

# Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership

Annual Report

2020 - 2021



**STAY · SAFE**  
**WORCESTERSHIRE**

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

# 1. Contents

1.	Foreword	3
2.	Executive Summary	4
3.	Introduction	8
4.	Key Facts about Worcestershire	10
5.	Background	11
6.	The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Group	12
7.	The Wider Partnership	16
8.	The GET SAFE Partnership Group	17
9.	The Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group	22
10.	The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group	31
11.	Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews	34
12.	Updates to Published Arrangements	34
13.	The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group	35
14.	Independent Scrutiny	38
15.	Conclusion	38
	Appendix A – WSCP – Budget Details (2020-2021)	39

# 1. Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity as the new Independent Chair of Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership to introduce the annual report for the period October 2020 to September 2021.

It has now been two years since the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership replaced the previous Board, and our second year has been a period in which we have seen the new arrangements become properly established.

It has also been a period in which the partnership has had to respond to a number of developments within child safeguarding, details of which are provided within the report. These developments, both national and local, have meant that the partnership has had to be clear on where it focuses the collective time and resources of our partners to strengthen and improve our multi-agency working to keep children and young people safe across Worcestershire.

Prioritisation and clarity of purpose for the partnership will be particularly important in the coming year as we start to see the publication of learning and recommendations from recent tragic events elsewhere in the country. There will undoubtedly be an expectation on safeguarding partnerships that local responses to these are swift and thorough, and rightly so. We can also expect significant scrutiny for the quality of our collective response to these events, which we welcome.

These additional challenges will need to be met alongside the partnership's ongoing work to implement learning from recent national thematic reviews, to build on the excellent work already done to address child on child abuse in response to the 'Everyone's Invited' website, to continue to promote the use of the Levels of Need guidance and early help services, whilst also being aware of the potential longer term harm that children and young people may have suffered as a result of the pandemic.

The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership would like to extend its thanks to staff across all agencies who have shown such commitment to supporting our children and families during these difficult times. We can be in no doubt as to the scale of the challenges to come, however I know that with the strength of the partnership and the commitment of all those who work within it, we will continue to do all we can to keep the children and young people of Worcestershire safe.



**Steve Eccleston,  
Independent Chair  
Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership**

## 2. Executive Summary

During this reporting year there have been a number of national developments to which the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) has responded. There have also been key developments at a local level, all of which have been managed against the ongoing backdrop of the Covid pandemic and the potential impact it is having on both multi-agency work and the services to children and young people.

In March 2021 the 'Everyone's Invited' website raised the extent of sexual violence and sexual harassment within schools and colleges, which was followed by an Ofsted rapid review.

In May 2021 Sir Alan Wood published his follow up report on the new multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This report focused on the key factors that underpin the successful implementation of the new multi-agency arrangements to safeguard children and highlighted key areas for safeguarding partnerships to consider when assessing their progress.

In July 2021 Worcestershire Children First received an Ofsted visit, in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Following the visit, Worcestershire Children First were praised for the improvements shown in Children's Services, and particularly the strong progress in improving the quality of practice for children and families in receipt of services at its 'Family Front Door'.

In relation to the delivery of service to vulnerable children during the Covid pandemic inspectors said, "The local authority and wider partnership have planned and delivered a well-coordinated and effective response to the pandemic and Social workers have been well supported during COVID-19 and enabled to work safely and effectively".

Locally, the Safeguarding Babies Programme, led by Worcestershire Children First and supported by the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership, was introduced in response to national concerns about the increased risk to babies during the Covid period. The very positive local response saw families with babies under the age of one being visited by a combination of services. These families were provided with information, support and also reminded how they could access services should they feel the need to do so.

In September 2021 the WSCP Executive Group considered the recommendations from Sir Alan Wood's review of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements with a view to identifying opportunities to strengthen our own practice. As a result the Executive have agreed the need to develop high-level indicators for children's safety within Worcestershire, beyond the current management information we gather. Further, the Executive Group has identified a need to strengthen links with other local partnerships to better understand what those partnerships have identified in relation to the safety of children and young people within Worcestershire, and what they are then doing within our communities to improve and promote their safety.

The WSCP has completed the audit process of single agency child safeguarding arrangements (known as the 'Section 11' audit) and has sought further reassurance as to the findings of those self-assessments through a series of follow up meetings between safeguarding partners and the authors of the individual reports.

During this reporting period the GET SAFE Partnership Group commissioned a problem profile of Child Exploitation in Worcestershire. This profile was completed by analysts from West Mercia Police and relied on the contribution of data and other information from all partner agencies within the GET SAFE Group. This clearer understanding of exploitation within Worcestershire will be used to support the most effective use of resources, the commissioning of services and in the training and support provided to practitioners across agencies. It has also been used to develop an action plan to build upon the work to introduce the GET SAFE approach in Worcestershire during 2019 and 2020.

The awareness raising of GET SAFE amongst partners has continued with GET SAFE briefings for all District Councillors across Worcestershire, a joint Herefordshire and Worcestershire Child Exploitation conference, and the continued roll out of multi-agency GET SAFE training, which been attended by over 3600 delegates in 2021.

We are seeing the growth of a network of services that support children and young people at risk of exploitation. The West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner supported CLIMB service, local Community Safety Partnership provision for young people with exploitation concerns working in partnership with established Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) youth providers, and a range of third sector agencies and charities such as Young Solutions all contribute to supporting children and young people across Worcestershire to stay safe within the wider community.

These protective arrangements are also supported by schools and colleges in Worcestershire having their own Early Help offers which can provide support to children and young people where contextual safeguarding concerns are identified, and also to work with younger children and their parents/carers to reduce the impact of 'push' factors within the family home at an early stage.

During 2021 guidance has been developed for professionals working with GET SAFE risks and/or vulnerability for young people aged 16-25 years, so bridging that period into adulthood. This guidance has been established from GET SAFE multi-agency discussions, case learning and national case reviews and research. The work has been led by Worcestershire Children First working closely with partner agencies. Young people from local youth groups in Worcestershire have also been engaged on the design and development of this 16-25-year agenda, the accompanying guidance and the new GET THERE website: [Get There | Worcestershire County Council](#)

GET THERE is an important development in the Worcestershire response to exploitation of young people within this age group to reduce an area of vulnerability which has been long recognised nationally.

Forthcoming priorities for the GET SAFE Partnership Group are our approach to tackling on-line exploitation, mapping out all diversionary activities available to victims or those that are at risk of exploitation, to ensure the most appropriate service is being delivered in each case, ensuring all recommendations from the 'Sarah' Child Safeguarding Practice Review are embedded in practice and securing assurance that the GET SAFE approach is fully supported and embedded within other local partnership groups.

During the Covid period there has been a significant increase in contacts and referrals being made by partner agencies to the Worcestershire Family Front Door. It is vital to the safety of our children and young people that agencies refer concerns at the appropriate level, and the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group has continued to prioritise this area. It has undertaken a multi-agency audit on the application of the Levels of Need Guidance. This work was supported by Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group on behalf of Primary Care, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, schools and West Mercia Police, and the learning has been shared across the partnership.

The QAPP Group has continued to use a range of multi-agency key performance indicators to understand the quality of multi-agency practice as the child or young person's case continues through the child protection system. These indicators have told us that during the pandemic we have also seen an increase in the volume of requests for service into the Early Help Family Support Service, a high proportion of which result in no role for the service. Strategy discussions remain a strength with good partnership attendance which has been sustained through the pandemic. Social work assessments remain timely, ensuring children's needs are appropriately identified and assessed. They have also highlighted however that during the Covid period there has been an increase in children subject to Child Protection Plans in the category of Emotional Abuse, attributable to the complex situation created by Covid for vulnerable families. We also for a period saw an increase in children being made subject to repeat Child Protection Plans. Targeted audits were completed in both of these areas to understand causes and secure reassurance as to the multi-agency response.

Multi-agency audits have also been completed in relation to strategy discussions and neglect in response to a recommendation from a Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board Safeguarding Adult Review, strategy discussions that were held after a request by Social Care for an urgent strategy discussion, and our multi-agency response to child on child abuse within educational settings. The latter audit was completed to support Worcestershire's response to the recommendations made in Ofsted's rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges.

Following their visit in July 2021, Ofsted noted that “The local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practice for children and families in receipt of services at its ‘Family Front Door’ since the inspection in June 2019.” Further, they noted that “Leaders have established a positive culture of commitment to continuous improvement across this service area, supported by particularly strong quality assurance arrangements.”

The report went on to say that; “Children and families in Worcestershire benefit from a swift and proportionate response to new contacts with prompt analysis, leading to appropriate management sign off and seamless referral and transitional arrangements to ensure that children and families experience minimal delay within the Family Front Door so that children gain the right service at the right time.”

The QAPP Group has worked extensively to ensure that the Levels of Need Guidance is well understood and properly applied by all agencies prior to any referral, and that the multi-agency child protection processes that support the Family Front Door functions are of a high quality. This will remain a priority for the group.

In support of this the QAPP Group will be developing multi-disciplinary audits at the Family Front Door. Further, in this coming reporting year it will be supporting the Get Safe Partnership Group in embedding the learning from the ‘Sarah’ Child Safeguarding Practice Review, and also ensuring that a multi-agency plan is in place to effectively respond to any Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).

This year the Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group has conducted three rapid reviews under the new arrangements which have resulted in the commissioning of two child safeguarding practice reviews. These reviews are ongoing. The early learning identified from these rapid reviews has been disseminated so that improvements can be made to the safeguarding system, prior to completion of the full CSPR.

The CSPR Group has also continued to implement learning from previous serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews. The influence of the work of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group on the development of our services to children and young people, and the systems for keeping them safe, is evident in the collective approach to early help, and to our ‘GET SAFE’ response to child exploitation, which has been strongly influenced by the ‘Sarah’ review. Other examples of improvements through learning from rapid review processes are the development of clear guidance for practitioners in relation to Core Group meetings, strengthening early safeguarding considerations in Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDIC) information sharing meetings, the inclusion of the escalation procedure within the multi-agency threshold guidance training package, and the awareness and understanding of the Mental Capacity Act and how it applies to 16 and 17 year olds.

In September 2021 the National Review Panel published a report entitled ‘The Myth of Invisible Men: Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers’ which set out the findings from its thematic review on safeguarding children under one from non-accidental injury caused by male carers. As national learning, this is an area of work that will be supported by the CSPR Group. This will form part of a wider ‘Keep Me Safe’ strategy, the development of which is also being supported by the CSPR Group and incorporates learning from another National Panel Review published in July 2020 entitled “Out of routine: A review of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm”. This wider piece of work is being undertaken jointly with the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The partnership has published only one Child Safeguarding Practice Review during this period. This review related to the tragic death of a 17 year old child ‘Sarah’ and was published in August 2021. Full details of that review and of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership response to the findings can be found here:

[\*\*CSPR-Sarah.pdf \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)\*\*](#)

A summary of the learning and recommendations prepared for practitioners can be found here:

[\*\*Sarah-Learning-Briefing-V3.pdf \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)\*\*](#)

During this reporting period the Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has continued to work to support the safeguarding arrangements in schools, colleges and early years settings. The ongoing pandemic and

a national focus on sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools have featured strongly within the work of the group. Additionally, the group has been involved in supporting the links between education settings and the Worcestershire Family Front Door, the development of the yearly audit of safeguarding arrangements in schools, the development of Worcestershire early help processes and their relationship to the work of schools and early help services (which attracted positive feedback from Ofsted), the monitoring of developments in relation Elective Home Education across the county, the impact of Covid anxieties on children's attendance and the work ongoing to return children and young people to school, and the development of a safeguarding training pathway and audit for early years settings.

In May 2021 Worcestershire was selected by Ofsted as one of the areas to be visited as part of their rapid review of sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools and colleges, prompted by the 'Everyone's Invited' website. In June 2021 Ofsted published their report, which placed an emphasis on the role of safeguarding partnerships in tackling this problem. A letter from Government ministers followed, which requested that all safeguarding partners review how they work with all their schools and colleges locally (including academies and independent schools) and set out what their offer of support to schools and colleges is.

In November 2021 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership responded to Ofsted with details of the work that has been completed within this area to improve engagement with schools and colleges. The local response included the Education Safeguarding Team hosting a task and finish group event involving members of the Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group members and other school Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) champions, to share good practice and identify any barriers through engagement with a wide range of local schools in the area. The learning from this event informed a school DSL conference in November 2021, entitled 'It's happening here', with a focus on reducing and responding to child on child abuse in educational settings. The Worcestershire safeguarding partners have also undertaken an analysis of the quality of response received by children and young people who have been victims of sexual violence from peers by undertaking a multi-agency 'deep dive' audit of selected cases, with learning from that to be shared with partners. Further, support is now being provided to DSLs to set up and deliver regular early help and safeguarding forums in their own districts, which will have a particular focus on tackling child on child abuse through the curriculum.

## Conclusion

With the ongoing national focus on the safeguarding of children and young people, and current reviews into both individual safeguarding incidents and overall structures and approaches (the transition from Clinical Commissioning Groups to Integrated Care Systems, and the HM Government commissioned independent review of children's social care being two examples) the next twelve months will be a time of significant change for child safeguarding partnerships.

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership will need to ensure that all agencies continue to work together to develop our multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements, and to ensure we use the learning from these various reviews to strengthen the way in which we safeguard and protect children and young people. Further, we need to focus on those arrangements continuing to work effectively and remain connected as individual agencies embed these national changes within their own services.

# 3. Introduction

As required by HM Government guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018), Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) has published the arrangements by which they fulfil their statutory responsibilities to child safeguarding. These arrangements can be read in full via the following link;

<https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Worcestershire-Safeguarding-Children-Partnership-Plan-FINAL.pdf>

The **safeguarding partners** in relation to a local authority area in England are defined under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as:

- (a) the local authority
- (b) a clinical commissioning group for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area
- (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area.

Within Worcestershire these organisations have delegated responsibility for the arrangements to;

- The Director of Social Care and Safeguarding within Worcestershire Children First (Local Authority)
- The Associate Director for Nursing and Quality/Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults and Children (NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group)
- The South Worcestershire Local Policing Commander (West Mercia Police)

In order to bring transparency for children, families and all practitioners about the activity undertaken, Chapter 3 of Working Together to Safeguarding Children (July 2018) requires the three safeguarding partners to publish a report at least once in every 12-month period. The report must set out what they have done as a result of the arrangements, including;

- how effective the arrangements have been in practice
- details of and learning from any child safeguarding practice reviews
- evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers
- an analysis of any areas where there has been little or no evidence of progress on agreed priorities
- a record of decisions and actions taken by the partners in the reporting period (or planned to be taken) to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, including any resulting improvements
- ways in which the partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision
- any updates to the published arrangements and the proposed timescale for implementation.

This report details the progress of the Worcestershire safeguarding partners and relevant agencies as required by Working Together. Where appropriate, this has been set out within a summary of the activity of each of the partnership's sub-groups to provide a more detailed understanding of delivery across the arrangements.

The last published Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership report covered the period 1st April 2019 to 30th September 2020 and can be found using the following link:

<https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/5.-WSCP-Annual-Report-2019-2020.pdf>



This latest report has been written with a view to incorporating feedback from the study 'Analysis of Safeguarding Partners' Yearly Reports 2019-2020' which was published in May 2021 by the What Works for Children Social Care organisation and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. This feedback highlighted that yearly reports from safeguarding partnerships are intended to be shorter, more focused on impact and with a more open style of report which focuses on the 'stubborn challenges' and evidence based approaches to their resolution rather than lengthy descriptions of partnership structures, activities and data.

# 4. Key Facts about Worcestershire

## Context and Local Demographics

Worcestershire is a largely rural county in the West Midlands made up of the six districts of Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester, Wychavon and Wyre Forest. Wychavon district has the largest proportion of the total population in the county and Malvern Hills the smallest. In June 2020, the population of Worcestershire was estimated to be around 598,070, an increase of 0.4% from the previous year. Although increasing, the overall population growth had slowed compared to the previous year.










Between 20-25% of the population in each of the six districts are children and young people (0-19 age group). Redditch has the highest proportion with 24.2%.

4.3% of the Worcestershire population is from a minority ethnic group, with the largest proportion (2.4%) being of Asian heritage.

Worcestershire is a relatively affluent county with a growing economy and performs well on many measures of health and wellbeing compared with other areas of the country. That said, according to the Government's Indices of Deprivation which uses various measures including income, employment, education, health, barriers to housing and services, crime, and living environment, nearly 28,000 Worcestershire residents do still live in one of the top 10% of deprived areas of England.

The latest available figures (from 2020) show that in Worcestershire 17.1% (18,000) of children live in poverty related to low income, which is where the income of the household is less than 60% of the national average. The England average is 19.1%.

**The current numbers of Worcestershire children and young people with levels of vulnerability are shown below. These figures are provided by Worcestershire Children First from their in-year monitoring as at 31st December 2020, except Children with SEND.**

	<b>737 Children in Need</b> (Local Definition) (1 in 162 children)
	<b>413 Subject of a Child Protection Plan</b> (1 in 289 children) (Statistical neighbours 1 in 307) (West Midlands 1 in 219) (National 1 in 233)
	<b>842 Looked After Children</b> (1 in 142 children)
	<b>29 Children Looked After who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers</b> (1 in 4116 children) (Statistical neighbours 1 in 1886) (West Midlands 1 in 3094) (National 1 in 2404)
	<b>29 Children Looked After who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (1 in 4,116 children)</b>
	<b>4550 Number of Children and Young People with an EHCP</b> (1 in 37 children)
	<b>11,824 Children with a Special Educational Need or Disability</b> (1 in 8 school age children)
	<b>40 Children registered as Missing Education for the academic year 2020/21</b> (1 in 2,066)
	<b>351 care leavers</b>

## 5. Background

During this reporting year there have been a number of national developments to which the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership has needed to respond. There have also been key developments at a local level, all of which have been managed against the ongoing backdrop of the Covid pandemic and the potential impact it is having on both multi-agency work and the services to children and young people.

In March 2021 the 'Everyone's Invited' website brought into sharp focus the extent of sexual violence and sexual harassment within schools and colleges. As a result of this, Ofsted was asked by the government to carry out a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. As part of this review Ofsted inspectors visited a number of areas of which Worcestershire was one. The report, which was published in June 2021, included a recommendation for safeguarding children's partnerships and the Worcestershire response to this is covered within the Education Head Teachers Safeguarding Steering Group section later in the report. The full Ofsted report can be read here; [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94424/sexual_abuse_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf)

In May 2021 Sir Alan Wood published his follow up report on the new multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements that were introduced as a result of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This report focused on the key factors that underpin the successful implementation of the new multi-agency arrangements to safeguard children. It highlighted key areas for safeguarding partnerships to consider when assessing their progress, and Worcestershire's position against these is set out within the Executive Group section of the report below. The full report by Sir Alan Wood can be read here;

[Wood Review of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94424/wood_review_of_multi-agency_safeguarding_arrangements.pdf)

In July 2021 Worcestershire Children First received an Ofsted visit, in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. During this visit Inspectors focused on the arrangements and quality of practice at the Worcestershire Family Front Door, an area in which both Worcestershire Children First and the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership members have invested considerable work.

Following the visit, Worcestershire Children First were praised for the improvements shown in Children's Services. Inspectors reported headline findings that "The local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practice for children and families in receipt of services at its 'Family Front Door' since the inspection in June 2019. Leaders have established a positive culture of commitment to continuous improvement across this service area, supported by particularly strong quality assurance arrangements. The early help partnership is now well engaged in the delivery of services, and most schools in Worcestershire have an early help offer, bespoke to the needs of their community."

The report also highlighted that "Children and families in Worcestershire benefit from a swift and proportionate response to new contacts with prompt analysis, leading to appropriate management sign off and seamless referral and transitional arrangements to ensure that children and families experience minimal delay within the Family Front Door so that children gain the right service at the right time." Social work assessments were described as "thorough and proportionate" and management oversight as "well considered and appropriately informing next steps."

In relation to the delivery of service to vulnerable children during the Covid pandemic inspectors said "The local authority and wider partnership have planned and delivered a well-coordinated and effective response to the pandemic and Social workers have been well supported during COVID-19 and enabled to work safely and effectively".

The full Ofsted report can be read here; [50168142 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50168142)

# 6. The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Group

Strategic decision making for the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) takes place within the Executive meeting. The Executive is a small group made up of the safeguarding partner representatives, and it meets regularly to ensure prompt responses to emerging themes. These meetings are independently chaired.

## Areas of Focus for 2020/2021

As The previous WSCP yearly report highlighted that with the ongoing challenges presented by Covid and the impact likely to continue well into the next reporting period, the Executive Group would be focused on ensuring the continued development of our partnership response to the emerging threats to the safety of children and young people across Worcestershire, and the effectiveness of our partnership arrangements in responding to those.

The Executive Group also highlighted the need to focus on the ability of the partnership to develop their services in a co-ordinated way, as it was recognised that competing demand on priorities, timelines of service improvement plans and organisational reviews within each agency would not always correlate with those of other partners. This would be particularly important when considered within the context of emerging or increasing risks to our children and young people.

## Progress, Achievements and Evidence of Impact

One In support of our ongoing work to ensure the effectiveness of our partnership arrangements the Executive has continued to provide the forum for oversight, discussion and decision making on emerging themes and concerns, both at a local national level. The regularity of the meetings and the makeup of the group allow for the safeguarding partners to respond promptly to such issues, and also as a forum to support and challenge each other's contribution to multi-agency safeguarding of children and young people within Worcestershire. Examples of this are provided below.

In April 2021 the Executive received an update on the Safeguarding Babies Programme. Led by Worcestershire Children First and supported by the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership, this program was introduced in response to national concerns about the increased risk to babies during the Covid period. In September 2020 the parliamentary undersecretary of state Vicky Ford wrote to all Directors of Children's Services and raised concerns regarding hidden harm and risks to babies. Minister Ford's letter asked Directors, supported by their safeguarding partners, to "consider ways in which we might review the circumstances of families who have historically caused significant concern, have recently turned a corner and who have a new baby in the last six months". The very positive local response saw families with babies under the age of one being visited by a combination of services. These families were provided with information, support and also reminded how they could access services should they feel the need to do so. A press release was also issued that raised awareness in the community and amongst the family networks of parents of young babies about support they may need, and how that could be accessed.

### Worcestershire's Safeguarding Children Partnership increasing support to families of babies born in 2020



Rob George  
21<sup>st</sup> Dec 2020

THE county's Safeguarding Children Partnership is increasing the support it gives to families with babies born this year.

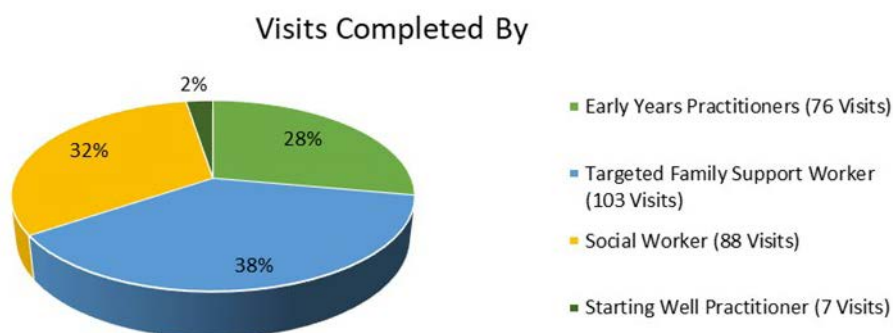
More than 4,600 babies have been born in Worcestershire since January 1.

County authorities say all of these families will have faced additional pressures brought about by the Covid restrictions.

In the first nine months of 2020 the Worcestershire Family Front Door service received 682 concerns relating to children under one year old, an increase of 36 per cent on the same period last year.

For help and advice call the health visitor telephone advice service on 0300 123 9551 or visit <https://www.startingwellworcs.nhs.uk/>

A follow up survey was completed to gauge the impact of the programme, which saw a range of practitioners attempt visits to 274 families across the county.



### The key points drawn from the survey were:

- Out of all the visits to families attempted throughout the period, 79% (216) of visits to families were successful, meaning the baby and family were seen. Out of these 100% of parents were willing to engage with the conversation.
- 85% of families (192 visits) told the worker that the visit and the information provided to them was useful.
- 60% of visits (137 visits) resulted in sign-posting information being provided and 21% of visits (48 visits) resulted in the worker directly referring or supporting the parent to refer themselves to a support service.
- Three visits resulted in a Safeguarding Referral to the Family Front Door, this equates to 1.3% of visits identifying the need for a Social Work intervention.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of parents highlighted that they were missing the face to face nature of support during the Covid restrictions.

The visits were also used to promote the Starting Well service, and to gauge the awareness of the various early help services available. The survey identified that there are areas of support families have said they are looking for and struggle to find, we know however that these services are available. The feedback therefore told us that a focus on promoting the awareness of the early help services is an area for development, particularly how the early help and Starting Well offer is communicated and delivered to those hard to reach and/or vulnerable families less likely to seek it out for themselves.

The WSCP Executive also provided the forum by which West Mercia Police were able to raise challenges they were facing during the summer of 2021 in relation to a backlog of referrals within their Harm Assessment Unit. Senior partners were able to discuss the current position and the potential impact on other partners and areas of business and gain reassurance as to the plans in place to address the back log. This also provided the opportunity for Partnership support to be provided promptly where necessary to do so. This is a strong example of the transparency that exists between the safeguarding partners within Worcestershire and the recognition between those partners of the need for accountability to, and acceptance of scrutiny from, the other partners. Similarly, the Executive facilitated a joint problem solving approach to an escalation from Health colleagues in relation to an aspect of information sharing.

In September 2021 the Executive Group considered the recommendations from Sir Alan Wood's review of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements with a view to identifying opportunities to strengthen our own practice. Although the report made a number of recommendations, only one was directed specifically at local safeguarding partnerships, this being:

“Local safeguarding partners should satisfy themselves that the level of support, analysis and intelligence they require to conduct their business effectively and efficiently is provided. The role of business manager should

be reviewed to consider whether it is meeting the needs of the safeguarding partners to carry out their strong leadership role in line with guidance in *Working Together*.”

Although it was recognised by the Executive Group that the current information provided to the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group in terms of the outcomes for children and young people was helpful, we need as a partnership to agree and develop other high-level indicators for children’s safety within Worcestershire, specifically covering perpetrators of child abuse, and attendance of children and young people at health settings which may be indicative of exploitation.

Further, the Executive Group identified a need to strengthen the WSCP links with other local partnerships to better understand what those partnerships have identified in relation to the safety of children and young people within Worcestershire, and what they are then doing within our communities to improve and promote their safety.

Following the disclosures made on the ‘Everyone’s Invited’ website, Ofsted was asked by the government to carry out a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. This review covered a number of areas including safeguarding and the curriculum, victim’s voice and reporting, and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Worcestershire was one of the areas visited.

The national Ofsted report made the following recommendation for multi-agency partners:

Multi-agency partners should work to improve engagement with schools of all types in their local area, tailoring their approach to what their analysis (produced in partnership with schools/colleges and wider safeguarding partners) indicates are the risks to children and young people in their local area.

This report was then followed in July 2021 with a letter from Vicky Ford MP to all statutory safeguarding partners which highlighted the above recommendation and

requested that all safeguarding partners review how they work with all their schools and colleges locally (including academies and independent schools) by October half-term and set out what our offer of support to schools and colleges is. The WSCP Executive considered this request in September 2021 with support from the Education Safeguarding Lead. Having reviewed the activity taking place to support schools and colleges in Worcestershire, the support being provided from a partnership perspective via the Education Head Teachers Safeguarding Steering Group and the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group and the plan to monitor progress via the schools ‘Section 175’ safeguarding audit Head Teacher’s Safeguarding Steering Group, the Executive were reassured that an appropriate partnership response is in place. Further details of the local response can be found in the Education Head Teachers Safeguarding Steering Group section of this report below.

The Executive received the outcome of the Section 11 audit completed by individual agencies within Worcestershire and have sought further reassurance as to the findings of those self-assessments through a series of follow up meetings between safeguarding partner representatives and the authors of the individual reports. This provided an opportunity for safeguarding partners to explore the activities being undertaken by agencies in those areas where improvement was required, but also to identify strong practice within agencies that can be used to support the wider partnership activity. An example of this is the opportunity presented to provide information about the ‘Get Safe’ services and support available via an app which has been developed within the Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust to provide information to children and young people. It has also provided the opportunity for safeguarding partners to explore relevant agencies’ views on the current arrangements and the effectiveness of them, and any opportunities to strengthen their working relationship with the three safeguarding partners, which was an area highlighted within Sir Alan Wood’s review of the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements as referred to above. A particular example of a positive outcome from these discussions is the future attendance of the Independent Chair of the WSCP at the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership with a view to strengthening the flow of information about multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements in Worcestershire to an area of this area of the partnership.

## **Voice of the Child/Family**

The Executive Group monitors the activity of the sub-groups to ensure the views of children, young people and their families are being collected as part of that sub-group's work on the wider quality assurance programme, and that these are being used to influence the various partnership workstreams. In addition, where the Executive identifies a particular issue, it will ask the appropriate partnership sub-group to explore that further. An example of this is where a Headteacher raised directly with the WSCP Executive that in their recent experience there is room for improvement in how the voice of children with Special Educational Needs is captured when they disclose a concern. The Executive has passed this to the QAPP Group which will undertake a multi-agency audit in relation to this specific area to better understand the issue, identify any learning and improve responses as required.

## **Areas for Development**

In the coming reporting period, the Executive will be focused on ensuring the learning and recommendations from both national and local reviews are used to strengthen the way in which we safeguard and protect children and young people. Further, that as individual partners undergo structural changes, our multi-agency arrangements remain connected and continue to be effective.

As a result of Sir Alan Wood's review, the Executive will develop high-level indicators for children's safety within Worcestershire and seek to strengthen the WSCP links with other local partnerships. Finally, from the parallel national review completed by Kantar Public the Executive will work with the wider partnership agencies to consider what Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership can learn from the findings of the research and how we can use that learning to improve outcomes for at-risk children within the county.

## 7. The Wider Partnership

The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership model continues to work within the published arrangements which were designed to ensure best use was being made of the valuable time and resource of the partner agencies, and particularly that safeguarding leads are able to use their expertise within the various sub-groups where it can most influence the development of services and practice.

At the same time the partnership has had to recognise the restrictions due to Covid, and although representatives from all relevant agencies across the partnership have continued to provide valuable and regular contributions through the ongoing sub-groups held virtually, large partnership events have not been possible. The safeguarding partners have however also sought to retain more direct contact with safeguarding leads from the wider partnership through the offer of a virtual 'drop-in' event with the Independent Chair, and with the follow up conversations as an outcome from the Section 11 audit, further information on which is provided within the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group (QAPP) section below.

The Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care and the Home Office commissioned research to be completed alongside the review of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements completed by Sir Alan Wood (2021). This research, which Kantar Public were commissioned to complete, supplemented the Wood review by focusing on behavioural drivers and barriers for effective practice, creating behavioural interventions and exploring the feasibility of implementing these to overcome remaining barriers. The main aims of the report are to:

- Examine how partnerships were working together following the reforms and identify and understand key behaviours required for successful multi-agency working.
- Provide robust insight into the drivers and barriers of ideal behaviours at all levels within partner agencies, and recommendations for interventions that may facilitate good practice.
- Provide a Theory of Change describing the actions and behaviours needed for agencies to work in partnership to deliver optimal outcomes for at-risk children.

The full report can be read using the following link; Multi-agency reform: Key behavioural drivers and barriers summary report ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

This report has recently been published, and the safeguarding partners have planned an event for May 2022 to bring representatives together from all the wider partnership agencies to consider what Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership can learn from the findings of the research and how we can use that learning to improve outcomes from children within the county.



## 8. The GET SAFE Partnership Group

Get Safe is the Worcestershire name for our multi-agency support and protection for children and young people at risk of exploitation. The GET SAFE Partnership Group is a sub-group of the WSCP and is chaired by Superintendent Stephanie Brighton, South Worcestershire Local Policing Commander (West Mercia Police).

### Areas of Focus for 2020/2021

Although the 2019-2020 WSCP yearly report highlighted the significant improvements to our multi-agency approach to responding to child criminal exploitation within Worcestershire, it was recognised that there was a need for further improvement in several areas over the coming twelve months. Specifically, these were to:

1. Continue to develop our understanding of exploitation in Worcestershire to inform multi-agency responses and disruption activity.
2. Continue to increase the knowledge and understanding of exploitation across our multi-agency workforce and community services to support early identification of risk, and knowledge of how to respond.
3. Build on our early identification and engagement work with young people to keep them safe and aware of the risks in their communities and online using a contextual safeguarding approach. This work was to be supported by the CLIMB programme and Community Link Workers.
4. Continue to promote multi agency learning on the impact and effectiveness of our interventions, support and response to exploitation in Worcestershire, and how we can continue to build on and strengthen this. In doing this we would learn from what children and young people are telling us about the services we provide.
5. Develop a transition pathway for young people into adulthood where there is continued vulnerability and risk and the need for ongoing service provision.

### Progress and Achievements

In relation to the areas of focus for this reporting period, the achievements of the GET SAFE Partnership Group are set out below.

1. Continue to develop our understanding of exploitation in Worcestershire to inform multi-agency responses and disruption activity.

During this reporting period the GET SAFE Partnership Group commissioned a problem profile of Child Exploitation in Worcestershire. This profile was completed by analysts from West Mercia Police and relied on the contribution of data and other information from all partner agencies within the GET SAFE Group. This clearer understanding of exploitation within Worcestershire is vital for partners to support them in the most effective use of resources, the commissioning of services and in the training and support provided to practitioners across agencies. Some of the key findings of this work are;

- The greatest proportion of modern slavery offences involving young people in Worcestershire in 2020 are linked to criminal exploitation.
- Drug supply and county lines are the most prominent form of criminal exploitation of children and young people in Worcestershire. Other offences include cannabis cultivation, burglary, theft and robbery.
- Victim profiles largely correspond with those on the GET SAFE portal. Males aged 15-18 years are most likely to be victims of criminal exploitation, with those involved in gangs and county lines at the higher end of that age group. This is an important finding as it demonstrates that our GET SAFE systems are tending to identify those that are at most risk.

- County line offences committed in Worcestershire are most noticeably committed by children and young people living in neighbouring Birmingham and West Midlands.
- The highest proportion of the overall cohort were not the subject of a child care plan, suggesting an increased risk to children of more affluent and/or supportive family backgrounds than previously seen.
- Police data showed that young people under the age of 25 are as likely to carry weapons as those aged 25 years or older.
- Two thirds of victims of child criminal exploitation investigations in Worcestershire in 2020 feature on the GET SAFE portal. This shows a strong correlation on those being identified as victims and being known to wider agencies; however, work is needed to understand the context in relation to the remaining third, and this features in our updated action plan.
- Most perpetrators of Child Criminal Exploitation are male and are not much older than the victims they exploit.
- In relation to trafficking, the greatest proportion of victims were trafficked from Iraq, as well as Vietnam, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Iran. Victims trafficked within the UK were also identified.
- During 2020, agencies within Worcestershire were involved in investigations of incidents of Forced Marriage, Honour Based Violence and Female Genital Mutilation involving young people under 25 years of age. This serves as a reminder that the risk of abuse in these forms exists within the county and the importance of professionals across our partnership understanding vulnerabilities, indicators and the appropriate reporting pathways.
- In relation to children and young people going absent, males and females were equally likely to be reported missing, with those aged 15-16 years most at risk. As would be expected, strong links were evident between missing episodes for both males and females, and criminal and sexual exploitation respectively.
- The majority of offences identified as child sexual exploitation in Worcestershire in 2020 relate to Obscene Publications and Protected Sexual Material, indicating they occurred via social media. Victim profiles largely correspond with those on the GET SAFE portal, with the greatest proportion of victims being females aged 15-16 years.
- All perpetrators of child sexual exploitation identified within the time period were male; the greatest proportion were aged 26 years or over, although some were young people themselves.

The information from this problem profile has been used to develop an action plan to build upon the work to construct and embed the Get Safe approach in Worcestershire which took place through 2019 and 2020.

2. Continue to increase the knowledge and understanding of exploitation across our multi-agency workforce and community services to support early identification of risk, and knowledge of how to respond.

In October and December 2020, the three safeguarding partners held Get Safe briefings for all District Councillors across Worcestershire to raise the awareness of exploitation risks and the Get Safe programme across the various districts within the county.

In May 2021 a joint Child Exploitation conference between Herefordshire and Worcestershire took place which included presentations from key national speakers. This was attended by around 200 delegates from agencies across the two areas, with over 98% of those who submitted feedback indicating they had benefited from an increased understanding of exploitation. This was a very valuable and thought provoking event, and the hard work of Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group staff in organising this event, supported by staff from the respective Safeguarding Partnership business units, should be recognised.

The multi-agency GET SAFE training, funded by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, is continuing and has been expanded to include early years providers. In total within Worcestershire from 1st January through

to 31st December 2021 this training was delivered to 3,616 delegates from 92 different organisations in 117 sessions. The move to online delivery because of Covid restrictions is believed to have helped to increase attendance and so contributed to achieving these very impressive figures. This significant roll out of knowledge in the Get Safe system has undoubtedly contributed to the accuracy of our problem profile as more and more professionals contribute to the building of our multi-agency intelligence picture on exploitation within Worcestershire through their increased understanding of local processes and how they can contribute.

In recognition of the exploitative nature of radicalisation, The Get Safe Partnership Group also receives regular updates on the progress of PREVENT training within Worcestershire. Home Office WRAP (Prevent) training sessions with school safeguarding leads have been delivered and there is a new tiered Prevent training plan in development designed to clarify the level of training for specific staff in key agencies in Worcestershire.

3. Build on our early identification and engagement work with young people to keep them safe and aware of the risks in their communities and online using a contextual safeguarding approach. This work was to be supported by the CLIMB programme and Community Link Workers.

The CLIMB programme has continued to support young people at risk of exploitation within Worcestershire, and the number of referrals, young people receiving support and outcomes is monitored within the Get Safe Operational Group.

CLIMB is not however the only support available for these young people within Worcestershire. As services grow and expand it is very positive that we see an ever increasing network of support for young people at risk of exploitation within the community. Through the close partnership working of Get Safe it has been identified that we need to ensure young people are being provided the support they need via the most appropriate route, and that valuable partner time and resource is not lost through duplication. It has therefore been recognised that co-ordination of support services and a strong understanding of the most suitable intervention to meet each young person's individual needs is an area requiring focus, and this forms part of our Get Safe action plan for 2021 – 2023.

This should not detract however from the very positive picture of support available for children and young people within Worcestershire from a Get Safe perspective. In addition to the Police and Crime Commissioner funded CLIMB resource, local Community Safety Partnerships within Worcestershire have their own provision for young people with exploitation concerns. Now in its second year, the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership funded project commissions teams of trained outreach and detached youth workers. These teams engage with and support young people involved in or at risk of becoming involved in on-street anti-social behaviour, county lines and gang activity. The project works in partnership with established Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) youth providers to commission qualified and experienced detached and outreach youth workers to engage with young people in the places where they gather.

Worcestershire Children First has introduced the Positive Outcomes Project (POP) which provides 1:1 work with children and young people or group work for children in their school setting to address all forms of concern, including contextual safeguarding concerns relating to exploitation, gang activity or county lines.

Schools and colleges in Worcestershire now have their own Early Help offers which can provide support to children and young people where contextual safeguarding concerns are identified, and also to work with younger children and their parents/carers to reduce the impact of 'push' factors within the family home at an early stage, which may otherwise make the child more vulnerable to external 'pulls', such as gangs and youth violence.

With a range of third sector agencies and charities such as Young Solutions also contributing to supporting children and young people across Worcestershire to stay safe within the wider community, we continue to see a very positive direction of travel for the partnership in this area.

All of the above services contribute to and are brought together by Worcestershire's use of the "4 P Plan" as a multi-agency approach to tackling Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). This plan focuses on: Protect, Pursue, Prevent and Prepare, and further details of how this works in practice can be found via the below link:

## Exploitation tools and pathways ([procedures.org.uk](https://procedures.org.uk))

4. Continue to promote multi agency learning on the impact and effectiveness of our interventions, support and response to exploitation in Worcestershire, and how we can continue to build on and strengthen this. In doing this we would learn from what children and young people are telling us about the services we provide.

Our approach to multi-agency training in Get Safe is detailed above, however another area of focus for the safeguarding partners is to ensure that the learning from the tragic death of a 17 year old child 'Sarah' is properly embedded within our partnership. Sarah's death was subject of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review which was published in August 2021, and within that our multi-agency approach to dealing with child sexual exploitation was a significant feature. Full details of that review and our response are set out within the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group section of this report.

5. Develop a transition pathway for young people into adulthood where there is continued vulnerability and risk and the need for ongoing service provision.

During 2021 there has been significant work done to develop guidance for professionals working with GET SAFE risks and/or vulnerability for young people aged 16-25 years, so bridging that period into adulthood. This guidance has been established from GET SAFE multi-agency discussions, case learning and national case reviews and research. The work has been led by Worcestershire Children First working closely with partner agencies who are part of the GET SAFE operational and strategic groups. It has also linked in with a range of other services who work within our communities every day such as youth services, health and fitness groups, community leaders, faith groups, housing, Department for Work and Pensions, sexuality and identity groups, apprenticeships, training, and employment.

Young people from local youth groups in Worcestershire have also been engaged on the design and development of this 16-25-year agenda, the accompanying guidance and the new GET THERE website:

### [Get There | Worcestershire County Council](#)

The additional risks and vulnerability that emerge when young people become 16 years old, and how in Worcestershire we support both our SEND young people and care leavers, post 18 up to 25 years who are identified as vulnerable to or experiencing criminal exploitation have also been taken into account. We have looked at our 4 P Plan approach (Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Pursue) and how we can use this to support young people through to adulthood and independence, whilst recognising the GET SAFE risks and vulnerability. We want to increase their safety and protection, whilst disrupting perpetrators or the opportunities to perpetrate and use young people in their crimes. We recognise that this is a challenging area of protection and we need to balance the rights of our young people with their need for independence into adulthood and control over their own lives and decisions.

GET THERE is an important development in the Worcestershire response to exploitation which serves to strengthen the partnership's ability to protect young people within this age group and reduce an area of vulnerability which has been long recognised nationally.



## Evidence of Impact

The hard work that has been invested in this area by all partner agencies during this reporting period and is detailed above has led to a greater clarity for partners on the exploitation risks facing our children and young people, the development of a network of support services for those who may be at risk of or suffering from exploitation, and a wide understanding of our Get Safe model and processes, and how individual practitioners' across numerous agencies can play their part in contributing to keeping children and young people safe from exploitation. With GET THERE we have strong evidence of the impact partnership work is having in tackling the most challenging areas of safeguarding, and in adopting a 'continuous improvement' approach, through the work completed in this reporting period the partnership is clear on next steps, as set out in our 'areas of development' below.

## Voice of the Child/Family

The voice of the child and young person continues to be a vitally important part of our response to exploitation, both at an individual case level, and when developing our local responses. Within the multi-agency child exploitation meetings (MACE), the parents or carers and the young person can be invited to participate where appropriate, for all or part of the meeting. The engagement of parents/carers and young people will be carefully planned by partner agencies before the meeting to support them and plan information sharing with the family. Alternatively, it may be that a young person wants their views heard and contribute to the meeting but does not want to be physically present. In such cases advocacy will be considered, or a trusted adult who can independently represent the young person's wishes and views separate from their professional views.

In relation to the development of services, as has been highlighted above, young people have been at the centre of the design of the 'GET THERE' website and guidance. It has been heavily influenced by young people, for example it includes issues they told us they would want advice on, and how in practice they want professionals to provide that advice and support.

## Areas for Development

In light of the problem profile, local and national learning the Get Safe Partnership Group will be focusing on the following areas in the coming reporting period.

- Our partnership approach to prevention, protection, and pursuit in relation to on-line exploitation across Worcestershire.
- Mapping out all diversionary activities available to victims or those that are at risk of exploitation, to ensure that the different agency offers provide efficient and comprehensive support across all age groups.
- Ensuring all recommendations from the 'Sarah' Child Safeguarding Practice Review are embedded in practice. This will include an audit of cases discussed at MACE to ensure that where a young person meets the threshold for child protection, the appropriate processes are used.
- Providing continuous professional development for practitioners around changing and emerging risks, local problem profile findings, the national picture of exploitation and the voice of the child.
- Ensuring all identified CCE concerns are shared via the Get Safe Portal and so contribute to our local understanding of risk and harm.
- Strengthening the influence of children and young people's views on GET SAFE services with a particular focus on commissioning processes.
- Ensuring that the Get Safe approach is fully supported and embedded within other local partnership groups where their priorities and activities contribute to keeping children and young people safe from exploitation.

Full information on the Get Safe programme can be found via the following link;

[www.worcestershire.gov.uk/getsafe](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/getsafe)

# 9. The Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group

The role of the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group (QAPP) is to support the improvement and development of services offered to children and young people in Worcestershire by delivering a multi-agency programme of Quality Assurance through focusing on three key areas, these being audits, service user feedback and key performance indicators.

The QAPP is currently chaired by Dan Gray who is the Principal Social Worker and Group Manager for Safeguarding Quality Assurance with Worcestershire Children First.

## Areas of Focus for 2020/2021

The 2019 - 2020 yearly report identified the following areas of focus during the forthcoming reporting year:

1. Quality and application of the Levels of Need Guidance for contacts to the Family Front Door. QAPP members would continue to work to address the decrease in the proportion of contacts to the Family Front Door that meet threshold by promoting awareness of the threshold guidance and early help offer.
2. Audits. We would ensure our audit programme is consolidated and we consistently complete multi-agency audits, and that learning is shared across the partnership.
3. Service User Feedback. We would embed our approach to Service User Feedback and ensure a consistent approach to this. We must then be confident that what children and families are telling us about our practice is used to inform improvements in our multi-agency safeguarding practice.
4. Learning and Development. We would continue to develop our multi-agency learning and development opportunities in line with requirements as identified from audit activity and child safeguarding practice reviews.
5. Section 11 Audit and survey of practitioner learning from recent serious case reviews. The QAPP group would need to analyse the results from this audit work and provide the appropriate support to address any identified areas for development.

## Progress and Achievements

The work of the QAPP Group within these areas of focus is set out below.

1. Quality and application of the Levels of Need Guidance for contacts to the Family Front Door. QAPP members would continue to work to address the decrease in the proportion of contacts to the Family Front Door that meet threshold by promoting awareness of the threshold guidance and early help offer.

The partnership is aware that during the period of Covid there has been a significant increase in contacts and referrals being made by partner agencies to the Worcestershire Family Front Door. It is vital to the safety of our children and young people that agencies refer concerns at the appropriate level, as high volumes of inappropriate referrals, those that could have been resolved by the agency itself via an early help response without the need for social care intervention for example, risk 'overheating' the referral and assessment system which in turn can detract from the service given to those who need protection.

To support the partnership response to this, QAPP undertook a multi-agency audit on the application of the Levels of Need Guidance. Twenty children's experiences were considered within the audit, which was supported by Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group on behalf of Primary Care, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, schools and West Mercia Police.

The key learning was:

- Application of thresholds and decision making at the Family Front Door is appropriate and proportionate to the identified needs and risks for children.
- 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.
- There was evidence of professional curiosity to understand worries and concerns for children and asking exploratory questions of families.
- 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, an Early Help service.
- There were examples of referrals being made where upon 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 in some cases need to consider whether they can work together at the lowest level to share information, with the consent of the family, which 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.
- Some of the families were already receiving Early Help services in the community and as need increased then referred to the Family Front Door. It is important in these circumstances that agencies consider what other actions agencies can do to support the family and 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.
- 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.
- It is important that agencies record on their systems the referrals they make and the outcomes, which is their responsibility as the referring agency.
- 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.

This learning was shared across the partnership in a learning briefing, on the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership website and through our newsletter. The learning briefing can be read here: <https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Learning-Briefing-Using-the-Levels-of-Need-Documents-July-2021Final.docx>

Further information on the Worcestershire Multi Agency Levels of Need document can be found here: [Levels of Need Guidance \(formerly Threshold Guidance\) | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Other activities as set out in the 'Learning and Development' section below continue to support practitioners' awareness and understanding of both the Levels of Need Guidance and the various early help services available to help them support children and young people.

The QAPP Group has continued to use a range of multi-agency key performance indicators. These are important to understand not only what is happening at point of referral to the Family Front Door, but also the quality of multi-agency practice as the child or young person's case continues through the child protection system. During this reporting period these indicators have told us the following about multi-agency practice.

- In addition to the significant increase in the volume of contacts and referrals into the Family Front Door seen during the Covid period, we have also seen an increase in the volume of requests for service into the Early Help Family Support Service, a high proportion of which result in no role for the service. Again, this is a key message to partners on how they can best support families at the lowest level and by community-based support services and is a focus of the review of the Early Help Strategy.
- Strategy Discussions remain a strength with good partnership attendance which has been sustained through the pandemic. Virtual working has enabled continued effective and timely practice in this area.
- Social work assessments remain timely, ensuring children's needs are appropriately identified and assessed.
- Through Covid we saw an increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans. This was a result of the protocol of not ending Child Protection plans during this period. As the ending of Child Protection Plans has resumed, we have seen the number of children on plans gradually reduce, and the number of plans has since remained within a consistent range.
- During the period of the pandemic, we have also seen an increase in children subject to Child Protection Plans in the category of Emotional Abuse, this is from the complex situation created by Covid for vulnerable families. A targeted audit of children on Child Protection Plans for Emotional Abuse identified that these had been made appropriately.

Towards the end of Quarter 4 (2020/2021) and into Quarter 1 (2021/2022) we have seen an increase in children being made subject to repeat Child Protection Plans. Again, a targeted audit was completed on children within this category. The consistent theme for all families was that between the first plan ending and second plan being implemented, we saw a national lockdown bringing with it a reduction in community services, and thus pressure increasing for families. The making of the subsequent plan was deemed appropriate in all cases within the audit.

2. Audits. We would ensure our audit programme is consolidated and we consistently complete multi-agency audits, and that learning is shared across the partnership.

An important area of our partnership framework is multi-agency audits. Due to the Covid pandemic and requirements on safeguarding partners, the Executive Group took the decision to pause multi-agency auditing, however our audit activity resumed in January 2021. In this reporting period there has been four multi-agency audits which have examined the experiences of 40 children. In addition to the application of Levels of Need audit described above, other areas of audit with the associated key learning are set out below.

### **Strategy Discussions and Neglect**

This audit was in response to a recommendation from a Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board Safeguarding Adult Review, which reported that; The Safeguarding Partnership should be assured that in all appropriate cases that due consideration is given to police investigation into cases of neglect. This was a joint audit between Police and Children's Social Care. Fourteen children's experiences were considered as part of the audit and the decision making at the point of Strategy Discussion was a specific focus.

The key learning was:

- In all cases both agencies agreed the threshold for a Strategy Discussion was appropriate and proportionate to the risks; the application of threshold was right. Where risks had escalated, decisions were made promptly to convene Strategy Discussions, and the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) were appropriately involved in out of hours case work when required.
- Decisions to hold Strategy Discussions were clear.
- There is learning in respect of how history is incorporated into Strategy Discussion records and ensuring this is clear and smartly recorded. Using the Signs of Safety Approach on how many times a specific risk has occurred, the first time, the most recent and the worst, will structure history more succinctly.



- Both agencies agreed that risks and strengths were appropriately identified within the Strategy Discussion.
- Scaling had been used within the Strategy Discussion and this was well used to inform discussions.
- Most cases resulted in a Single Agency Section 47 enquiry; however, some cases were jointly investigated with the Police. In each case it was agreed by Social Care and Police that this had been appropriately considered and the decisions were appropriate in each case to be single or joint respectively.
- Police and Social Care agreed that risk was appropriately managed, the recommendations were appropriate to the identified concerns and the actions were appropriate to safeguarding the children. Safety Plans appropriately identified what needed to happen, by who and by when. The outcomes and actions were clear.

## Strategy Discussions

This audit considered the experience of five families and was completed jointly by Police, Education, Health and Children's Social Care. The focus was specifically on Strategy Discussions that were held after a request by Social Care for an urgent Strategy Discussion.

The key learning was:

- The multi-agency group agreed that in most of the cases the request for an urgent Strategy Discussion was appropriate.
- The quality of information sharing is good, and the partnership agreed with the outcome of the Strategy Discussions in all cases, there was good multi-agency attendance and contributions in the Strategy Discussions.
- The learning is in respect of actions being multi-agency and not solely focused on the activity of Social Care and this is a challenge to partners.
- The language within the Strategy Discussion request was not in-line with the West Midlands procedures, as an outcome of this audit, the Strategy Discussion request booklet was reviewed and updated to reflect the criteria as set out within the regional guidance, this was agreed by the Family Front Door Partnership Group and is now in practice and updated in Social Care Practice Standards.

## Response to Peer on Peer Abuse within Educational Settings

An audit has been completed using the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) methodology, focusing on the multi-agency response to reports of child sexual abuse between peers in educational settings. This audit has been completed to support Worcestershire's response to the recommendations made in Ofsted's rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, published in June 2021. Agencies that took part in this audit were School Health Service, Acute Trust, Education, Youth Justice Service, Police, Childrens Social Care and Cranston. Further information about this audit is provided within the Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group section of this report.

3. Service User Feedback. We would embed our approach to Service User Feedback and ensure a consistent approach to this. We must then be confident that what children and families are telling us about our practice is used to inform improvements in our multi-agency safeguarding practice.

How we capture the voice of children, young people and families both within the work of the QAPP Group and the individual partner agencies is covered later in this section. The QAPP Group has however discussed ways in which we can hear specifically about children and young people's experiences of our partnership working.

Within Sir Alan Wood's national review of the new safeguarding arrangements published in May 2021, he questioned whether the purpose of engaging children to talk about multi-agency systems is always clear and highlighted that safeguarding children partnerships need to be clear about the impact local partnerships expect to achieve by engaging children and young people in discussion about the multi-agency system. The QAPP Group recognised that further reflection on this work is required, however as a starting point agencies have been asked

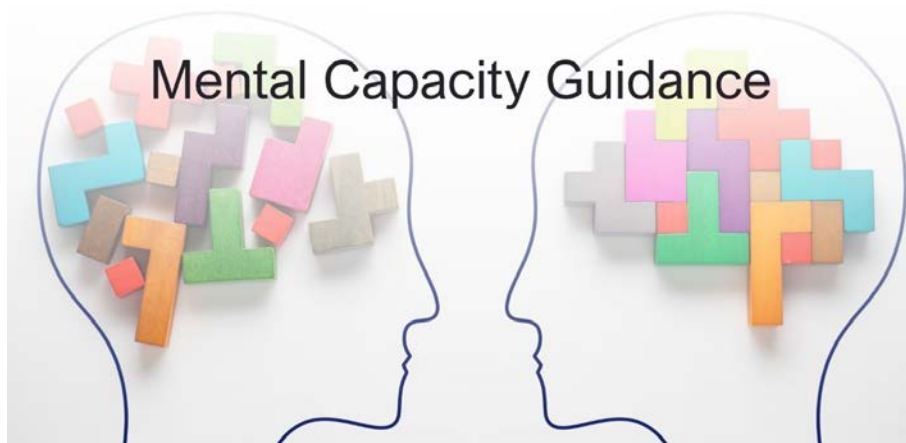
to provide a summary report of children's feedback to their own agencies and the impact that has had. This is an area of work that is ongoing for the partnership, and requires further development.

4. Learning and Development. We would continue to develop our multi-agency learning and development opportunities in line with requirements as identified from audit activity and child safeguarding practice reviews.

As highlighted above, we have provided a learning briefing for practitioners covering the learning from our audit of how the Levels of Need Guidance is being applied. This complements the ongoing delivery of multi-agency training in the use of the Worcestershire Levels of Need Guidance.

QAPP has also supported the development of targeted presentations to be shared within agencies on understanding what Early Help is and the range of Early Help services in the community that are available to support practice in this area.

We have continued to promote the understanding of the Mental Capacity Act and how it applies to young people through the development and distribution of a partnership newsletter on this subject. This continues to support the learning and recommendations from previous case reviews. A copy of that newsletter can be found here: [Mental Capacity Guidance for Partner Agencies](#)



The QAPP Group has also developed guides for professionals to support them while working with Looked After Children, children on a Child In Need Plan and children who are on Child Protection Plans. These guides can be found here:

[Resources and Publications - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](#)

In addition, the multi-agency training offer resumed, and these courses have been delivered through virtual platforms such as Webcast and Microsoft Teams. These are summarised below.

### **Signs of Safety**

We have strong partnership engagement within case work and over the past two years over 350 partners have undertaken Signs of Safety partnership training so we can talk the same language when we work with families in identifying risk and supporting needs. The course is run by an accredited Signs of Safety consultant and provides greater detail of the Signs of Safety Practice Model and is relevant for professionals contributing directly to assessments and plans and attending Social Care meetings, including early help.

### **Management of Allegations**

This course provides information to help professionals understand the Management of Allegations processes, the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), and the role of the multi-agency network. It gives an overview of legislation, procedures, and processes; and supports individuals to know how to respond if there is an allegation against a professional working with children and families. Three sessions were run in 2021 up to the end of September, attended by 29 professionals, and further sessions are planned.

To further support the work of the partnership in the management of allegations we have developed three leaflets on the role of the LADO, Positions of Trust Meetings, and a leaflet to provide to the individual who has been referred to the LADO, all of which are available on the WCF Website at:

[Are you worried about an adult who works with children? | Are you worried about an adult who works with children? | Worcestershire County Council](#)

## Multi-Agency Levels of Need and Threshold Guidance Workshop

This workshop is for all agencies and professionals who need to understand the levels of need in Worcestershire; the workshop covers:

- How to apply to the levels of need
- Review the threshold document
- Cover the Legal and Policies Frameworks
- Information sharing of which services are available to families at which levels

During this reporting period, three workshops were delivered virtually, which a total of 118 professionals attended, and further workshops are arranged. This training is delivered jointly by Children's Social Care, Police and Health.

5. Section 11 Audit and survey of practitioner learning from recent serious case reviews. The QAPP group would need to analyse the results from this audit work and provide the appropriate support to address any identified areas for development.

Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places on a statutory footing the need for named agencies and individuals to co-operate to safeguard children and promote their welfare, and to make arrangements for ensuring that 'their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children'. The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership published arrangements sets out the functions of the partnership, one of which is to 'Review and evaluate effectiveness of multi-agency practice in relation to high-quality and timely decision making, assessment and planning to protect children from harm'. The 'Section 11' audit of individual partners' safeguarding arrangements is an important contribution to this.

As highlighted in our last annual report an online version of the Section 11 audit was developed by QAPP members which focused on five key areas of practice within each agency. This ensured a balance between the need for reassurance as to the effectiveness of agency's child safeguarding arrangements, whilst recognising the impact of the response to Covid on resources across the partnership.

This section 11 audit process has now been completed. As an additional step members of the Executive also met with the authors of the individual agency section 11 reports to moderate the submissions and gradings, and explore the evidence submitted in greater depth. Further details of this are provided within the WSCP Executive section of this report.

Here are some examples of what agencies said within their audit responses.

"The voice of the child is integral to the delivery and development of community safety youth work projects, with participants experiences and feedback collated utilising face to face interviews, questionnaires, surveys and assessed using a variety of outcome measures and tools."

"Our annual consultation month involves children and young people. The data collected helps shape our service delivery plans."

"Effective contribution to Child Protection, Children in Need, Looked After plans, Section 47 enquiries and Early Help Plans are actively encouraged. Cases that are subject to supervision are scrutinised to provide this evidence as well as the annual record keeping audit."

"All high-risk cases are subject to review and planning through the HRPs, which are well attended by partner agencies and provide an additional layer of management oversight to ensure that relevant referrals are made. Assessments and planning for all high-risk cases are quality assured by a manager."

"This is a piece of work that is progressing and will be improved with the implementation of the Early Help offer."

"Learning and information from safeguarding partnership is often reinforced through team meetings, quality

assurance and learning review, however we do not have a systematic process in place to measure and record whether it has made a difference to practice.”

(In relation to the dissemination of learning from safeguarding reviews and audits) “All taken via Integrated Safeguarding Committee / Children’s Board Safeguarding Champions Safeguarding Pathway, training pages of the Trust intranet Quality Improvement Group. Examples in mandatory face to face training..... and standing agenda item at Integrated Safeguarding Committee.”

As can be seen from the above examples, there are a range of activities ongoing within each agency to promote the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people, and areas which have been identified as ‘requiring improvement’ within this audit will be followed up by the QAPP Group.

## **Policies and Procedures**

A key area of QAPP Group work is ensuring the partnership has the right multi-agency policies and procedures. These are available to all partners through the West Midlands Safeguarding Procedures website, accessible through the following link: <https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/>

During this period, QAPP members have completed focused work on the following policies:

- i. Self-Harm and Suicidal Behaviour
- ii. Children Missing Education
- iii. Exploitation Procedure

There has been partnership expertise provided through QAPP to inform and develop these policies from the Safeguarding Education Lead, the Children Missing Education Lead Officer, the Designated Doctor, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, CAHMS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), and Police.

## **Evidence of Impact**

Through the activities of the QAPP Group we have a strong understanding of the quality of multi-agency work within our key areas of business and have been able to provide further learning and guidance to support practitioners where required, as evidenced above. In improving practitioner’s knowledge and understanding of how they can contribute more effectively to keeping children safe, so we impact on the safeguarding and protection of children and young people in Worcestershire.

Through the Section 11 audit process the Safeguarding Partners have a clear understanding of the strength and quality of the child safeguarding arrangements within individual partner agencies, where areas for improvement are required and how those are being addressed. The ongoing follow up on those areas identified as needing improvement supports the development of better services to children and young people across the partnership.

In July 2021 Ofsted visited Worcestershire County Council children’s services. This visit was focused on the Worcestershire Family Front Door and concluded that; “The local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practice for children and families in receipt of services at its ‘Family Front Door’ since the inspection in June 2019. Leaders have established a positive culture of commitment to continuous improvement across this service area, supported by particularly strong quality assurance arrangements. The early help partnership is now well engaged in the delivery of services, and most schools in Worcestershire have an early help offer, bespoke to the needs of their community”

The report went on to say that; “Children and families in Worcestershire benefit from a swift and proportionate response to new contacts with prompt analysis, leading to appropriate management sign off and seamless referral and transitional arrangements to ensure that children and families experience minimal delay within the Family Front Door so that children gain the right service at the right time.”

As described above, members of the QAPP Group have worked extensively to ensure that the Levels of Need Guidance is well understood and properly applied by all agencies prior to any referral, and that the multi-agency child protection processes that support the Family Front Door functions are of a high quality. The QAPP Group will continue to ensure they are an important part of 'particularly strong quality assurance arrangements' recognised by Ofsted.

## **Voice of the Child/Family**

The QAPP Group continues to take into account the experiences of the child, young person and family in all of their audit activity.

Last year we reported how the QAPP Group had developed an online survey for families who receive a multi-agency service in relation to child safeguarding, and within this reporting period we used the survey to capture feedback on their personal experience of Early Help. This is the first time the Safeguarding Partnership has sought feedback in this way and has been a very positive piece of work from which we heard the views of 54 families. The key learning from this was:

- The majority of families reported that professionals worked well together, were clear on what was working well, what they were worried about and what needed to happen.
- However, for some families this did not happen; one of the key areas within the comments was that families felt support offered to them was for too short a period, this is a key message to partners around ensuring that plans are in place to continue to support families at the lowest level and when this can be reduced, families are clear on how to continue to access support if they become worried about something again.
- The area of lowest feedback (76%) was how the multi-agency approach supported families to improve their child's and their own safety and wellbeing; this does mean three-quarters of families felt this had happened however this was the area where most families did say 'no'. This may be indicative of how families perceive agencies working together and is a key message to share with the partnership on ensuring we are clear on how we work together to support families.
- The majority of comments provided by families were positive with examples of agencies supporting them in the community.

Learning was shared through the QAPP Group membership for dissemination through agencies to support single agency learning and development.

To gain reassurance as to individual agencies contributions to including the children's views within their delivery of services, the Section 11 audit included the specific question "How effective is your agency at capturing the experience of children who use your service, and then using that feedback to influence the service provided?". Many strong examples were provided, two of which are provided within the Section 11 Audit information above.

The QAPP Group have now commissioned the Early Help project with the University of Worcester, and although this has not progressed as rapidly as we would have wished due to competing priorities for the partnership, the agreed terms of reference focus heavily on the views and experiences of children, young people and families who have been offered and/or received early help services. This project will provide a real opportunity to gather feedback which can be used to directly shape and influence multi-agency safeguarding services.

## **Areas for Development**

During the forthcoming reporting period the QAPP Group will be focused on the following areas;

- Completion of the Early Help project in conjunction with the University of Worcester
- The development of multi-disciplinary audits at the Family Front Door between Social Care, Education and Early Help to look at the quality of referrals and application of the levels of need to promote system learning and the Early Help agenda.

- Support the Get Safe Partnership Group in embedding the learning from the 'Sarah' Child Safeguarding Practice Review.
- Ensure that a multi-agency plan is in place to ensure Worcestershire can effectively respond to any Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI). This will include support for agencies to understand their role, expectations and resourcing commitments of such an inspection.
- Continue to deliver multi-agency audits in areas identified as requiring further scrutiny and use the learning from those audits to improve services to children and young people. The audit activity within this coming reporting period will include how effectively agencies capture the voice of SEND children within our safeguarding processes.

# 10. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group oversees the management of rapid review processes and the commissioning of child safeguarding practice reviews within Worcestershire. The CSPR Group is also responsible for ensuring that child safeguarding practice reviews are completed to a high standard and within agreed timescales, that the recommendations and learning resulting from these reviews are fully implemented, and evidence of their impact obtained. The CSPR Group is chaired by Ellen Footman who is Associate Director for Nursing and Quality/Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults and Children with the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group.

The purpose of a review is to identify any learning from these cases and then use that learning to improve both individual agency and multi-agency working to safeguard children more effectively, for example through policy development and the commissioning of multi-agency training. There are clear criteria for when rapid reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews should be completed, and these are set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (July 2018). These reviews are undertaken when a child has died or been seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. That said, with the changes introduced in the most recent 'Working Together' document, even when the criteria for a CSPR is met, the three safeguarding partners do not have to carry out a full review if they believe all learning has been captured at the rapid review stage of the process. Further, CSPR's allow a more flexible approach to reviewing cases than was previously seen within Serious Case Reviews. Child safeguarding practice reviews are not inquiries into how a child died or was seriously harmed or about who is culpable.

This year the CSPR Group has conducted three rapid reviews under the new arrangements which has resulted in the commissioning of two child safeguarding practice reviews. These reviews are ongoing. The early learning identified from these rapid reviews has been disseminated so that improvements can be made to the safeguarding system, prior to completion of the full CSPR.

## Progress and Achievements and Evidence of Impact

The CSPR Group has continued to implement learning from previous serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews. The serious case review into the death of baby Isaac, which was published in July 2019, contained a recommendation that the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership should seek assurance regarding the effectiveness of the provision of Early Help and satisfy itself that there is clear communication with and between all partner agencies about the shared roles and responsibilities regarding the provision of Early Help support for children and families in Worcestershire.

The CSPR Group has followed up on this recommendation and received assurances that the following improvements in the approach to Early Help in Worcestershire have been made -

- The Early Help Pathway has been developed with multi-agency partners to work with families.
- There is now a multi-agency Early Help partnership where areas for development across the partnership are discussed and progress against these areas monitored through an Early Help action plan.
- Training in the use of Early Help assessments is being delivered, incorporating the use of the 'Signs of Safety' model. Training also promotes the need for professional curiosity by practitioners within their Early Help work.
- Education partners have been supported to develop their own Early Help offers for their settings. This has been followed up within the Section 175 audit of safeguarding arrangements in schools and colleges across Worcestershire.

- A refreshed community lead Early Help assessment and intervention plan has been produced. Early Help assessments completed in the community are then being collated to ensure a 'whole system' understanding of services being delivered to families, and identify any gaps.
- Early Help in Your Community events have been held across the county to build understanding on Early Help support available.

This follow up was completed in December 2020, and since then work has continued to produce a comprehensive Early Help Strategy for Worcestershire which will guide the ongoing development of early help services within the county. In support of this, the WSCP Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group will continue to explore the impact of these multi-agency early help services for children and young people through its programme of work.

The impact of the work of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group on the development of our services to children and young people, and the systems for keeping them safe, is evident in the collective approach to early help as detailed above and to our 'Get Safe' response to child exploitation, which has been strongly influenced by the 'Sarah' review (details below). The learning and recommendations from these reviews provide a compelling evidence base for change and focus our partner agencies on specific areas for development within the wider system. Other examples of improvements through learning from rapid review processes are;

- The development of clear guidance for practitioners in relation to Core Group meetings.
- All Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDIC) information sharing meetings now have a direct question relating to whether any safeguarding referrals are appropriate at that point.
- The inclusion of the escalation procedure and how it should be used within the multi-agency threshold guidance training package.
- The re-emphasis of the use of the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) risk assessment in cases where professionals have concerns that a service user may be a victim of domestic abuse.
- Awareness and understanding of the Mental Capacity Act and how it applies to 16 and 17 year olds has featured as a learning point within Worcestershire. This has been an ongoing area of work for the group, and further progress has been made details of which are included within the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group section of this report.

Evidence of the changes to practice made and their impact, is further 'tested' through the work of the QAPP Group, through their on-going programme of work to seek assurance regarding quality and improved performance across the system, such as through the multi-agency audit programme.

## **Voice of the Child/Family**

Within any child safeguarding practice review it is essential that the views of the child and family feature strongly within the process and are reflected within the final report and conclusions. The CSPR Group ensures that engagement with families is central to the review and that their views are properly reflected within the final report.

Findings from the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

In March 2021 a commissioned report on Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Rapid Reviews undertaken by the University of East Anglia and Birmingham University was published by the Independent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, followed by the publication of the Panel's own annual report in May 2021. These are welcomed as they support partnerships in what is still a relatively new and developing approach to review work. The Worcestershire CSPR Group has actively considered its own practice against these documents and as a result has adopted the National Panel's suggested 'six key themes to make a difference' for reviews as the basis for our most recent review. These six key themes on which the terms of reference for the review are closely based, are:



- Understanding what the child's daily life is like
- Working with families where their engagement is reluctant and sporadic
- Critical thinking and challenge
- Responding to changing risk and need
- Sharing information in a timely and appropriate way
- Organisational leadership and culture for good outcomes

In September 2021 the National Review Panel published a report entitled 'The Myth of Invisible Men: Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers' which set out the findings from its thematic review on safeguarding children under one from non-accidental injury caused by male carers. As national learning, this is an area of work that will be supported by the CSPR Group. Although this work is in its early stages, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group has secured funding to support the use of the ICON programme within the county, this being a nationally recognised programme to help parents cope better with crying babies. This in turn will form part of a wider 'Keep Me Safe' strategy, the development of which is being supported by the CSPR Group and incorporates learning from another National Panel Review published in July 2020 entitled "Out of routine: A review of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm". This wider piece of work is being undertaken jointly with the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

### **Areas for Development**

The CSPR Group is aware of the increased focus on the timeliness of the completion of reviews and the expectation of the National Review Panel that reviews should be published within six months. We recognise that here in Worcestershire we are not currently meeting that expectation, and as such will be striving to improve on this, whilst accepting that the integrity of any criminal process, and the quality of the learning and recommendations achieved from the review must take precedence.

As detailed above, the group will also continue its work to strengthen the multi-agency approach to reducing the risk of non-accidental injury to children under one through the 'Keep Me Safe' strategy, incorporating the learning from the national review completed on these theme.

# 11. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) currently has three child safeguarding practice reviews (CSPR's) in progress. These reviews are being overseen by the Worcestershire Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group on behalf of the WSCP.

The partnership has published only one Child Safeguarding Practice Review during this period. This review related to the tragic death of a 17 year old child 'Sarah', and was published in August 2021. Full details of that review and of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership response to the findings can be found here:

[CSPR-Sarah.pdf \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](#)

A summary of the learning and recommendations prepared for practitioners can be found here:

[Sarah-Learning-Briefing-V3.pdf \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](#)

Further work continues through the WSCP Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group and the Get Safe Partnership Group to ensure recommendations have been appropriately addressed and learning embedded across the various agencies.

# 12. Updates to Published Arrangements

There have been no updates to the three safeguarding partners' published arrangements during this reporting period.

# 13. The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group

The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group consists of representatives of the Worcestershire phases of education settings. The group quality assures the safeguarding work of the education sector across Worcestershire and provides a direct link for that work into the wider safeguarding partnership. The group uses key performance indicators, the Section 175 safeguarding audit returns and direct feedback from schools to understand both the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, and the resulting outcomes for children.

Membership includes representatives from the following schools' areas:

- Early Years
- First Schools
- Independent Schools
- Primary Schools
- Middle Schools
- Secondary Schools
- Further Education
- Special Schools
- Alternative Provision

## Progress and Achievements

During this reporting period the Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has continued to work with settings to support the safeguarding arrangements in schools, colleges and early years settings. The ongoing pandemic and national developments in relation to an increased focus on sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools have featured strongly within the work of the group. Additionally, the group has been involved in the following areas;

- The links between education settings and the Worcestershire Family Front Door. The Steering Group has provided the appropriate forum for Children Social Care and Education representatives to discuss and develop these links. The application of the Worcestershire Levels of Need Guidance has been discussed, and within that the appropriateness of certain types of referral, the timeliness of feedback in response to referrals and the use of escalation processes. The group has enabled healthy debate and professional challenge on such matters, which is vital to problem solving in any effective safeguarding partnership.
- The development of the yearly audit of safeguarding arrangements in schools, in line with Section 175 Education Act 2002.
- The development of Worcestershire early help processes and their relationship to the work of schools and early help services. The strength of this area, particularly around the development of schools' early help offers was noted by Ofsted in their ILACS visit in July 2021. Inspectors commented "The early help partnership is now well engaged in the delivery of services, and most schools in Worcestershire have an early help offer, bespoke to the needs of their community".
- The monitoring of developments in relation Elective Home Education across the county, the impact of Covid anxieties on children's attendance and the work ongoing to return children and young people to school.

- The development of a safeguarding training pathway and audit for early years settings.

In May 2021 Worcestershire was selected by Ofsted as one of the areas to be visited as part of their rapid review of sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools and colleges, prompted by the 'Everyone's Invited' website. Representatives from Worcestershire Children First, local education settings and the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership met with Ofsted to contribute to the review. In June 2021 Ofsted published their report, which placed an emphasis on the role of safeguarding partnerships in tackling this problem. The full report can be read here: [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948212/sexual_abuse_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf)

The role of the safeguarding partners in this area was further emphasised in a letter received in July 2021 to all children's safeguarding partnerships jointly signed by Nadine Dorries MP Minister of State for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, Vicky Ford MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families and Victoria Atkins MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding. This drew attention to Ofsted's specific recommendation for safeguarding partners 'to review work to improve engagement with schools of all types in their local area, tailoring their approach to what their analysis (produced in partnership with schools/colleges and wider safeguarding partners) indicates are the risks to children and young people in their local area'. The letter requested that all safeguarding partners review how they work with all their schools and colleges locally (including academies and independent schools) by October half-term and set out what their offer of support to schools and colleges is.

In November 2021 Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership responded to Ofsted with details of the work that has been completed within this area to improve engagement with schools and colleges. This is summarised below:

In September 2021 the Education Safeguarding Team hosted a task and finish group event involving Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group members and other school Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) champions, based on the Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools. The aim of the workshop was to share good practice and identify any barriers through engagement with a wide range of local schools in the area. This work has helped to inform the child protection policy and peer on peer abuse policy developed by the Education Safeguarding Team for use by education settings across Worcestershire.

The learning from the above workshop also informed a school DSL and Deputy DSL conference in November 2021, entitled "It's happening here", with a focus on reducing and responding to peer on peer abuse in educational settings. This event was attended by over 200 delegates from schools and colleges in Worcestershire and was delivered collaboratively with other partner agencies. This wider communication has been supported by more direct help to schools and colleges with the creation of a template risk assessment for schools to be used when responding to reports of sexual violence between pupils, the introduction of a peer mentoring programme offered to all schools in the county, upskilling children and young people to give them the confidence to talk about sensitive issues, and the strengthening of the peer on peer section within the schools' audit tool.

The Worcestershire safeguarding partners have also undertaken an analysis of the quality of response received by children and young people who have been victims of sexual violence from peers by undertaking a multi-agency 'deep dive' audit of selected cases, using a JTAI (Joint Targeted Area Inspection) type audit tool and process. These have been completed by the WSCP Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) sub-group, the cases having been selected for their wide range of relevant agencies involved within each case and in support of the victims. Those agencies have been involved in the audit process and learning and best practice from these cases will be disseminated across the partnership to support schools and other agencies in their response to child on child abuse, and where necessary raise awareness of the services available to support victims at the various levels of need.

Finally, the Education Safeguarding Team has started supporting DSL's to set up and deliver regular early help and safeguarding forums in their own districts, which will have a particular focus on tackling child on child abuse through the curriculum.

Although much progress has been made, partners recognise the ongoing challenges in this area such as the fact

that children and young people can for a number of reasons, and perhaps understandably, be reticent in reporting peer on peer abuse to professionals, parents or other trusted adults. Further, whilst the education sector is fully committed to changing behaviours and cultures, wider changes in attitudes within society more generally are needed if that good work is not to be undermined.

## Evidence of Impact

The impact of the work of the WCF Education Safeguarding Team supported by the Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has led directly to;

- The vast majority of education settings within the county now having their own early help offer in place, so providing support to children and young people at the earliest opportunity.
- The development of procedures, guidance and risk assessments for schools and colleges to support them in responding to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment, and ensuring victims receive the appropriate support and protection.
- The improving direction of travel for Family Front Door referrals from schools resulting in social care intervention year on year from 39% to 44%
- Through the proactive approach taken by Worcestershire Children First through a range of networks to flag inappropriate cases of elective home education (EHE), there has been no increase noted amongst children with additional vulnerabilities. Embedding early help processes has contributed to this outcome.

## Areas for Development

In the coming twelve months the Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group will be focused on ensuring the learning from the audit of multi-agency responses to reports of sexual violence in schools and colleges is used to further improve the services provided to children and young people.

System learning from Ofsted complaints is a further area of development on which the group will be focused. We need to build on how learning from these complaints, which also includes identified best practice, is used to strengthen practice in our education settings.

The group will continue to work to support education providers to encourage those who are victims of sexual violence, sexual harassment and other forms of child on child abuse to report those concerns, and have processes in place that promote such reporting through education and guidance, recognising that this is happening in all settings.

The group will also be focused on ensuring that they continue to support the relationship between education settings and the Worcestershire Family Front Door and promote the knowledge and understanding of the Levels of Need Guidance through regular joint audit activity and clear guidance and dissemination of learning.

## 14. Independent Scrutiny

Independent scrutiny of the child safeguarding partnership arrangements is provided by the Independent Chair, and examples of how the work of the partnership is scrutinised are provided throughout this report. In summary however, the Independent Chair is in attendance and directly involved in all groups within the partnership so has a detailed knowledge of the contribution of the various partners, and the effectiveness and progress of ongoing workstreams. Further, the Independent Chair provides direct scrutiny of the Safeguarding Partners' representatives contributions within the Executive Group, reviews all Rapid Review decisions made by partners, and has a direct involvement in selecting the areas of focus for multi-agency audit, the quality assurance of the single agency Section 11 audit process and the effectiveness of the delivery of multi-agency learning.

## 15. Conclusion

With the ongoing national focus on the safeguarding of children and young people, and current reviews into both individual safeguarding incidents and overall structures and approaches (the transition from Clinical Commissioning Groups to Integrated Care Systems, and the HM Government commissioned independent review of children's social care being two examples) the next twelve months will be a time of significant change for child safeguarding partnerships.

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership will need to ensure that all agencies continue to work together to develop our multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements, and to ensure we use the learning from these various reviews to strengthen the way in which we safeguard and protect children and young people. Further, we need to focus on those arrangements continuing to work effectively and remain connected as individual agencies embed these national changes within their own services.

# Appendix A – WSCP – Budget Details (2020-2021)

The WSCP budget was set for financial year April 2021 to March 2022. Details of the contributions made by the safeguarding partners for the first half of the period covered by this annual report (October 2020 – March 2021) are therefore set out within last year's published report.

In relation to the current financial year April 2021 to March 2022, the decision was made by the safeguarding partners that in view of the available carry forward and in recognition of the financial implications of the pandemic on all partners, no further financial contribution would be requested for this financial year, and the carry forward alone would be used to fund the WSCP activity. This in turn would allow agencies to make the saving available for single agency Covid recovery.

WSCP started this current financial year with £232,364, comprising of £171,446 from previous carry forwards plus last year's carry forward of £60,987. The partnership has spent £50,618 to 31st October 2021 (please see table below for full details of outgoings in this financial year to date), and therefore has £181,746 available.

The safeguarding partners have made the decision to resume contributions for the 2022 – 2023 financial year at previous levels, these being:

Worcestershire Children First – £85,800

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group – £71,479

West Mercia Police - £21,444

**Table: Income and Expenditure of WSCP for period 01/04/21 – 31/10/21**

Income and Expenditure Account for the period: 01/04/21-31/10/21	Partnership Budget	Training Delivery	SCR Fund	Partnership Fund	Total
	CF0153	CF0154	CF0155	CF0156	
<b>Holding account 30 September 2019</b>	<b>-47,982</b>	<b>-97,851</b>	<b>-18,085</b>	<b>-7,528</b>	<b>-171,446</b>
<b>Income £</b>					
WCF	0	0	0	0	0
Health	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0
National Probation Service	0	0	0	0	0
Community Rehabilitation Company	0	0	0	0	0
CAFCASS	0	0	0	0	0
District Councils	0	0	0	0	0
Core Training	0	0	0	0	0
Serious Case Reviews income	0	0	0	0	0
Partnership Fund income/carry forward from 20/21	-60,987	18	0	51	-60,918
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>-60,987</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>-60,918</b>
<b>Expenditure £</b>					
Salaries	40,465	0	0	0	40,465
Independent Chair (estimated and incl)	1,660	0	0	0	1,660
SCR Learning events	0	0	0	0	0
Data Analyst (Paid for Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4)	6,750	0	0	0	6,750
Administration and business costs	1,142	600	0	0	1,742
Recharges (for half year)	0	0	0	0	0
Training Expenditure	0	0	0	0	0
Neglect events	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>50,018</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50,618</b>
<b>Net Position at 30/09/2020</b>	<b>-10,969</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>-10,300</b>
	Underspend	Overspend		Overspend	Underspend
<b>Net Position + Holding Account</b>	<b>-58,952</b>	<b>-97,233</b>	<b>-18,085</b>	<b>-7,476</b>	<b>-181,746</b>





**Get Safe**  
Connecting Services to Keep People Safe