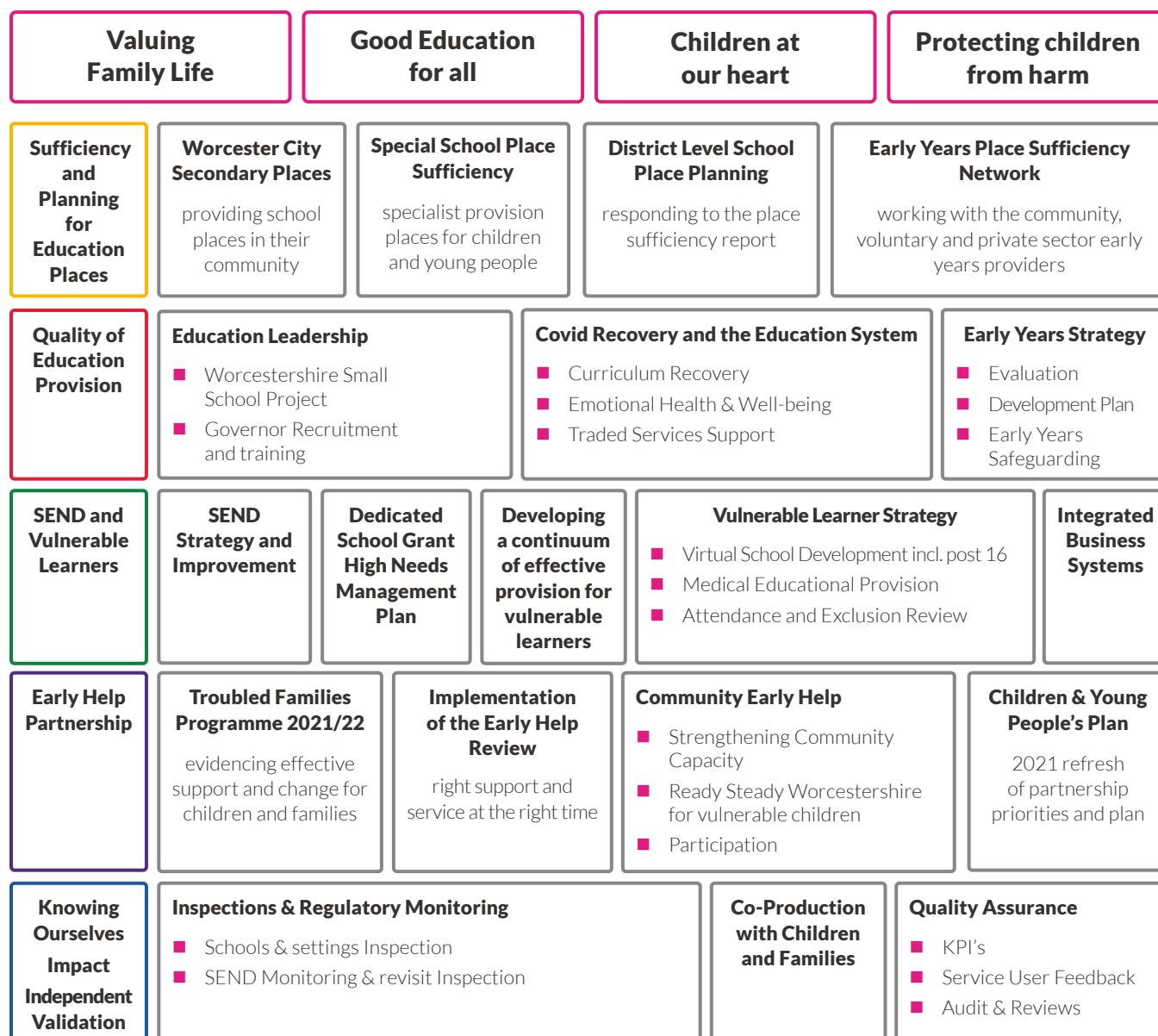
- Key Performance Indicators
- Service User Feedback
- Audit

Our Quality Assurance Framework is a crucial programme of work on how we know ourselves, celebrate our successes, identify areas for improvement and embed this learning. Our Framework is built on three key-strands which are how much are we doing (KPIs), how well are we doing (audits) and the impact of our work for children & families (service user feedback). We will continue to embed and grow our business as usual approach to quality assurance and continual improvement.



## Education and Early Help Directorate Priorities 2021/22

### WCF Values:



## Sufficiency and Planning for Education Places

### Worcester City Secondary Places

The provision of education places for secondary school pupils in the Worcester City Education Planning Area is the key risk for place sufficiency for Worcestershire as the population of Worcester continues to grow. During 2021/22 we will work with WCC, and stakeholders to address the shortfall of education places. The intention is for a new secondary school to be provided, the detailed specification and identification of funding sources was approved by Council and Cabinet in 2021/22 with delivery of additional places due for 2024.

### SEND Place Provision Planning

The provision of appropriate education places for children and young people with SEND remains a pressure for Worcestershire and demand continues to rise. Planning work will support the delivery of the SEND Strategy and SEND Improvement journey in providing forecasting, space utilisation, capacity assessments and options to establish a strategy of local provision to be considered by Cabinet during 2021/22.

## District Level Planning

The Mainstream Sufficiency Report 2020 describes the unique breadth of education structures and arrangements for children and young people's education in Worcestershire. We will continue to work with WCC and stakeholders including schools, DfE and Diocesan partners to identify strategic priorities that promote smooth education pathways for children and present to WCC Cabinet and Council during 2021/22.

## Early Years Place Sufficiency Network

The Childcare and Early Years Education Sufficiency Assessment 2020 reviews the assessment of provision in the Early Years market. The work during 2021/22 will strengthen our relationships and the network of provision, particularly following the impact on the market from the Covid pandemic, is key to an effective delivery of the Early Years Strategy with good quality and stable provision for very young children.

## Quality of Education Provision

### Education Leadership

In order to improve school outcomes, the capacity and quality of school leadership must be strong. This area of work is predominantly working with maintained schools to support and challenge leaders through the support received from School Improvement Advisors. Workstreams include the identification, assessment and support of schools within their school's improvement journey. Priorities to develop and sustain effective leadership include:

- **Worcestershire Small School Project** - Worcestershire has 72 mainstream maintained schools that have less than 210 pupils on role. These schools face particular challenges of sustainability due to their size, and likely rural location. We will work with the headteacher and governors of these schools to understand their challenges and opportunities to develop a long-term sustainability plan. Given the high proportion of these schools are also Church of England schools the project is in partnership with the Diocese of Worcester.
- **Governor Recruitment** - To improve the capacity and quality of school leadership is the focus on developing the capacity and quality of school governance in maintained schools. This work will ensure effective and proactive involvement of school governing bodies. Working with stakeholders including WCC we will recognise and promote the role of governors, undertake recruitment and review our offer and support for training of new and existing governors.

### Covid Recovery and the Education system

This priority area works with all schools to ensure the needs of their children as a result of the pandemic are met. This includes the school curriculum as well as safeguarding and emotional health and well-being. The professional development offer will reflect the outcomes of needs analysis and be available to all schools. To add further clarity to DfE Covid guidance published throughout the pandemic period, detailed advice and guidance will be created to support all schools. Maintained schools will receive bespoke support in addition to this to effectively implement training, advice and guidance to ensure improved outcomes for children. This priority area will also encompass the support for schools to be informed and prepared for Ofsted inspections as schools return to full opening.

### Early Years Strategy

This strategy will bring together partners from Public Health, Early Help, Social Care, Speech and Language, Education and others in a unified way to ensure our youngest children achieve the best possible outcomes. There are five strands to the plan; parents as partners, improved outcomes, workforce development, equality of access for all and the reduction of word and social mobility gaps. Existing initiatives such as the Professional Development Programme (supported by the Education Development Trust and Elkkan), the integrated two year check and the reducing social mobility programme in Wychavon will be enhanced and developed in order that best practice be shared across the county. In addition, partners will work together to develop a shared vision of "school readiness" and best practice with 2 year olds.

## **SEND and Vulnerable Learners**

### **SEND Strategy and Improvement**

Worcestershire's local arrangements for SEND were inspected in March 2018. This inspection highlighted 12 key concerns and led to the production of a Written Statement of Action (WSOA). Activity in the WSoA is organised into 5 workstreams: SEND Local Offer, embedding the graduated response, assessment and planning, joint commissioning and leadership, and workforce and engagement. Progress against the WSoA is monitored by a multiagency SEND Improvement Board which meets every two months. Ofsted and NHSE also make regular monitoring visits as part of the post-inspection process. A re-visit to determine whether sufficient progress has been made against the 12 key concerns is expected in the summer of 2021. Worcestershire's SEND strategy (2017-2021) is being refreshed as part of this improvement journey. The new 2021-2025 strategy will be co-produced with partners (including families) and will build upon the WSoA as well as agreeing an approach to emerging areas of work such as the development of an All Age Disability service.

### **Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Management Plan**

The High Level Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant is significantly overspent in Worcestershire. This is an issue for almost all Local Authorities. WCF make key operational and strategic decisions which impact on the spend of this WCC budget. A plan has been written to manage this budget more effectively going forward. The aims of the plan are to increase the transparency and visibility of spend from the budget, to improve outcomes for CYP and to make changes in the spend per pupil as part of a strategic approach to managing the budget more effectively and ultimately reducing the deficit over time. The plan has 6 workstreams: finance, top up funding, commissioning, building capacity in mainstream schools, ensuring an effective continuum of SEND provision and Section 19 provision. Activity described in the plan is closely aligned with the SEND WSoA, with progress monitored by a High Level Needs Management Board and regularly reports to Worcestershire Schools Forum.

### **Developing a Continuum of Effective Provision for Vulnerable Learners**

Worcestershire's WSoA includes a focus on ensuring a continuum of effective provision for vulnerable learners. This work also impacts significantly on spend from the High Level Needs budget. The aim of this work is to develop provision which effectively meets the needs of vulnerable learners in inclusive local settings. It involves building skills and confidence to meet needs in mainstream educational settings, improving enhanced provision in mainstream settings to meet the needs of particular groups of learners (such as those with complex communication needs through a review of Mainstream Autism Bases). Additional activity includes ensuring there are sufficient places and expertise in Worcestershire special schools to meet needs and the identification of new approaches to meeting the needs of SEND pupils who currently receive their education in independent provision. There is a particular focus in this work on Post-16 and 19 learners whose placements in Independent Specialist Providers place a strain on the High Level Needs budget. The ongoing review of Exclusions and Alternative Provision in Worcestershire is also a key priority in the year ahead.

### **Vulnerable Learner Strategy**

The Virtual School will continue to facilitate high quality termly Personal Education Plans for ALL statutory school age children looked after (CLA) as part of their care plan. This aspect of our work will begin to incorporate all 2, 3 and 4 year old CLA who are accessing Nursery Education Funding and Post 16 CLA through a new Personal Progression Plan process. This includes the development of social, emotional and mental health focus. This will involve engaging schools and EY settings through a variety of professional development and sharing best practice. The intention is to improve attendance and reduce exclusions from school resulting in higher levels of engagement in wider learning. The continued review and development of the Virtual School is overseen by a governing body with multi-agency representation.

Following review and coproduction of services to support those children not well enough to attend school we will implement recommendations once approved by Cabinet. In addition we will continue to develop our system leadership programme of work to improve attendance and minimise exclusion for children and young people.

### **Integrated Business Systems**

There is a need in Worcestershire Children First to improve the Capita One system to ensure accurate data and information is held in one place to support operational activities and reporting. Timely data should be available to support the development of performance dashboards. The aims of this development work include enabling co production of Education Health and Care Plans and ensuring we can track outcomes for SEND CYP in special schools, post 16, NEET and young offenders. The improvements will result in a single child record on the Capita One system which will enable monitoring and support reporting at all levels.

### **Early Help Partnership**

#### **Troubled Families Programme**

This programme has been extended for a further year from the 1st of April 2021. The potential income for this period is £1.16 million pounds, for successfully claiming positive outcomes for 533 children and families. We will achieve this by providing the evidence required to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to demonstrate successful support for families across all WCF services and some partner services that result in significant and sustained change, improving children and family outcomes.

#### **Implementation of the Early Help Review**

Implementation of the Early Help review will be based on the outcome and recommendations of service review in order to provide sustainability and continuity of service. We want to ensure we are working effectively and efficiently in a timely way to support families to make sustained positive changes via early interventions, preventing problems escalating at a later stage.

#### **Community Early Help**

In 2021 we will continue to work with schools and settings to develop an effective early help offer and connect to resources and opportunities in local communities that provide information, early support and interventions.

We will work alongside WCC as it develops its Here2Help services into a sustainable community approach to support and wellbeing.

Ready Steady Worcestershire (RSW) will be further developed to support vulnerable children and families during the school holidays. Developing the community response by allocating funding from the DfE Food and Activities Grant in 2021 will increase activities and access to food and support for children through education and community projects, reduce inequalities and assist with Covid recovery.

### **Children & Young People's Plan**

The current Children and Young People's Plan has been developed through the CYPSP a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Board. We will develop the plan in conjunction with the HWBB revised priorities co-producing with stakeholders, parents, carers, children and young people.



## Knowing Ourselves, Impact and Independent Validation

### Inspections and Regulatory Monitoring:

We will continue to work with schools and Ofsted to support their understanding of the inspection framework, evaluation of capacity and effectiveness and their readiness for inspection.

### Co-Production with Children and Families

Co-production remains a key focus for improvement work in SEND and vulnerable learners. Work with Families in Partnership and other representative groups including children and young people will continue to support the Written Statement of Action in addition to consulting and participating in reviews of provision and service delivery. A renewed focus, as part of Covid recovery, will further improve the participation work of schools in 2021.

### Quality Assurance:

- Key Performance Indicators
- Service User Feedback
- Audit

Our Quality Assurance Framework is a crucial programme of work on how we know ourselves, celebrate our successes, identify areas for improvement and embed this learning. Our Framework is built on three key-strands which are how much are we doing (KPIs), how well are we doing (audits) and the impact of our work for children & families (service user feedback). We will continue to embed and grow our business as usual approach to quality assurance and continual improvement. We will work with schools and settings to understand, monitor and review the impact of our work. We will also receive feedback from Ofsted inspections both of schools and settings, and more widely through the SEND reinspection process.





## 7. FINANCE

The following information describes the resources to run Worcestershire Children First and agreed funding arrangements for 2021/22 with indicative contract sums for 2022/23 and 2023/24 reflective of current forecast demand. The figures are indicative due to confirmation of future national spending reviews. The key driver for WCF is improvement of outcomes for children, not cost reduction or income generation. However, given the current financial context and to mitigate future cost pressures the company focuses on trading with schools and education settings through our Learning and Achievement Services and efficient use of resources to ensure value for money.

The budget for 2021/22 is in full alignment with the Council's Budget setting process and this was considered and agreed by the Worcestershire Children First Board on 19 January 2021 and Worcestershire County Council's Cabinet on 4 February 2021.

### Summary of Financial Information

The agreed contract sums are shown as two separate elements; net funding from WCC base budget and grants passed through to the company to arrive at the gross contract price, and with Sales, Fees and Charges to arrive at the total company turnover. These are shown in Table 1 below:

Contract Sum	Current Budget 2020/21	Original Budget 2021/22
Net Budget funded by WCC	101,708	106,583
<b>Other Funding passed through:</b>		
Funding added to contract (Grants / Income / Reserves)	17,890	18,865
<b>Total Gross Cost funded by WCC Contract</b>	<b>119,598</b>	<b>125,448</b>
Sales, Fees and Charges	1,324	1,995
<b>WCF Turnover</b>	<b>120,922</b>	<b>127,443</b>

Table 1. WCF Contract Sum

The contract sum includes external funding that would be required to be transferred to the Company, on top of the Council 'Net Budget', in order to fund the gross expenditure requirements of Worcestershire Children First. The net budget includes the cost of Support Services that are purchased from the County Council -£7.3m in 2021/22.

### Service Budgets

The total gross expenditure budget for 2021/22 financial year is **£127m**. In development of the financial model and as part of the development of the business plan for WCF, a detailed review, analysis, challenge and scrutiny has been completed by finance staff, the WCF Board as part of the agreed governance arrangements in the contract, and agreed by both the Chief Financial Officer of the council and the Director of Resources for WCF.

## 2021/22 Service Gross Expenditure Budgets and FTE

The budget for 2021/22 includes a continued commitment by the council to invest £7.7 million (excluding £3m savings) to improve outcomes for children and young people (up to the age of 25) in Worcestershire, by addressing their needs holistically through early help and prevention, education provision and social care. There is a further £1.1 million set aside in earmarked reserves which was established through the 2019/20 budget process to mitigate any potential financial risk on placements for looked after children which reflect the ongoing demographic and cost pressures in the service. However, this has not been required in last two financial years due to the strong leadership, good practice in the service and careful financial management.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic demand for services has risen which is consistent with all other local authorities, therefore the financial risk has increased. The budget in 2021/22 includes new investment for:

- Continuing the Council's journey of improvement in children's safeguarding with further full year investment of £4.2 million to reflect an increase in overall demographic pressures and costs, including a funding increase of £2.6 million on the placements budget to reflect demand and COVID pressures
- A further investment £0.6 million into Special Educational Needs Transport
- A further £0.3 million towards general inflation across Children and Families

It should be noted in the following tables, certain assumptions have been made in respect of growth, savings, and inflation. For inflation, assumptions are in line with WCC Medium Term Financial Plan. Utilities such as gas and electricity have also been inflated over the period, by amounts that again are in line with this.

In terms of demand growth, the budget reflects the latest agreed monitoring position, which incorporates trend analysis and a revised monthly forecast which is reviewed in detail. This means that the budget includes the most recent estimate of increases/decreases across all placement types over the period.

**Table 2: Recurrent operating costs WCF (2021/22)**

Ref.	Service	Staffing	Premises	Transport	Other Non- staffing	Total Gross Expenditure
A	Resources Directorate	3,549	0	14	8,580	12,144
B	Social Care Directorate	28,726	495	710	51,937	81,868
C	Education and Early Help Directorate	9,882	257	577	4,019	14,735
D	Home to School Transport	287	0	15,496	2,407	18,190
E	Youth Offending Services	0	0	0	507	507
<b>F</b>	<b>Total Gross Expenditure</b>	<b>42,444</b>	<b>752</b>	<b>16,797</b>	<b>67,450</b>	<b>127,443</b>

Note - £1,995k of Sales, Fees and Charges income outside of the main WCC contract gives WCF a net budget of £125.448m (the contract sum in Table 3)

**Table 3: Contract Price for WCF, over- time**

Ref.	Service	2020/21 Current Budget	2021/22 Original Budget	2022/23 Indicative	2023/24 Indicative
A	Resources Directorate	12,593	12,075	12,315	12,562
B	Social Care Directorate	75,784	81,480	89,110	96,892
C	Education and Early Help Directorate	13,299	13,196	13,460	13,729
D	Home to School Transport	17,415	18,190	19,353	20,541
E	Youth Offending Services	507	507	507	507
<b>F</b>	<b>WCF Contract Sum</b>	<b>119,598</b>	<b>125,448</b>	<b>134,745</b>	<b>144,231</b>

**Table 4 : 2021/22 Funding Sources and Contract Funding Reconciliation**

		Funding	
<b>2021/22 Gross Expenditure Budget</b>			<b>127,443</b>
Non-WCC Sales, Fees and Charges		1,995	
WCC Gross Contract Sum			<b>125,448</b>
Funded By:	Dedicated Schools Grant	6,745	
	Public Health Ring-Fenced Grant	850	
	Other Grants	7,415	
	Other Income	168	
	HTST Income	1,596	
	Capitalised Revenue	608	
	Funding from Reserves	1,484	
Total non-base budget funding passed through Council		18,865	
<b>Total External Funding</b>			<b>20,860</b>
<b>Council Base Budget 2021/22</b>			<b>106,583</b>

The service element of the contract value is considered to be the 'gross budget' shown above, less the Sales, Fees and Charges income which could be recovered directly by the Company.

The 2021/22 budget is considered to be challenging and broadly sufficient in terms of meeting current service demands, however there are ongoing demand pressures in both the Placements and Provision budget, and Home to School and College Transport. Budget monitoring and variance analysis is reported monthly by the Company and will be used to regularly update the 3-year projection of Company budget.

## Transfer of Reserves

The company budget has an element of funding from reserves which will be passported as income, however Children's Services specific reserves will have held on the Council's balance sheet. The use of the reserves to fund activity will be agreed annually through the annual budget setting process or in year through the agreed change request process.

## Transfer of Assets and Capital

There is no physical transfer of assets to WCF and the Company will not hold a capital budget. The Company will lease all buildings, including furnishings and fittings, from the Council. The rental charge for property will be for a peppercorn rent.

Where the Company identifies a desired use of capital funds for investment, the Director of Resources will submit a business case to the Council requesting funds. If the Council agrees the capital funding through its normal Capital Processes, any asset created as a result will be an asset owned by the Council.

## VAT

As part of company set up, we scoped requirements for PS Tax VAT/Tax advisors for advice to WCC and WCF. The conclusion following a review of the business case and contractual documentation by our advisors was the contract between WCF and Worcestershire County Council will result in a single supply of taxable services by WCF to the Council.

## Further Tax Implications for the Company

We have reviewed our tax status and this has been confirmed by HMRC that the provision of services from Worcestershire Children First to Worcestershire County Council does not constitute a trade for corporation tax purposes. Any surplus on other activities within an accounting period is subject to UK Corporation Tax which is currently 19%.

## Cashflow

WCF cashflow remains healthy and is spread relatively evenly from month to month. A cashflow forecast has been carried out during implementation and has been reviewed constantly since company go-live. Working capital has been steady (with an average balance of £27M in 2020/21). Cashflow will be managed carefully by the company to ensure it can meet its obligations by paying support services charges on a quarterly basis.

## 8. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management and Business Continuity Planning are a vital part of the Company's success to consider and mitigate (where possible) inherent (unmanaged) and residual (managed) risk. This involves an informed understanding of the effectiveness of controls and actions in place subject to ORCT principles (Objective, Risks, Controls, Tests). WCF are representatives at Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) Corporate Risk Management Group (CRMG) who implement Corporate Risk Management and Business Continuity arrangements for critical services across all aspects of the Council's activities.

WCF will maintain the Company risk register, which will be scrutinised at the Risk, Governance & Audit Board and encompasses COVID-19 related issues as well as ongoing organisational risks which are regularly reviewed, these relate to:

### COVID-19 specific

- Spread of COVID-19
- PPE Availability
- Financial Impact
- Remote Workings and ICT
- Staff Capacity and Well-Being
- Interagency Communication - Multi-agency Working and Information Sharing
- Provision of wider education services
- Commissioned Providers and Services
- Re-opening of schools and early years settings
- Availability and Sufficiency of Placements (Education and Social Care) for Key Worker and Vulnerable Children
- COVID-19 exit strategy

### Other

- Serious harm or death of a child/young person
- Reputational risk as a result of receiving a poor Ofsted inspection rating
- Failure to act in the interests of children and young people - keeping them safe or planning for permanence
- Financial pressure and failure to achieve required savings
- Uncertainty of future funding arrangements (2022- 23 onwards) for local government which impacts financial strategy for the company
- Business continuity failure in critical services
- Insufficient staff capacity, capability and productivity - recruitment and retention
- Education for all children in Worcestershire including school financial pressures, Home to School Transport costs, management of the Dedicated Schools Grant on behalf of the Council, changes to school organisation and SEND
- High Needs Funding arrangements
- Additionally, risks are captured as part of transformational projects.

Our risk management and business continuity framework, alongside our performance monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms, support our commitment to provide rigorous quality services, improving outcomes for our children and young people in Worcestershire.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The Business Plan for Worcestershire Children First details our Company information and priorities for the year ahead acknowledging the additional challenges and unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic for our families in Worcestershire. With our unwavering focus on outcomes for children and young people and our commitment to our organisational values we are dedicated and prepared to deliver effective services in 2021/22.

We are proud of our partnerships and the resilience of our communities at a time of unprecedented challenge, which inspires our tenacity. We always strive to understand the voices and experiences of our children and young people and actively welcome feedback via: [YourSay@worschildrenfirst.org.uk](mailto:YourSay@worschildrenfirst.org.uk)

In 2020/21 where the demand for advice, guidance and practical support has been relentless our WCF workforce have proven their dedication to the delivery of public services as we continually improve. This has been well managed and has been a considerable achievement considered by our Leadership team which will set us up strongly for the coming financial year.





## 10. APPENDICES

### **Appendix 1: Terms of Reference: Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Board**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Board of Directors is responsible for exercising all the powers of Worcestershire Children First set out in the Articles of Association, however, may delegate any of those powers to a sub Groups of the Board or to an Executive Director.

The principal role of the Chairman is to manage and provide leadership to the Board of Directors of WCF. The Chairman is accountable to the owner and DfE for the management of WCF, through the Chief Executive for company duties but not the Statutory Director of Children's Services responsibilities.

#### **2. Membership**

The members of the Board shall comprise of the Chairman, the non-executive directors and executive directors.

#### **3. Attendance**

Only members of the Board shall be entitled to attend meetings. Wider representation will be via invitation only.

#### **4. Quorum**

No business shall be transacted at meetings of the Board unless the Chair, two executive directors, two non-executive directors, (one independent non-executive director and one council non-executive director) are

in attendance. A duly convened meeting of the Board at which a quorum is present shall be competent to exercise all or any of the authorities, powers or discretions vesting or exercisable by the board.

## 5. Meetings of the Board

The Board shall meet on a monthly basis, at a location that will be determined by the Board. Formal Board meetings will be held monthly with every third meeting held in public (Members of the public shall be entitled to attend such Board meetings but, shall not be entitled to speak or vote at such Board meetings). Additional meetings may be called where there is a business requirement to do so to support decision making.

## 6. Minutes of Meetings

All formal Board meetings will be minute together with clear resolutions of the Board. A record of attendees will also be provided together with any apologies received. A higher level record of informal meetings will be held to summarise attendance, apologies and general discussions.

The Chairman shall ascertain, at the beginning of each meeting, the existence of any conflicts of interest and minute them accordingly.

## 7. Duties

The duties of the Board are to:

- i. Determine (within the overall policies and priorities of WCF) and keep under review the company's strategic direction in accordance with the member views of the company
- ii. Determine the company's key financial objectives in accordance with the member views
- iii. Monitor performance against clear objectives, business plans and budgets in respect of:
  - » Quality of Services
  - » Finance
  - » Operational performance - workforce
  - » Risk management
  - » Matters that may materially affect the reputation of the Company
  - » Income, future growth and development of the company
- iv. Ensure appropriate financial stewardship through effective value for money, financial control and financial planning and strategy
- v. Approve and keep under review the WCF's annual revenue budget
- vi. Approve and keep under review WCF's arrangements for the management of risk
- vii. Approve the Annual report and Accounts and other statutory submissions
- viii. Approve a Schedule of Matters Reserved to the Board and Scheme of Delegation
- ix. Receive and consider reports from Sub Groups
- x. Review and, if appropriate, agree changes in the terms of reference for Sub Groups

## 8. Sub Groups of the Board

The Board may establish and delegate powers to formally constituted Sub Groups. Sub Groups established by the Board shall include:

- Risk, Governance and Audit Board
- Quality Assurance Board



## Appendix 2: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

In relation to contract performance, during the Covid-19 period the arrangements between Council and Company were paused recognising that services are still responding to the pandemic, however regular performance, financial updates are provided to the council and elected members. There continues to be strong effective working relationships between WCC and WCF which go far beyond the formal contractual monitoring arrangements and these add the most value to improving outcomes for children and young people.

Review of Tolerances and suggestions of new KPIs for Education and Early Help (following the transfer of Learning and Achievement services in June 2020) will be agreed under contractual arrangements when these resume.

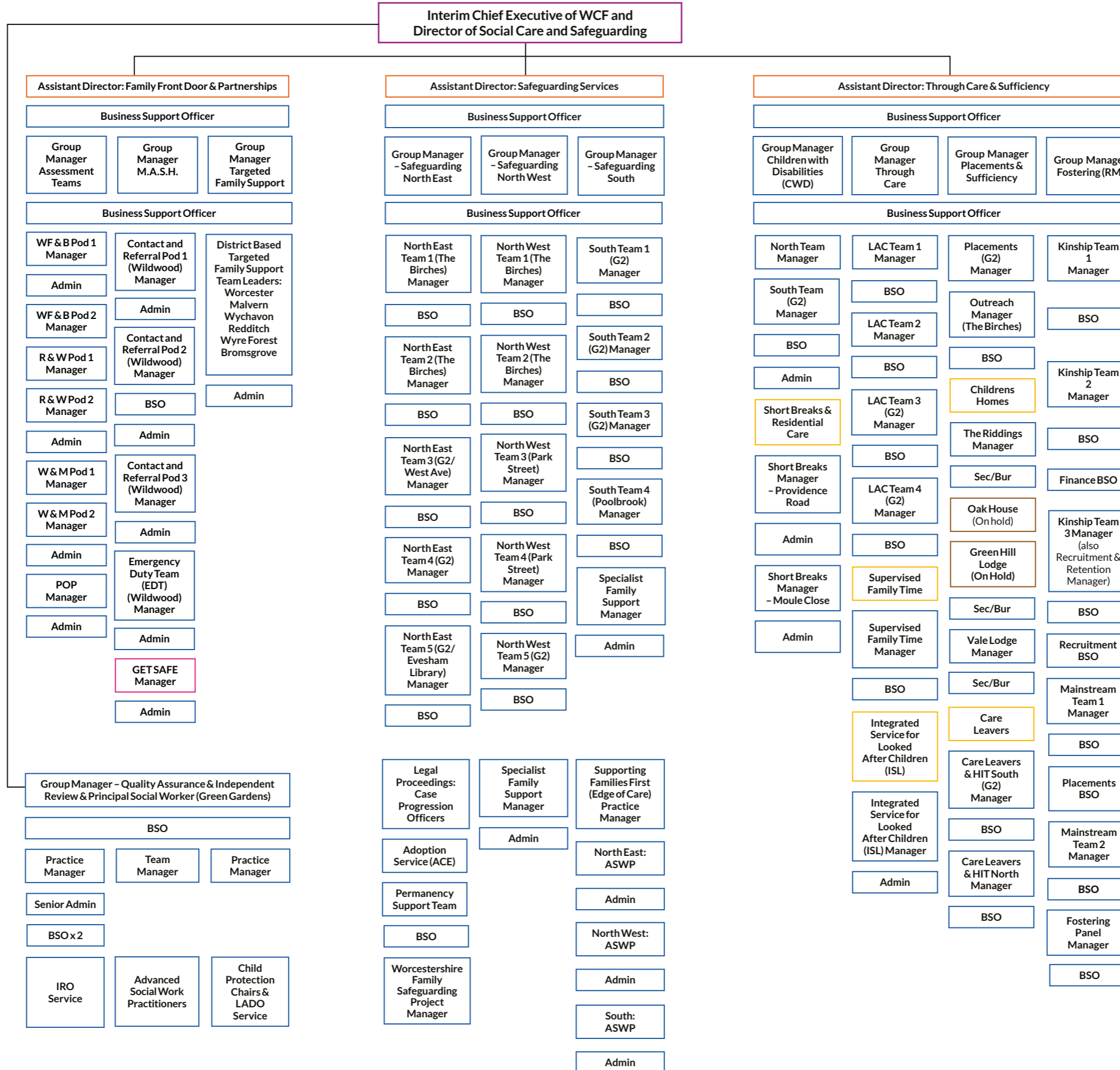
KPI	Area	KPI Descriptor	Tolerance Levels (* denotes those suggested TBC when contractual arrangements resume)	Contractual Reporting (February 2020 unless otherwise stated)
KPI-SC1	Social Care	Proportion of Referrals with a decision within 24 hours	52.3% - 62.7%	80.0%
KPI-SC2	Social Care	Proportion of social work assessments completed within 45 days	75.6% - 89.4%	93.4%
KPI-SC3	Social Care	Proportion of children subject to a Child Protection Plan with a plan in place	TBC*	86.9%
KPI-SC4	Social Care	Proportion of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days	67.8% - 85.1%	67.2%
KPI-SC5	Social Care	Proportion of children who became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time	17.9% - 36.5%	20.8%
KPI-SC6	Social Care	Proportion of Review Child Protection Conferences held in timescale	87.9% - 100.0%	92.2%
KPI-SC7	Social Care	Proportion of children subject to a Child Protection Plan seen within 20 days	TBC*	89.8%
KPI-SC8	Social Care	Proportion of Children Looked After Reviews completed within timescales	80.9% - 92.5%	88.4%
KPI-SC9	Social Care	Proportion of Children Looked After with an up to date Care / Pathway Plan	TBC*	97.8%

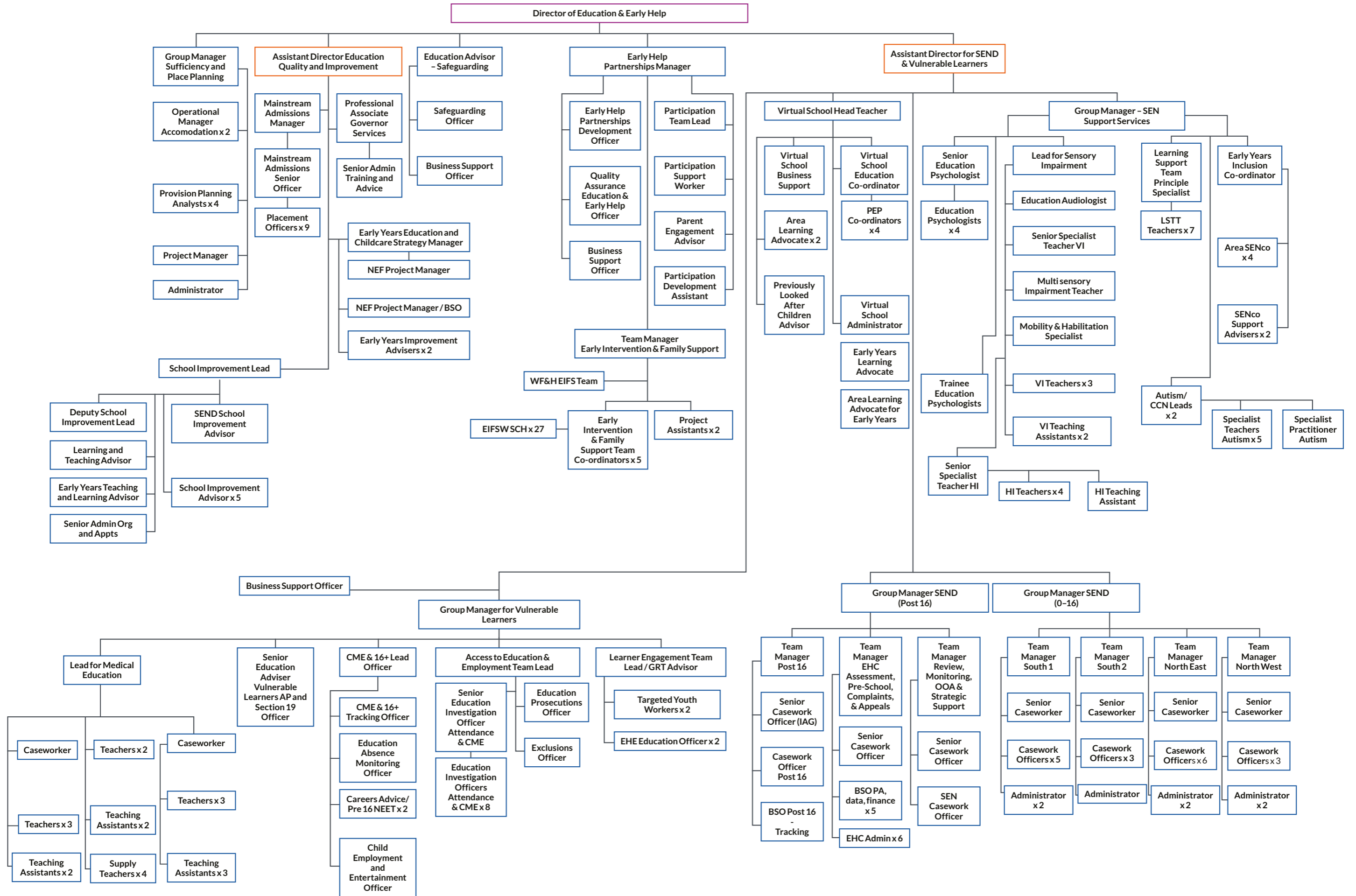


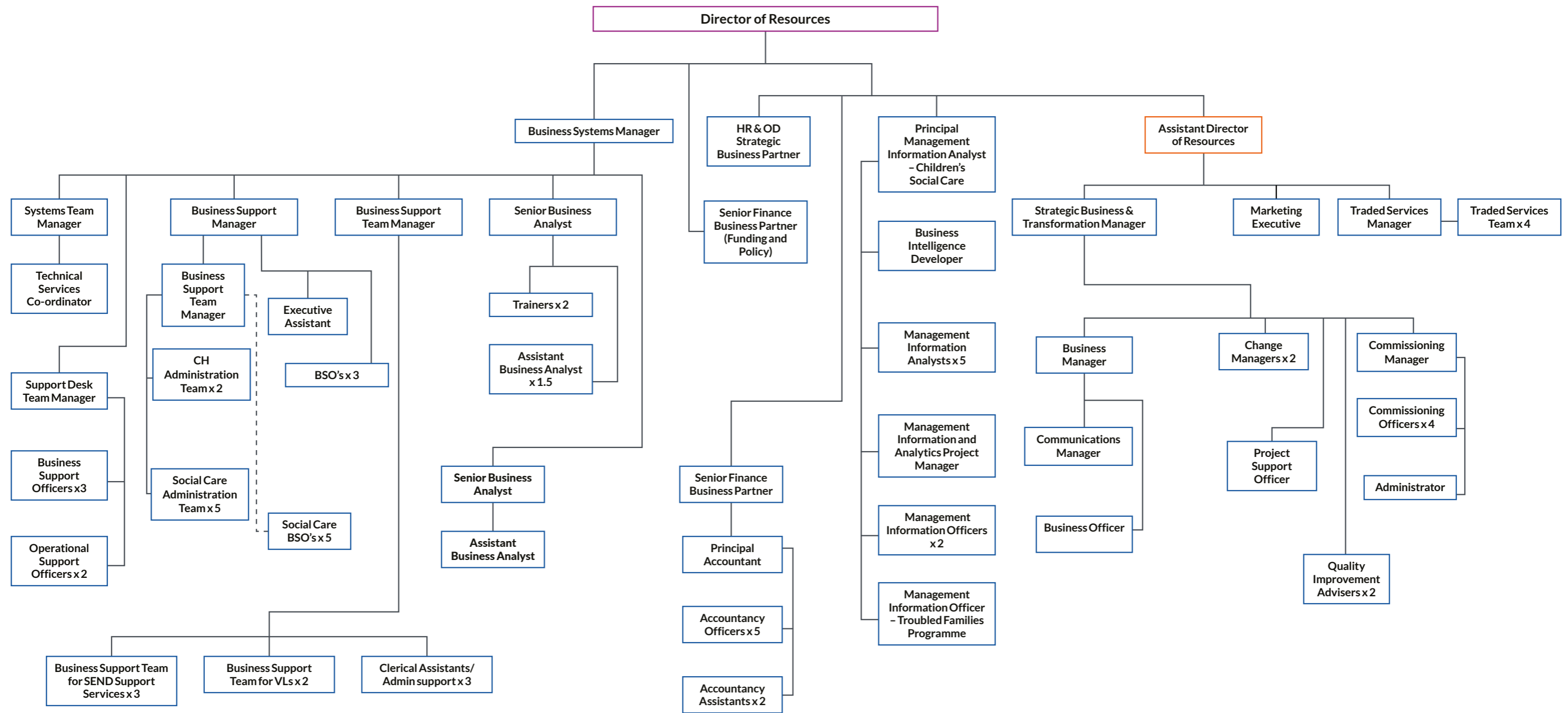
KPI	Area	KPI Descriptor	Tolerance Levels (* denotes those suggested TBC when contractual arrangements resume)	Contractual Reporting (February 2020 unless otherwise stated)
KPI-SC10	Social Care	Proportion of Child Looked After visits that were within timescale (30 days / 60 days)	TBC*	86.2%
KPI-SC11	Social Care	Proportion of children open for assessment or plan without an allocated worker for 5 days	TBC*	0.6%
KPI-SC12	Social Care	Percentage of Care Leavers open to services with an up to date Pathway Plan (age 18-20)	60.0% - 98.3%	91.1%
KPI-EH1	Early Help	Number of successful claims under the "Troubled Families" programme	416-555 claims	555 claims for 2021-2022 Programme
KPI-ED1	Education	Percentage of EHCP requests received where review decisions has been made within 6 weeks (statutory timescale)	80% - 90%*	New
KPI-ED2	Education	Percentage of Education Health and Care Plan decisions made within 16 weeks	60% - 75%*	New
KPI-ED3	Education	Percentage of Education Health and Care Plans completed within 20 weeks	60% - 75%	New
KPI-ED4	Education	Percentage of Statutory Advice Education Psychologist Service Reports submitted within 6 weeks	80% - 90%*	New
KPI-ED5	Education	Percentage of statutory advice Complex Communication Needs (Autism) reports submitted within 6 weeks	80% - 90%*	New
KPI-ED6	Education	Percentage of Statutory School Age Personal Education Plans for Children Looked After completed termly (available Jan/May/Aug)	80% - 90%	New



### Appendix 3: Directorate Structure Charts







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