**Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership**

**Learning Briefing**

**Application of the** **Levels of Need by Partners**

This learning briefing has been produced following a multi-agency audit of referrals to the Worcestershire Family Front Door. The aim of the briefing is to help all professionals across the partnership to improve the way they use the Worcestershire Levels of Need Guidance document to decide whether a referral to the Family Front Door is the correct step at that point, or whether the child or young person could be better helped via another route.

The Worcestershire Levels of Need Guidance document can be found using the following link:

[Levels-of-Need-Document-formerly-Thresholds-document-updated-May-2019-3.pdf (safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk)](https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Levels-of-Need-Document-formerly-Thresholds-document-updated-May-2019-3.pdf)

This audit was undertaken by Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, GP Services, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Schools and West Mercia Police; across the audit, twenty children’s experiences were considered.

The key learning points for all professionals can be summarised as follows.

1. Application of thresholds and decision making at the Family Front Door is appropriate and proportionate to the identified needs and risks for children.
2. Agencies are referring to the Family Front Door when they have a genuine worry and concern for children and young people, and when a referral is made, it is generally being made in a timely manner.
3. There was evidence of professional curiosity to understand worries and concerns for children and asking exploratory questions to families.
4. There were examples of when referrals should not have been made. These can often be avoided by professionals using the Levels of Need Guidance which would direct the referrer towards the correct response, for example provision of Early Help by their own, or another agency.
5. There are examples of referrals being made where speaking to other agencies and the family, the Family Front Door identified that a referral had not actually been necessary. Before deciding upon a referral, agencies need to consider whether they can work together at the lowest level to share information, with the consent of the family. This may ultimately negate the need for a referral when that additional information is considered using the Levels of Need Guidance document. This would ensure children get the right help at the right time.
6. On occasions referral was the right decision at the right time, however, it did not sufficiently describe the level of need and risk for that child or young person and why a Social Work intervention is required. Using the Levels of Need Guidance will support practitioners to appropriately identify presenting issues and risks at each level of the continuum of need.
7. Some of the families were already receiving Early Help Services in the community and as need increased these families were referred to the Family Front Door. It is important in these circumstances that agencies consider what other actions they and other partners can do to support the family to increase support, such as Multi-Agency Meetings, Early Help Assessments, bringing in other forms of support or a referral through the Early Help Family Support Service, and whether these are improving the outcomes for the child/children.
8. There are referrals being made to the Family Front Door (Children’s Social Work Service) when they should be being referred directly to the Early Help Family Support Service. The Family Front Door and Early Help Pathways are clearly outlined within the Levels of Need Guidance and professionals need to check they are using the correct pathway to avoid referring to the wrong service or making duplicate referrals to both.
9. It is important that agencies record on their systems the referrals they make and the outcomes from those – this is their responsibility as the referring agency.
10. If practitioners are unsure about the level of need for the child and family, it is important that they discuss this with their manager or safeguarding lead to decide on the appropriate response for the child.

Where professionals recognise that the child or young person does not meet threshold for referral to the Family Front Door, helpful information on the early help support available and possible next steps can be found at;

[Early help guidance for professionals | Worcestershire County Council](https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/earlyhelp)

[The Family Hub | Worcestershire County Council](https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20643/the_family_hub)

Agencies can also access Levels of Need Training through the Partnership at:

[WSCP Training and Events - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards (safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk)](https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/learning-development/training-c/wscb-events/)