

WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST



WCF ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

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1. FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Morrison', written in a cursive style.

Rob Morrison

Chair, Worcestershire Children First



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tina Russell', written in a cursive style.

Tina Russell

**Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First
and Director of Children's Services**

We are proud to share our Annual Report in follow up to our business plan for 2020/21. Our original business plan was revised in August 2020 to reflect the unprecedented impact of Covid on Education, Early Help and Social Care and Safeguarding services. Despite the changes and challenges brought about by the pandemic, our robust planning ensured we responded to the needs of Worcestershire children, young people and their families and as a company, continued to build upon the progress made in our first year.

Worcestershire Children First staff have been agile, resilient, and committed in their pandemic response, maintaining an unwavering focus on children, young people and their parent/carers throughout this difficult period.

In February 2021 I moved from Director of Social Care & Safeguarding to become interim Chief Executive of WCF and Director of Children's Services for WCC. In June I was pleased to be appointed permanently to this position.

Throughout 2020/21 we have worked alongside parents, carers and key partners to deliver the support and protection needed in front line services and our workforce have been innovative and flexible in ways of working to minimise the impact of the pandemic on our continued journey of improvement and service development. I am proud to share our achievements during 2020/21 in this report.

It is my ambition and vision to Sustain, Invest and Innovate as we continue as a service to make a difference to the lives of Children, Young People and their families supporting them to be Happy, Healthy and Safe.

2. ABOUT WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST

Worcestershire Children First (WCF) is the company responsible for delivering children's services across the county of Worcestershire. These services include Early Help and Support to Children in Need, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, Through Care Services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Services for Children with a Disability, SEND services and Education Improvement and Safeguarding services.

WCF services expanded on 1st June 2020 to include our Learning and Achievement services. The teams have brought an established record of high-quality services for schools and settings, including a traded offer.

WCF have an independently registered fostering agency providing foster care placements to children in care and we have an independently registered Adoption and Permanency service that works alongside our regional adoption agency "Adoption Central England" whose focus is to ensure we achieve timely permanency for children who have entered the care system.

The company is 100% owned by Worcestershire County Council and delivers its children's services on behalf of the local authority, working with partners across the county to ensure children, young people and families receive the best possible services.

In August 2020 Worcestershire Children First's business plan, originally published on 26th March 2020 for full year 2020/21, was revised to reflect the unprecedented changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It details how Education, Early Help, Social Care and Safeguarding services have been revised and prioritised during the pandemic and provides insight into the Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy.

Download: [WCF Business Plan 2020/21 – and the Revised Impact of COVID-19 \(PDF\)](#)



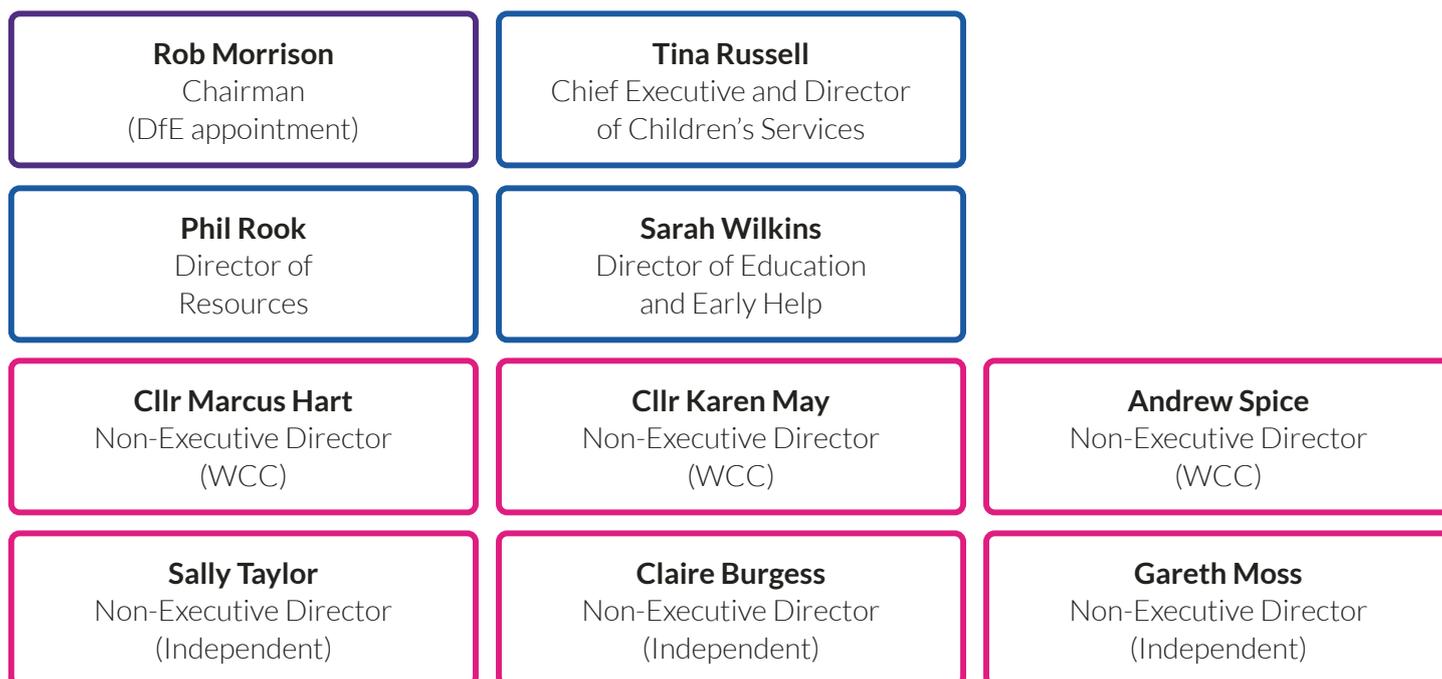
3. OUR BOARD AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Internal Governance

The WCF board consists currently of 10 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 provide input and challenge.

February 2021 saw the departure of Dr Catherine Driscoll from the post of Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First. Tina Russell was initially appointed as interim with permanent appointment in June 2021.

The governance structure below:

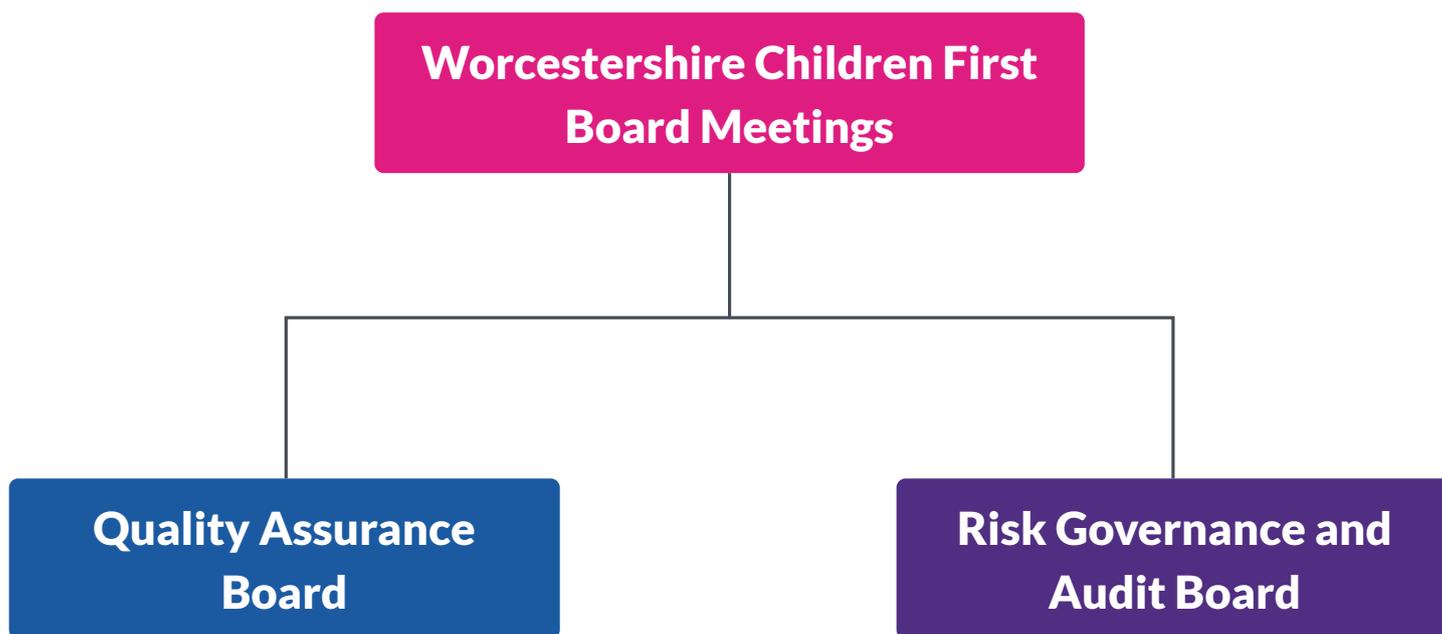


((Pink) denotes Non-Executive Director; (Dark Blue) represents Executive Director.
The Chairman of the Board is a DfE appointment (Purple))

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.

A programme of regular reporting on performance, finance, business planning and innovation is in place under the direction of the Chief Executive and extended senior leadership team to ensure monitoring impacts positively on outcomes for children and young people and is the core and demonstrable Company purpose.

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 sub-boards 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 and oversees the quality and performance of our front-line services. This includes actively seeking the views and opinions of children and young people on the impact of our interventions 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 and maintains an oversight of our governance, risk management, internal control, financial arrangements, and value for money framework. During the year we asked internal audit to independently review our governance and financial arrangements to ensure that they are effective to ensure the achievement of the company's objectives. The report concluded our governance and financial control is strong and robust, which has also been confirmed by external audit during the 2020/21 audit of our financial statements.

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.

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.

4. OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Our vision, mission, and values define our reason for being and this permeates throughout our Company's business; from our Board, strategic leadership, operational plans to frontline delivery of services to the children and families.

OUR VISION

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

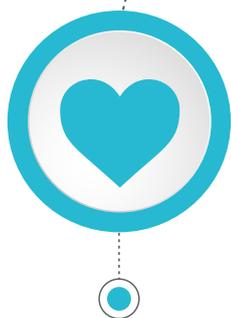
WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST



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 has 166,656¹ children and young people aged 0-25. 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. These are figures as at end of 31 March 2021 and as such do not include children worked with and closed during the year.



723 Children in Need
(1 in 165 children)



448 Children on a Child Protection Plan
(1 in 266 children)



842 Looked After Children
(1 in 142 children)



411 Young People are Not in Education, Employment or Training (1 in 31, 16-17 year olds)



29 Children Looked After who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (1 in 4,116 children)



4,212 Children on Education Health and Care Plans (1 in 40 children)



11,824 Children with a Special Educational Need or Disability (1 in 8 school age children)



40 Children registered as Missing Education for the academic year 2020/21 (1 in 2,066)



351 care leavers

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

5. OUR WORKFORCE

Our workforce (around 1,000 staff) 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' and we approach this through a culture that values the impact our staff have in improving children's lives. We have high expectations and have created conditions where professional expertise is valued and can flourish.

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

We are delighted to see that in 2020/21 Worcestershire was ranked 1st in the region and 12th nationally in a survey completed by social workers against the refreshed 2020 employer standards, in the review commissioned by the Local Government Association in 2021.

Our Workforce Vision ensures that, as a service, we continue to have strong front-line management and that we have the capacity and ability to flex in response to changes that are inevitable, whilst keeping a good level of stability and quality.

Our workforce strategy is managed and monitored through our WCF Workforce Board and is supported by financial investment and through staff feedback and performance reviews. Ultimately, we are focused on building a performance culture and the right working conditions, where employees are valued and supported to perform at their best.

During 2020/21 our workforce has been largely sustained with permanency rates for social workers at 82% and managers at 95%, with an overall qualified social work permanency rate of 86%. This has helped us in our virtual work with children and young people during key national lockdown periods where the relationship has been a foundation of a positive "virtual" experience.

Annual Health Check Outcomes – January 2021

In Worcestershire we undertake regular Health Checks, the most recent of these was completed January 2021. The Health Check provides data that evidences in all areas how staff experience management, and support in Worcestershire has remained consistent or improved.

- 98% receive dedicated supervision which includes review of performance; this is an increase of 10% from the previous year 2019/20
- 98% feel listened to and worries/concerns are dealt with by their line manager; this is an increase of 4% from the previous year
- 99% direct line managers (Team Manager/Group Manager) are visible, approachable, and responsive; this is an improvement of 4% from the previous year
- 83% say they have a manageable case load; this is an improvement of 12% from the previous year
- 92% receive regular information & communication on Quality Assurance; this is an improvement of 2% from the previous year.

6. OUR JOURNEY THROUGH COVID-19

WCF Company Response

April 2020 saw the beginning of the financial year and the start of the pandemic with a national lockdown. We recognised the impact of the pandemic on our partners as single specialist agencies, and considered this as part of our wider partnership multi-agency response to community demands and need for services during COVID-19. However safeguarding continued to be recognised as a priority and during this year we have needed to be flexible, responsive, proactive and collaborative in our partnership working to ensure children and families continue to access the support and protection required.

WCF have worked in unison with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) in its management and response to the pandemic, which has included involvement in the county's gold, silver and bronze command meetings.

During the pandemic our strategic and operational partnership working has remained strong with the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) establishing a COVID-19 executive meeting programme to monitor the impact on arrangements of COVID-19 across Worcestershire. A risk matrix was created and has been updated throughout and data shows consistent contributions to the child protection processes including Family Front Door (FFD), MASH and strategy discussions where agency contributions have remained above 90%.

A dedicated Worcestershire Education Incident Planning Group for COVID-19, with representatives from schools, colleges and early years settings and partnership stakeholders was established by the Director for Education and Early Help in March 2020. The group provided a forum for the collective expertise in the arrangement of education provision, application of DfE guidance and legislative changes and co-ordination in the recovery of educational services. In addition, specialist task groups responded to specific areas including SEND, Alternative Provision and Early Years. The Education Safeguarding Group of the WSCP continues to meet to ensure a strategic view of Keeping Children Safe in Education is understood with key messages heard and delivered.

Collaboration between WCF colleagues, Educational Leadership forums, the DfE, WCC and Public Health, enabled our schools and settings to remain open for the children of key workers and those pupils with vulnerabilities or special educational needs during the height of the pandemic. Coordination of arrangements for full school reopening from September 2020 and March 2021 were also fully supported, and ongoing weekly communications to education providers continues with national and local updates.

During 2020/21 the DfE developed national key performance indicators related to children's social care demand and contacts with children and in Education the availability of provision and attendance of children. Data shows WCF maintained high performance throughout with measures consistently above or in line with the national averages. For Education, a process for data collection was put in place in March 2020; daily and weekly reporting from schools and early years providers has continued to track openings and pupil attendance. Data is shared with the DfE to comply with national reporting requirements, and a database of local intelligence is maintained. Local data collections enable teams to track and monitor the progress being made by schools and settings including early years providers, and to support and challenge.

Social Care and Safeguarding Directorate

Our mission continued throughout the pandemic to do all we could to ensure children and young people received the support and protection they needed. WCF continued to deliver statutory social care and safeguarding services to our most vulnerable children alongside virtual services for early help, during each stage of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

WCF Social Care and Safeguarding developed four COVID-19 Operational Service Delivery Protocols. These were shared with the workforce and partners through the WSCP. As the pandemic evolved, we moved to the relevant phase of the protocols. Each protocol was developed to enable our services to:

- deliver the required interventions to safeguard those children in need of protection,
- promote the welfare of those children and young people in our care and to provide the necessary support to those children in need, preventing escalation of risk and need for child protection or care where possible.
- adapt and respond to the delivery of social care & safeguarding services in the context of minimising the spread of infection within our community and workforce.

As we progressed throughout the year, protocols were reviewed and updated to reflect the management of staff and service delivery needs.

Our demand for children services rose through 2020/21 - a rise very much associated with the pandemic. Whilst many understand these pressures at the “front door”, we know as an “End to End” service that these demands and the impact of COVID-19 affected our whole system and the journey for children and young people through it. We experienced a doubling of contacts, referrals and rises of repeat Social Work Assessments, associated national lockdowns, the diminished Early Help offer, instability in school attendance and Covid pressure resulting in increases of domestic violence, poverty, mental health and substance misuse.

The initial lockdown created issues for our care planning in courts and through to permanency and we saw the associated rise in Looked After Children numbers. During the second half of the year, we progressed focused work and communications to families and parents on early help, we challenged the “professional anxiety” culture and through our WCF early support we found ways to enable families effectively and efficiently to “problem solve”.

The use of Strengthening Families First enabled us to support parents to address and manage risk and the impact of Covid, continuing our work to prevent care where it was safe to do so. We also worked closely with the courts to progress our care proceedings and addressed delays in our ability to achieve permanency for children exiting the care system.

The establishment of the Social Care and Safeguarding Covid -19 KPIs (as shown in Appendix 1) supported the leadership team’s review of service delivery and senior management oversight on a weekly basis and has been updated throughout.

Despite the unprecedented rise in demand for services and the new ways of working we faced during 2020/21 the service continued to work to the business plan priorities, and in addition, two new projects were created and delivered in response to the pandemic and associated concerns raised regarding children missing school and a rise in harm to babies.

Back to School

We responded to waves of increased demand as schools returned identifying those pupils who had not returned through our Back to School project. During the course of the project we received 144 referrals from 59 educational settings and 124 children and young people were accepted into the project.

WCF contributed to the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership event in May 2021 and presented the Back to School project and evaluation. [The link to all videos from across the week can be found here.](#)

Safeguarding Babies

During COVID-19 we saw an increase in the number of contacts at Family Front Door for babies under 2 years old, but the need was predominantly at level 2/3 for early help and where social work assessment was undertaken, we saw a lower percentage requiring ongoing intervention.

In response to this trend seen locally and reported nationally, WCF implemented a Safeguarding Babies project to support families with young babies and looked to identify “hidden harm”. Over 700 families were visited as part of this project and 274 contributed to a survey we undertook seeking their views and experiences of support and early help.

Final phase 4 Protocol (April 2021)

In April 2021, we resumed face-to-face visits to all children subject to assessment and plans. The social work skill in listening, observing, triangulating, and analysing to understand the “lived life experience” of the child has never been more important and to do this we need to see them in their own homes, in the company of their parents/carers and with siblings as well as on their own. Under phase 4 we have resumed services in full and implemented adaptations from our learning.

In terms of safeguarding and supporting the most vulnerable children it is our view that we are yet to see the full impact of Hidden Harm and the increased peaks in demand will be seen throughout the coming year as schools return to a greater period of stability, children return to regular time with family and trusted adults and start to feel a level of “normality” and from that the assurance and confidence it gives them to talk about their lived experience.

Education and Early Help

On 20th March 2020, the Government announced that schools and settings would remain open to vulnerable children and children of critical workers, but for all other learners, arrangements would need to be made for them to access education from home. The Department for Education (DfE) also cancelled GCSE and A level examinations for 2020 and 2021 and Ofqual set out the process for schools and colleges to award grades for young people.

WCF put in place a process to be followed to ensure provision was available for children who need arrangements to be made during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was updated in line with Government guidance and to support the wider, phased reopening process throughout the academic year 2020/21. Schools and settings were supported to keep children safe, provide remote education, assess and support effective education for children with SEND, ensure food and access to food for children was maintained, supply IT devices for children, prepare and deliver onsite testing of children and staff, transport children safely and effectively and ensure they made smooth transitions.

School Improvement Advisors continued to work with school leaders to respond to demand and manage capacity across the county, in line with Government guidance to open schools to larger cohorts of pupils. All schools could work within a supportive Hub model which was in place across the county to make optimum use of staff, space and resources. The Hub was based on pyramids of schools, grouped by geographical area.

Our priority for the early years sector during the coronavirus outbreak was first and foremost to ensure enough childcare for vulnerable children and children of critical workers who could not be looked after at home. WCF successfully ensured childcare places were available throughout Worcestershire through regular communication with providers. However, ensuring provision is available for children who need care is challenged by the volumes and numbers of settings (over 700 Worcestershire settings).

The highest priority and consideration throughout this time was the safety and wellbeing of Worcestershire children, young people, families and staff and our response was in line with the following principles:

- Reduce the risk of infection following PHE/DFE guidance via risk assessments and related actions
- Support a collaborative approach across Worcestershire schools and settings, governors and trust boards, the Council, WCF, DfE, trade unions and other key stakeholders
- Support a sustainable and progressive approach to wider reopening
- Increase the attendance for vulnerable children along with children of critical workers
- Risk assess the re-opening and inclusion for all children and make decisions about phasing, timing and management, based on the outcomes of risk assessments
- Empower an inclusive and therapeutic approach to reintegration, particularly for those children and young people who may find a return to school or setting challenging
- Assess building capacity and spaces and advise on protective measures
- Work with partners to support children and their families, for example health and social care and services, Here2Help

Resources

The Resources Directorate enable services that support children's social care and education and early help to deliver high quality services as well as enabling us to operate efficiently and effectively. These services include finance, management information, systems, transformation, commissioning, company communications, business support, and business management services as well as several support services, such as facilities management, Human Resources and IT support, bought back from the Council.

Significantly for 2020/21 was the addition of Learning and Achievement to the Resources Directorate, following their TUPE transfer, including the traded services element, who support our offer to schools and supplement our revenue. This seamless transfer was co-ordinated and managed by the business and transformation team. See appendix 2 for structure charts.

During the Covid 19 pandemic the Resources Directorate reacted to national and local needs. Fundamental to this was the communications team who produced the frequent bulletins for schools, detailing Government updates and vital information to support schools throughout the pandemic. During the height of the pandemic these were produced daily and continue to be an invaluable source of information for our education colleagues.

The information management teams adapted the production of KPIs to reflect the reporting on the Covid 19 Protocols, enabling management teams to monitor performance and ensure support to vulnerable children, young people and their families continued to be timely and effective during this unprecedented period.

Ready Steady Worcestershire

Our commissioning team brought together an external partnership group, now known as Ready, Steady, Worcestershire to tackle the issue of hunger and isolation in the school holidays. Funding was secured by the business team from the National Lottery and the Covid Winter Grant to enable organisations from across the county to deliver food, recipes, and activity packs to vulnerable children. The business team continue to project manage this ever-growing initiative, which received DfE funding for financial year 2021/22. In total the business team brought in £360k of grant funding for financial year 2020/21, to support a range of Social Care projects.

8. WCF QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

We know our Quality Assurance programme is a significant strength of our service. Worcestershire Children First has a collective framework which ensures arrangements for quality assurance:

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

Our Quality Assurance Framework has three dimensions:

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.



Key Performance Indicators.

Analysis of our business and performance information on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

Audit Activity.

Completing thematic and case-file audits (multi-agency included).

In the year 2020/21 we have continued our focus and priority of quality assurance in social care and safeguarding services; we have seen a significant increase of 36% in the number of case file audits completed from the previous year. The number also judged to be Good has also increased by 10%, when considering this grade two years ago. The audit tool is divided into five dimensions: Quality of Assessment, Quality of Plans, Voice of the Child, Management oversight and Partnership Working and we have seen a reduction in audits graded Inadequate in all areas.

Feedback from Children, Young People and Families include:

“I do not feel that the social worker could have done anything better. I feel that the social worker was supportive and the SW was able to work with me to develop an age appropriate way to explain to my children why they were not having contact with their father”

“the Social Worker is amazing, and she actually truly genuinely cares about the kids on her caseload. She must not of got home until 8pm and was amazing. I really don't know how I would have coped yesterday evening/ last night without her. I'm feeling very very lucky and supported...”

“Thank you to you all for helping me through the rough times and being there when I've needed help”

“You get my point across to perfection she says exactly what I say”

114 Families gave us feedback following Closure to our services in Quarter 4 2020/2021, they told us:

- 99% told us that the practitioner gave them opportunities to share their views and opinions
- 95% told us that the practitioner spoke to their child and listened to their views
- 98% told us that the worker spoke to the right people and partner agencies to inform the assessment and plan for their children
- 88% of families told us we made a positive difference to them and their child

Our business planning for the forthcoming year sets to extend this to a company-wide Quality Assurance framework.

9. BUSINESS PLANNING 2020/21

In accordance with our Business Plan for 2020/21, and despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, WCF still ensured a focus on our business priorities. The following pages provide an overview of our areas of focus for the period of the financial year, and provides the achievements and progress made for Social Care and Safeguarding, and Education and Early Help services.

Social Care and Safeguarding					
Workforce and Culture					
	Family Front Door and Partnerships Emma Brittain	Safeguarding Maria White	Through Care Adam Johnston	Safeguarding Quality Assurance Dan Adams	
Senior Leadership Quality Assurance Programme	End to End Leadership Team				
	Ofsted Recommendations July 2019 and additional, areas for improvement	The engagement with partners to deliver early help to families and to ensure that this help is timely.	The quality of intervention with families, where there is a risk that children may be received into care if the right support and guidance is not available. (Edge of Care - Supporting Families First)	The availability of a dedicated pathway to the provision of mental health services for children in care. Provision of personal assistants for care leavers when they reach the age of 17.	Learning from the breakdown of placements for children by the holding of timely disruption meetings.
		Assessments of need for 16 and 17 year olds who present as homeless, including whether they should come into the care of the local authority. Young people should be told clearly about this option.	The timely availability of family support when children have a plan to leave care and return home.	The availability of suitable accommodation and timely interventions that ensure that care leavers, including those aged over 18 years, are not placed in bed and breakfast accommodation or become homeless.	
	Sustaining improvement and building consistency in good practice				
Team Managers and Independent Chairs to proactively and effectively identify and improve quality and timeliness in all cases. Ensure comprehensive assessments, effective use of chronologies and family friendly outcome focussed plans are in place all the time for all children. Ensure robust case management and timely reflective supervision in place for all social workers all of the time.					
Service Area Business Development and Improvement Plans	Thresholds and Partnerships	Development of Specialist Family Support Service	Sufficiency of Placements Review Integrated Service for Looked After Children (ISL) and Emotional Health & Well Being Service Development	Are we Making a Difference? Outcome Measures - impact on children's lives Improving the quality and timeliness of plans, effective use of Dispute Resolution Process (DRP)	
	Get Safe - identification and management of children at risk of exploitation.	Quality and timeliness of Court Work	Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Business Plan and Inspection Financial Management, Savings and Efficiencies	Understanding service user experience, Child Protection and Looked After Children's Processes	
	Financial Management, Savings and Efficiencies	Financial Management, Savings and Efficiencies	Organisational review of CWD and SEND	Financial Management, Savings and Efficiencies	
Innovation	Social Work Student in Practice	Family Safeguarding	Regional Fostering Developments	Practice Managers - Research in practice	
		Repeat Proceedings and Child Removals (Pause Project)	Safe Centre Regional Secure		
Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP)			Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures	Safeguarding Practice Review Board	Get Safe Partnership Board

Inspections and Focused Visits / JTAI

Area	Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Ofsted Recommendations July 2019 and additional areas for improvement	Family Front Door and Partnerships	The engagement of partners to deliver early help to families and to ensure that this help is timely	QA work completed through work of Family Front Door and WSCP QAPP – very positive outcomes.
		Assessments of need for 16 and 17 year olds who present as homeless, including whether they should come into care of the Local Authority. Young People should be clear about this option.	Targeted Family Support and EIFS merged into FFD. Revised model of working completed. Independent validation of achievement evidenced in Ofsted Focused Visit to FFD June 2021.
	Safeguarding	The quality of intervention with families, where there is a risk that children may be received into care if the right support and guidance is not available. (Edge of Care – Supporting Families First)	Supporting Families First successful implementation and year one evaluation completed. 92% success rate in care prevention development of SFF approach to children in need 2021/22. Delays in permanency and rehabilitation planning due to Covid. Audit identifies case of delay progressed latterly. Priority in business plan 2021/22.
		The timely availability of family support when children have a plan to leave care and return home.	
	Through Care	The availability of a dedicated pathway to the provision of mental health services for children in care.	Partnership group continued including: Joint case review learning events and presentation to CYSP and Feedback to national protocol on cross border MH services to children in care. Priority for 2021/22
		Provision of Personal Assistants (PAs) for care leavers when they reach the age of 17.	Completed merger of Outreach and PA service, coordination of roles and specialism to prevent duplication and ensure all YP aged 17 had allocated worker.
		The availability of suitable accommodation and timely interventions that ensure that care leavers, including those aged over 18 years, are not placed in bed and breakfast accommodation or become homeless.	No use of B&B for under 18's and monitored for those over 18 with short term emergency.
	Safeguarding Quality Assurance	Learning from the breakdown of placements for children by the holding of timely disruption meetings.	Completed. Review of process and co-ordination of Disruption mtgs and Consolidation meetings.
	All	Sustaining improvement and building consistency in good practice	Completed evidence in through year KPI/SU feedback and Audit.

Area	Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Service Area Business Development and Improvement Plans	Family Front Door and Partnerships	Thresholds and Partnerships	Threshold application a concern through Covid impact. Concerns raised through WSCP
		GET SAFE – identification and management of children at risk of exploitation.	Launch of Get Safe year 2 completed. WSCP Get Safe action plan implemented.
	Safeguarding	Development of Specialist Family Support Service	Review of service completed. Service support children in CP plans and no waiting list.
		Quality and Timeliness of Court Work	LFJB data remains high although Covid impact caused some delays, addressed 2021/22
	Through Care	Sufficiency of Placements	Completed: Sufficiency Strategy completed and signed off at Cabinet.
		Review Integrated Services for Looked After Children (ISL) and Emotional Health & Well Being Service Development	ISL review delayed due to Covid impact and priorities for all agencies IFA registered.
		Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Business Plan and Inspection	CWD & SEND services development continues under SEND action plan and CWD service review following appointment of interim CWD group manager. KPI's improved
		Organisational Review of CWD and SEND	All Age Disability board created, and consultation project lead appointed who has led development.
	Safeguarding Quality Assurance	Are we making a difference? Outcome Measures – impact on children's lives	QA programme impacted successfully through 2020/21. Evidence of good outcomes in increased audits and SU feedback with increased positive outcome in both. KPI's maintained through 2020/21
		Improving the quality and timeliness of plans, effective use of Dispute Resolution Process (DRP)	
		Understanding service user experience, Child Protection and Looked After Children's Processes	
	All	Financial Management, Savings and Efficiencies	

Area	Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Innovation	Family Front Door and Partnerships	Social Work Student in Practice (POP)	Completed. Student in place, supported FFD and schools in early management of Covid. POP forms part of workforce 2021/22
	Safeguarding	Family Safeguarding	Projects implemented – progress on track
		Repeat Proceedings and Child Removals (PAUSE Project)	
	Through Care	Regional Fostering Developments	Development on regional commissioning HUB with fostering framework. Revised progress on Safe Centre in reflection of regional priorities and developing ways of working to prevent care and secure. New groups established 2021/22
		Safe Centre Regional Secure	
Safeguarding Quality Assurance	Practice Managers – Research in Practice	Completed and supported workforce learning through 2020/21	



Education and Early Help

Co-production with Children & Families

		Sufficiency and Place Planning Robert Williams	Education Support and Effectiveness David Townsend	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) & Vulnerable Learners Gabrielle Stacey	Education Safeguarding Denise Hannibal	Early Help Partnerships Helen Hey			
Education & Early Help and SEND & Vulnerable learners Leadership Teams									
Education Partnerships	Service Area Business Development and Improvement Plans	Forecast education places in early years and mainstream provision	Early Years Strategy development and delivery	Local Offer	Strengthen links with Social Care and SEND	To develop the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Headteacher Steering Group	Visits Engagement with partners to deliver Early Help to families and to ensure this help is timely (Ofsted)		
		Development of forecasting for Specialist Education and Post 16 education provision	School Improvement Leadership and recruitment	Embedding inclusive practice in Early Years providers and Schools	Educational outcomes for Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children	To improve the skills and confidence of schools to manage risk/identify harm through workforce training & development including Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Network	Troubled Families Programme 2020/21		
		Partnership working to open a new Alternative Provision school in Wyre Forest	School Admissions in year admissions management for all schools	Continuum of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision	Exclusions and Alternative Provision Review including the Medical Education Service		Implement and embed the Reducing Parental Conflict initiative		
		Plan the strategic capital programme through needs analysis and condition surveys	Education Strategy School Improvement at district level	Continuing health care needs for children and young people with SEND	Review and publish Children Missing Education (CME) strategy	Quality Assurance Audit programme for schools; Keeping Children Safe In Education	Participation and Inclusion Team empowering children, families and young people to participate in decision making		
		Plan new schools	Plans Governor recruitment, development and Quality Assurance	Co production in Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process	Attendance and exclusions for Vulnerable Learners		Early Intervention Family Support (EIFS) delivery plan		
		Workforce and Culture		Develop new and existing provision for SEND pupils	Regional Schools Commissioner / Diocese	Quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)	Identification and tracking of Children Missing Education (CME) / Timeliness for suitability of Elective Home Education	To ensure compliance with WSCP Child Protection Procedures	Enhance the Early Help Local Offer
				Academy Conversions		Management of High Level Needs funding	children looked after (CLA) experience of high quality Alternative Provision / curriculum	Operation Encompass Phase2	
						Review and implement EHCP Annual reviews			
						Post 16 Graduated response guidance			
		Financial Management Value for Money High Needs Management Optimise and Integration of Business Systems							

Inspections and Monitoring Visits

Quality Assurance Framework and programme

Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Sufficiency and Place Planning	Ensure that there is a process in place to manage sufficiency of education places and forecasting, to include the following provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ early years ▪ mainstream ▪ specialist ▪ post-16 	Appointment of new Group Manager linking into Corporate Asset Strategy Planning. Cabinet approval in for provision of new Secondary School in Worcester in February 2021 as part of our annual plan
	to include new provision of - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ mainstream ▪ specialist ▪ AP provision 	
	Academy conversions	WCF continue work with and support schools to work to this government agenda of Academisation.
Education Support and Effectiveness	Early Years Strategy development and delivery	Early Years lead appointed.
	School Improvement leadership and recruitment	Delayed due to Covid in progress for 2021/22 business planning
	Education Strategy School Improvement at district level	
	Management of in-year school admissions	Total in-year applications processed from 01/06/2020 to 31/05/2021 was 3348, compared to 2135 in the previous period. Development of a new Fair Access Protocol led to the placement of 13 children in the 2020/21 academic year, compared to none in the previous year.
	Education Sector response to COVID-19 Pandemic	This strategic group met regularly throughout the pandemic providing regular support, steer and decision making with key educational leaders to ensure continuity of and access to education.
Plan Governor recruitment, development and quality assurance	Delayed in Covid now in progress for 2021/22	

Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Vulnerable Learners	SEND Improvement Programme including. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Offer ▪ Early Years Inclusive Practice ▪ Continuum of SEND Provision ▪ Continuing health care needs for CYP with SEND ▪ Coproduction, quality and review process of annual review of EHCPs ▪ management of high level needs funding ▪ Post 16 graduated response ▪ Transition, support service 	<p>The SEND Improvement Board and workstream leads continued to meet throughout the COVID-19 period and meetings are attended by the DfE Advisor and NHSE adviser who remains supportive of our approach and progress.</p> <p>We have continued to complete new assessments for EHCP's within timescales and improved review timeliness.</p> <p>A comprehensive quality assurance and learning programme is part of 2021/22 priorities.</p>
	Review of Alternative Provision and Medical Education service	Cabinet agreed the future delivery approach in March 2021 following co-production on the future approach with relevant stakeholders
	Review and Publish Children Missing in Education (CME) Strategy, including process for tracking children and suitability of EHE	Data is now collated and reviewed regularly by an operational team "missing Mondays" and senior managers through the Leadership work programme
	Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children, and previously Looked After Children	100% Personal Education Plans completed for statutory school age Children Looked After (CLA). Increase in percentage of CLA making expected progress against their own targets and approach to learning.
	Strengthen links with Social Care and SEND	CWD and SEND senior managers have come together to do the groundwork for the planned All Age Disability service. This has included workshops and learning about each other's role and responsibilities in legislation and practice approach

Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Education Safeguarding	Develop the WSCP Headteacher steering group	Completed. Group has representatives of all provision and meets regularly
	Improve the Skills and confidence of schools to manage safeguarding, including. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workforce Training ▪ DSL Network ▪ Quality Assurance audit programme (KCSE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 210 schools bought into Service Level Agreement in academic year 2020/21 ▪ Designated Safeguarding Lead network includes 925 staff from 279 schools (includes independent schools and FE Colleges) ▪ The DSL Networks meet termly and every half term local networks run by DSL champions facilitated by WCF education safeguarding team ▪ QA visits - 36 safeguarding self-assessment reviews were undertaken by the Education Safeguarding Leads with schools in the first 2 terms of 2020/21
	To ensure schools' compliance with WSCP Child Protection procedures	S11 Audits completed. A moderation programme through WSCP underway
	Operation Encompass Phase 2	Launched. This introduced a more detailed level of information sharing for schools and results in timely and appropriate action to support children in school.



Service Area	Priority	Outcome
Early Help Partnerships	Enhancement of the Early Help Offer across partnerships	<p>This was a priority from the ILACS inspection July 2019. Ofsted focused visit of July 2021 said of our Early Help</p> <p><i>“The local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practise for children and families in receipt of services at its family front door since the inspection in June 2019. The early help partnership is now well engaged with the delivery of services, and most schools in Worcestershire have an early help offer, we spoke to the needs of their community”.</i></p> <p><i>“Children and families assessed as not requiring a statutory social work response by the family front door are stepped down to early help services or signposted appropriately, ensuring a timely and proportionate response. Most children who need early help support receive a service that is multi-agency, reflective and responsive to Childrens needs. Children benefit from creative direct work and the voice of the child is considered in early help assessments”.</i></p> <p><i>“Leaders have developed seamless referral and transitional arrangements to ensure that children and families experience minimal delay within the front door so that children gain the right service at the right time”.</i></p>
	Troubled Families	The 2020 payment by results programme achieved 93% of the programme target for the year (494/533). This is an improvement on the previous phase of 12%.
	Implement and Embed Reducing Parental Conflict (Harmony at Home)	Initial programme launch and engagement was followed by the delivery of Train the Trainer sessions to practitioners across the early help partnership. A multi-agency reference group has been established and they helped to co-produce a localised “Harmony at Home” toolkit of resources and web based content for practitioners’ ongoing use.
Early Help Partnerships and Social Care & Safeguarding	Implementation of Liquidlogic	The system was successfully implemented in the Spring and is now operational across Social Care and Early Help

10. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Director of Resources and team have successfully guided the company through its second year of trading returning a small profit. In 2020/21 the company's turnover for the period was £119.7M making a small profit of £566k, which represents 0.47%.

The company is an admitted body to the Worcestershire Pension Fund. The cost of pensions in 2020/21 was £5M and the contribution rate was 18.6%. The financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors on 26 July 2021, an extract is included in this report.

Worcestershire Children First Support Services (ICT, Human Resources, Payroll and facilities management services etc) are provided by Worcestershire County Council. The value of these contracts was £7.3M for the 2020/21.

Income for the year ended 31 March 2020	2019 - 20 (£M)	2020 - 21 (£M)
Income from Worcestershire County Council for main contract	55.0	117.4
Other Income	0.3	2.3
Total Turnover	55.3	119.7

Financial Information Summary

Profit and Loss Account and Other Comprehensive Income	2019 - 20 (£)	2020 - 21 (£)
Turnover	55,294,453	119,731,869
Cost of sales	(51,151,811)	(111,939,005)
Gross profit	4,142,642	7,792,864
Other operating expenses	(3,517,750)	(7,323,758)
Operating profit	624,892	469,106
Interest Receivable	20,060	4,528
Profit before taxation	644,952	473,634
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	122,541	(92,911)
Profit for the financial year	522,411	566,545

Worcestershire Children First- Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2021	2019 - 2020 (£)	2020 - 2021 (£)
Current Assets		
Debtors	5,245,639	28,354,791
Cash at bank and in hand	6,609,231	13,936,548
Total Assets	11,854,870	42,291,339
Liabilities		
Creditors; amounts falling due within one year	(11,332,459)	(41,202,383)
Total Liabilities	(11,332,459)	(41,202,383)
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	522,411	1,088,956
Capital Reserves		
Retained Earnings	522,411	1,088,956
Equity	522,411	1,088,956

Company Secretary: Phil Rook | **Auditors:** Grant Thornton | **Company Number:** 11447965

11. RISK

The principal risk facing the Company is the requirement at all times to ensure the delivery of safe and compliant services and the associated reputational risk if the company fails to safeguard and provide high quality services to its customers. This risk is mitigated through maintaining high standard robust policies and procedures, developing strong relationships with customers and ensuring continuous investment in staff development through internally and externally provided training.

WCF will maintain the Company risk register, which will be scrutinised at the Risk, Governance & Audit Board. 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.

During 2021-22 WCF will be continuing to build a network of customers, suppliers and potential partners in our sector. WCF is able to demonstrate financial stability due to Worcestershire County Council being our owner as well as our major customer. This demonstrates low risk as our owner Worcestershire County Council fully support WCF.



12. STRATEGIC GOALS AND BUSINESS PLANNING FOR 2021/22

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



Worcestershire Children First Business Plan 2021/22

Our Business Plan for 2021/22 is published on our website which sets out the ambitions, priorities and arrangements and outlines how we will deliver services for children, young people and families in Worcestershire, aligning with our strategic goals.

Download: [WCF Business Plan \(PDF\)](#)

Company-wide priorities for 2021/22

As part of our Company's Business Plan for 2020/21 we are striving for transformational change to support WCF's continuous improvement journey. Collectively we have identified key priorities for the year ahead which will need a dedicated focus at Company and Directorate level, to meet the best outcomes for children:

- **Working in partnership with Worcestershire County Council** – this includes developing an all-age disability experience, improving customer access to services, integrating wellbeing, digitalisation, and strategic capacity planning.
- **Worcestershire Children First 'a whole service working together'** – with a focus on vulnerable learners, services for children and young people with SEND, commissioning, quality assurance and finance.
- **Our workforce, our foundation** – encompassing health and wellbeing, recruitment and retention, diversity and culture, leadership and management, and building skills for our future workforce.



13. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Contractual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Indicator	This Month	KPI Status	Min. Target	Stat. Neigh.	Preceding three months		
					Feb	Jan	Dec
A: (KPI-SC1) Referrals - Level 4 decision within 24 hours	74.1	●	52.30		●	●	●
B: (KPI-SC2) S17 Assessments completed within 45 days	92.6	●	75.60	81.0	●	●	●
C: (KPI-SC3) Proportion of Children Subject to CP Plan with Plan in Place	100.0	●	80.00		●	●	●
D: (KPI-SC4) ICPCs completed within 15 days	96.3	●	67.80	78.0	●	●	●
E: (KPI-SC5) Proportion of children who became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time within 2 years	11.3	●	27.30		●	●	●
F: (KPI-SC6) RCPCs completed within timescale	100.0	●	87.90	93.0	●	●	●
G: (KPI-SC7) Proportion of children subject to a Child Protection Plan seen within 20 days	93.8	●	77.00		●	●	●
H: (KPI-SC8) % Children Looked After Reviews in timescale	99.0	●	80.90		●	●	●
I: (KPI-SC9) Looked After Children with up to date Care Plan/Pathway Plan	97.5	●	73.00		●	●	●
J: (KPI-SC10) % Looked After Children who had a visit (in person) within timescale (30 days/60 days)	75.7	●	85.00				
K: (KPI-SC11) % Children Open for assessment or plan without an allocated worker for 5 days	0.5	●			●	●	●
L: (KPI-SC12) % of Care Leavers open to services with an up to date pathway plan (age 18-25)	65.4	●			●	●	●
M: (KPI-EH1) % of annual target reached for successful claims under the "Troubled Families" programme	92.7	●			●	●	
N: (KPI-ED1) Percentage of EHCP requests received where review decisions have been made within 6 weeks	100.0	●			●	●	●
O: (KPI-ED2) Percentage of Education Health and Care Plan decisions made within 16 weeks	100.0	●			●	●	●
P: (KPI-ED3) Percentage of Education Health and Care Plans completed within 20 weeks	96.2	●			●	●	●

Indicator	This Month	KPI Status	Min. Target	Stat. Neigh.	Preceding three months		
					Feb	Jan	Dec
Q: (KPI-ED4) Percentage of Statutory Advice Reports (all types) for EHCP Needs Assessment submitted within 6 weeks of request sent	92.0	●					
R: (KPI-ED6) Percentage of looked after children of school age with an up to date Personal Education Plan	100.0	●			●	●	●

Key to KPI Status

- Green - KPI is at or above target
- Amber - KPI is below target, but not for three consecutive months, so action plan not triggered
- Red - KPI is below target and has been for three consecutive months, triggering action plan



Worcestershire Children First

County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

Tel: **01905 766766**

Email: **support@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk**

Website: **www.worcschildrenfirst.org.uk**