

Inspection of safeguarding

Worcestershire

Inspection dates: 19 – 23 March 2012
Reporting inspector: Gary Lamb HMI

Age group: All
Published: 23 April 2012

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Contents

About this inspection	2
The inspection judgements and what they mean	2
Service information	3
Safeguarding services	5
Overall effectiveness	5
Capacity for improvement	6
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	9
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	9
Quality of provision	10
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	10
Ambition and prioritisation	12
Leadership and management	13
Performance management and quality assurance	15
Partnership working	16
Record of main findings	19

About this inspection

1. Worcestershire County Council is currently subject to an Improvement Notice. This was issued by the Minister of State at the Department for Education "due to poor performance and decline in children's social care on the basis of evidence contained in the 2010 Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services, which judged safeguarding to be inadequate".
2. The purpose of this further inspection of Worcestershire's safeguarding arrangements is to evaluate the work of children's social care in ensuring the most vulnerable children who need protection are safeguarded. Also the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and protected. The inspection team consisted of two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one Additional Inspector. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
3. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - discussions with children and young people receiving services, interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members, representatives from the Police and members of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board
 - analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of serious case review's undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together To Safeguard Children'*, 2010
 - a review of 41 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services delivered over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment arrangements undertaken in July 2011.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

4. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements
Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

5. Worcestershire County Council has a resident population of approximately 122,000 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing 21.9% of the area's total population. In January 2011, 9.4% of the school population was classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British compared to 18.3% in England overall. The majority of these children are from dual heritage, Pakistani or Other White Black minority groups. English is spoken as an additional language by 4.5% of pupils. Urdu, Panjabi and Polish are the most commonly recorded spoken community languages in the area.
6. There are 222 local authority maintained schools in Worcestershire, comprising 170 primary schools, 21 middle schools, 15 secondary schools, nine special and six short-stay schools. There are 20 academies, of which 14 are secondary schools and six primary schools. There are approximately 917 early years providers (both private and voluntary), including 58 local authority nurseries and 489 child minders.
7. Social care services for children have 205 Worcestershire County Council foster carers, four children's homes and two short-break units. There is an Access Centre offering advice and signposting and taking all referrals for children's social care. There are three duty and assessment teams and eight children and family teams, as well as three children with disabilities teams, and county-wide teams for 16+ family support, an outreach team, Looked after Children Permanency Team and Integrated Provider Services to Looked After Children. There is an emergency duty team that provides out of an out of hours service covering Worcestershire and Herefordshire. The youth offending service also covers both counties. Other family support services are provided through 34 children's centres and early intervention family support services attached to schools as well as externally commissioned services. Some services are provided or coordinated through children's services such as youth services, support guidance and skills service, and services for substance misuse, special educational needs, behaviour and learning support and early years and childcare. At the time of the inspection there were 455 children who were the subject of child protection plans and 2267 children in need.

8. Worcestershire has had a Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership since 2006. The Children's Trust Board was set up in April 2010. It is chaired by the lead member for children's services. The Trust includes representatives of Worcestershire County Council and NHS Worcestershire. Other representatives include West Mercia Police, West Mercia Probation Board, representatives from the district councils, and local schools and colleges. A three year Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) was published in 2011 with safeguarding as an explicit priority. A Health and Well-being Board (HWB) has been established in shadow form and a general practitioner member of this board also sits on the Children's Trust Board. The emerging priorities for the HWB board support key aspects of the CYPP.
9. The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) became independently chaired in April 2008, bringing together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in the area which provide safeguarding services. The chair of the WSCB is a member of the Children's Trust Board. A new business plan is in place following the previous announced inspection. There is a planned transition for the new chair of the board who takes up role from April 2012 when the current contract expires.
10. Worcestershire County Council and NHS Worcestershire jointly commission health services for children and young people across Worcestershire, governed by a Section 75 agreement. The Children's Joint Commissioning Unit, based within Worcestershire County Council, is the lead commissioner for all community health services including speech, language and communication needs, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and services for children with a disability. All community health services, including community-based CAMHS, are commissioned from Worcestershire Health and Care Trust. In-patient CAMHS is provided at Birmingham Children's Hospital and other independent sector services, including services outside the West Midlands. The main provider of acute hospital services is the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, which includes the Worcestershire Royal Hospital, the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch, and Kidderminster Hospital and Treatment Centre.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (Adequate)

11. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is adequate.
12. There has been a step change in the priority given to the child protection service by Worcestershire County Council. The Children's Service Safeguarding Improvement Plan is being effectively overseen by the Improvement Board and progress is being reported to the Children's Trust Board, WSCB and elected members. Although the initial rate of improvement has been slow, time has been used well to complete a thorough whole system review of the child protection service and this is beginning to make a difference. The WSCB has produced a new access to service threshold document. Multi-agency training has resulted in a better understanding by professionals about referring children and families to services that best meet their needs. This has already had an impact. More children are being referred appropriately to children's social care and the rate of re-referrals continues to reduce.
13. The local authority has taken effective action to strengthen the contact, referral and assessment arrangements. This has ensured that children who are at immediate risk of significant harm and need protection are safeguarded. The Access Centre provides a robust single point of contact for all social care enquiries. All child protection cases are allocated to a qualified social worker promptly and record keeping is generally relevant and up to date. Performance on the timely completion of initial and core assessments has improved and is now good. All child protection enquiries are undertaken within statutory timescales. Management oversight of cases has improved significantly. However, in a small number of cases, statutory visits have not taken place within the required timescale and it was not always clear if management direction was followed by some social workers. The systems to ensure the overall quality of child in need plans are not robust. Also managers do not ensure sufficient priority is given to monitor children in need cases for example, social workers allocated children with learning difficulty and/or disability do not receive regular supervision on these cases.
14. Referrals relating to domestic abuse are dealt with effectively and there is good information sharing between the Police and children's social care to ensure these cases are properly prioritised. Although the quality of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) assessments seen by inspectors were only judged adequate where CAF assessments are in place, multi-agency work to support the child and their family is leading to improved outcomes. Plans for intervention are in place in all cases. However, their quality is too variable. For example, there is insufficient detail about the intended outcomes. Child protection plans are aggregated to include other

children in the family in order to reduce the paperwork for families. However, the format makes them too long and confusing and this is being reviewed as part of re-commissioning the electronic recording system. Progress has been made to identify the ethnicity of children, young people and their parents and carers but equality and diversity is not always thoroughly considered in children and young people's assessments and plans.

15. Outcomes across the broad safeguarding agenda are steadily improving such as school attendance which is better than the national average and those young people who are persistently absent from school. Also there is a downward trend in the rate of first time entrants into the criminal justice system and the level of young people who re-offend has decreased significantly and performance is better than both the national average and comparator averages.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 3 (Adequate)

16. The capacity to improve is adequate.
17. The Corporate Plan of the council gives safeguarding the highest priority. This is underpinned by a year on year increase in the council's child protection budget to support improvement in this particular area of the council's statutory responsibility at a time of financial restraint. All partners have worked well together with the council on the Children Services Safeguarding Improvement Plan. Progress reported at the last unannounced inspection of the council's contact, referral and assessment arrangements has been consolidated over time.
18. Overall there are many plans in place, which are at an early stage of implementation. However, improvements in procedure and practice to ensure the most vulnerable children who need protection are safeguarded have been effectively prioritised and actions are robust. Sustained improvements are reliant on the successful implementation of the work force strategy which is progressing very well. Good progress has been made in the recruitment of social workers to enable all statutory work to be allocated to qualified staff and ensure the workforce reflects the diverse population of Worcestershire. The workforce strategy has increased the capacity of the workforce to undertake the social work task in a timely way and at the right quality. Similar progress is being made by partner agencies to skill up their staff to increase the effectiveness of multi-agency early intervention and prevention responses.
19. There are examples of good child protection core assessments but the quality of analysis of risk is not always sufficient particularly in children in need assessments. The views of parents are taken into account in most cases but the involvement of children in their assessments is not so clearly evidenced. Children and young people do not routinely attend child protection conferences and the chairperson does not engage with those

children and young people who do not attend. Also the advocacy service, commissioned by the authority, is under utilised to improve the quality of representations of the views of children.

20. A wide range of early intervention services are in place across the authority to offer support to families with young children. These services are effectively identifying the right children who need protection and those who can benefit from intervention early to reduce risk. However, overall early intervention and prevention services are insufficiently targeted and coordinated. A new Early Help strategy has been agreed across the partnership and newly commissioned early help services are being introduced to ensure provision is closely matched to meet local need. Partner agencies are well placed to progress the safeguarding improvement agenda further. Partnership work is good at operational level and outcomes for children have improved. However, this recent improvement is from a low base and the quality of service provision, service responses and safeguarding outcomes are only judged adequate.
21. Although there are some examples of good progress in the use of the CAF such as with adult substance misuse and mental health services who now generate CAF assessments, the impact of CAF has not yet been maximised across partner agencies. There are also some gaps in partnership working in the involvement of school nurses in children in need planning, core groups, and by CAMHS. Also health practitioners do not routinely receive children in need and child protection plans.
22. The WSCB is delivering its core business plan and it is increasingly effective. Good action has been taken to implement lessons learned from serious case reviews and progress is monitored rigorously by the WSCB serious case review subgroup. Although monitoring arrangements for complaints has recently improved, the evaluation of lessons learned from complaints has yet to be fully embedded into practice improvements.

Areas for improvement

23. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Worcestershire, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- ensure statutory visits are carried out in accordance with individual children's child protection plans and that these visits and any management directions required to be undertaken by social workers are recorded promptly
- accelerate plans to improve the quality of assessments, plans and social work practice to consolidate progress.

Within three months:

- develop procedures and practice to support children and young people to make representations and where appropriate attend meetings, conferences, and reviews so that their wishes and feelings are known, understood and considered by those who are making decisions
- ensure all relevant partners are invited to contribute to children in need planning and core group meetings
- ensure all agency professionals who are involved in children in need and child protection conferences, core group meetings and child protection reviews routinely receive a copy of the meeting notes or outcome record, assessments and plans
- ensure the systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of children in need plans are strengthened including routine supervision for social workers and social work assistants undertaking this work.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 3 (Adequate)

24. Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people are adequate.
25. The local authority has taken effective action to strengthen the contact, referral and assessment arrangements. This has ensured that children who are at immediate risk of significant harm and need protection are safeguarded. The WSCB has produced a new access to service threshold document which has been widely disseminated across the partnership. This has already had an impact. For example, more children are being referred appropriately to children's social care services and the rate of re-referrals continues to reduce.
26. The role of the local authority designated officer (LADO) is well understood and utilised across the partnership. Effective training across the authority has resulted in the service receiving appropriate referrals from a wide range of agencies. LADOs offer appropriate advice to agencies to ensure that there is a proportionate response to allegations and investigations are concluded in a timely manner. The work of the LADO is scrutinised by the WSCB on an annual basis. Monitoring of complaints has recently improved. Most complaints are resolved at the first stage. Although complaints are managed too slowly, timeliness is improving. However, learning from complaints has yet to be fully embedded into practice improvements.
27. The new missing children protocol has been effectively implemented and good multi-agency work ensures that children who are missing are located. All children are offered a 'return interview' but are not asked if they would prefer this to be with an independent person, although this service is available. Human resource, staff recruitment and selection processes meet statutory requirements to ensure children are safe. The WSCB through its policy subgroup has implemented new guidance for safe recruitment of staff and this is ensure good practice is promoted across the service sector.
28. In all inspections of schools, safeguarding is at least adequate and in most it is good or better. For children under five, the large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good or better and some is outstanding. The very large majority of early years and childcare providers are good or better. This position has been consolidated from the previous year. Reducing the impact of bullying on children and young people is a priority for the council and includes a comprehensive e-bullying programme. Reported incidence of bullying in schools is low and peer

mentoring is effective in working with bullying in schools. The council is currently undertaking an evaluation of impact. The small number of young people who met inspectors said they felt safe in their schools, colleges and the communities where they live but they were concerned that youth services were about to be withdrawn and that they would not have safe places to go on an evening.

29. The partnership is developing effective responses to wider issues of safeguarding, including child trafficking and the impact of forced marriage. However this is not yet embedded in practice across the partnership. There has been a downward trend in the rates of first time entrants into the criminal justice system over the last three years with performance slightly better than the national average and in line with comparators. The level of re-offending has decreased significantly and performance is better than both the national average and comparator averages. School attendance is better than the national average and performance on persistent absence continues to reduce and is below the national average. Although unauthorised absences have increased they are still below the national average.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (Adequate)

30. The quality of provision is adequate.
31. A wide range of early intervention services are in place across the authority to offer support to families with young children, through family centres, parenting programmes and individual support. These services are increasingly effective and data shows that few of these families are subsequently referred for statutory services. However, early intervention and prevention services are insufficiently targeted and coordinated. A newly commissioned early help service is being introduced to offer sharply focused services to meet local need. Although some services are available to young people and their families who need early help, these are not sufficiently integrated into the wider strategy.
32. The local authority has made considerable efforts to increase the use of the CAF across the partnership. However, the numbers of CAF assessments completed by partner agencies is still too low. Although the quality of CAF assessments seen by inspectors were only judged adequate where CAF assessments are in place, multi-agency work to support the child and their family is leading to improved outcomes. A recent review of the threshold for access to services has been undertaken effectively. Multi-agency training has resulted in a better understanding by professionals about referring children and families to services that best meet their needs.
33. Referrals relating to domestic abuse are dealt with effectively and there is good information sharing between the Police and children's social care to ensure these cases are properly prioritised. The Access Centre provides a

robust single point of contact for all social care enquiries. Where safeguarding issues are highlighted, appropriate information is collected and decision about the progress of the case is taken by experienced social workers in a timely manner. All child protection enquiries are undertaken within statutory timescales. Decision-making from strategy discussions with the police are clear and are followed up by appropriate investigations. All child protection cases are allocated to a qualified social worker promptly and record keeping is generally up to date and relevant to the case. Statutory assessments involving children in need cases are undertaken by a qualified social worker. A small number of children in need cases are worked by unqualified social work assistants once the child in need plan is in place, but are overseen by a qualified social worker. Reviews are always conducted by a qualified social worker.

34. Performance on the timely completion of initial and core assessments has improved and is now good. Where timescales have been exceeded, managers are aware of the reasons for this and they take appropriate remedial action. In the majority of cases, assessments are based on an appropriate range of information and liaison with the relevant agencies. The views of parents are taken into account in most cases but the involvement of children in their assessments is not so clearly evidenced. There are examples of good child protection core assessments but the quality of analysis of risk is not always sufficient particularly in children in need assessments. This includes failing to assess the impact of mental health issues of parents on their behaviour and the impact of the risky behaviour of young people on their own safety.
35. Management oversight is good and well-recorded. In the majority of cases, this is clear and offers direct challenge to workers about the progress of the case. However, in a small number of cases, statutory visits had not taken place within the required timescale and it was not always clear if management direction was followed by workers. Plans for intervention are in place in all cases. However, their quality is too variable. Timescales are not sufficiently defined and they have insufficient detail about the intended outcomes. Child protection plans are aggregated to include other children in the family in order to reduce the paperwork for families. However, the format makes them too long and confusing and this is being reviewed as part of re-commissioning the electronic recording system.
36. Children and young people do not routinely attend child protection conferences and the chair person does not engage with those children and young people who do not attend. In a small number of cases, creative ways are used to gain the views of the child. For example, by writing to the chair person. However, in the majority of cases, this was not so and the advocacy service, commissioned by the authority, is under utilised to improve the quality of representations of the views of children. Although progress has been made to identify the ethnicity of children, young people

and their parents and carers, equality and diversity is not properly considered in some cases. Assessments do not routinely consider the specific risks to children with disability or the impact of culture on their lives. In some meetings, where children attend, sensitive health issues are discussed openly and so fail to respect the privacy of children and young people.

37. A well-established auditing system, involving the quality assurance team and senior managers, is in place to review child protection cases. However, reports produced showing the outcomes of the audits demonstrate that the pace of improvement in case work has been too slow. The systems to ensure the overall quality of child in need plans are not robust. As a result, there is no systematic auditing of these cases to ensure their quality.
38. Although the partnership has taken action to reduce the number of children and young people who are detained overnight in police cells, there is still insufficient emergency accommodation to avoid some remaining in custody inappropriately. Plans are in place to develop emergency temporary accommodation to reduce the need to use bed and breakfast provision for some homeless 16 and 17 year olds who refuse to become looked after.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 3 (Adequate)

39. Ambition and prioritisation is adequate.
40. There has been a step change in the priority given to the child protection service by Worcestershire County Council. This is underpinned by a year on year increase in the council's child protection budget to support improvement in this particular area of the council's statutory responsibility at a time of financial restraint. The Corporate Plan of the council gives safeguarding the highest priority. Detail of the implementation of this is set out in a number of strategic plans and other supporting documents such as the Children's Service Improvement Plan - the Next Steps programme which partner agencies are signed-up to deliver.
41. Leadership at all levels, political, managerial and across partner agencies, is both strong and committed to the safeguarding improvement agenda. Although the initial rate of improvement has been slow, time has been used well to complete a thorough whole system review of the child protection service and this is beginning to make a difference. Partner agencies are well placed to progress further. Progress reported at the last unannounced inspection of the council's contact, referral and assessment arrangements has been consolidated. The Improvement Plan is being effectively overseen by the Improvement Board and progress is being reported to the Children's Trust Board, WSCB and elected members.

42. Although there is a wide range of early intervention and prevention services these services are insufficiently targeted and coordinated. The partnership has agreed a new early help strategy. The implementation of this strategy is based on a needs analysis which is helping to influence the shape of service provision to meet the specific needs of local areas, eliminate duplication and maximise the use of all available resources such as better targeting of services delivered through children's centres. Overall there are many plans in place, which are at the inception stage. Sustained improvement remains fragile and is reliant on the successful implementation of the workforce strategy. The workforce strategy is beginning to increase the capacity of the workforce to undertake the social work task timely and to the right quality and for partner agencies to skill up their staff to increase the effectiveness of multi-agency early intervention and prevention responses.
43. The Improvement Plan Exit Strategy is well developed at draft stage awaiting the outcome of this inspection. It appropriately focuses on the fragilities of the service and the contingencies that exist to strengthen services even further such as social work mentors and consultant social workers. This forms the immediate objectives for the new independent chair person of the WSCB who takes-up post on 1 April 2012.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

44. Leadership and management are good.
45. The social care workforce strategy is securely set in both national and local contexts reflecting key goals for improvement in the delivery of safeguarding services and professional practice standards. Good progress has been made in the recruitment of social workers to enable all statutory work to be allocated to qualified staff. Some well experienced agency staff are employed to provide support to the high proportion of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs). The improvement of social worker practice is being effectively developed by a number of mentors and experienced qualified consultant social workers. The most recent management data demonstrates that measures to retain staff are beginning to have an impact. Further measures including access to post qualification training, opportunities through collaboration with local higher education institutes and trainee sponsorship are being put in place to ensure good quality practitioners are developed and retained.
46. There are many examples of support provided to improve the quality of managers. These include priority for corporate management and leadership training integrated with service specific supervisor and professional skills development. There is good support provided to tackle incapability. This has resulted in a shared understanding of priorities and expectations of service standards across the management team. The council demonstrates a strong commitment to tackle equality and diversity

and has achieved Level 3 on the Equality Standards Framework. Recently introduced monitoring of diversity in the workforce shows that the number ethnic minority staff reflects the diverse communities of Worcestershire. There is good access to interpreting and translation services to support social work interventions. Other actions have ensured availability of staff to communicate in the first language of some users including signing for those working with children with disabilities.

47. There are good examples of single event consultations with service users to help shape strategic priorities and services at a universal level such as the Children's Service Plan and youth activities. There are also good examples of more systematic participation of standing groups in shaping safeguarding services which are making a difference. For instance a standing panel of young people subject to protection plans informs the WSCB and the young people have produced two DVDs to support the delivery of staff training and inform young people about the child protection conference process. A group of formerly homeless young people have helped shape the specification for temporary accommodation. Young service users are routinely involved in staff recruitment and sometimes this includes parents and carers. A service user and stakeholder engagement strategy is under development which aims to ensure systematic feedback from the full range of existing user groups to consistently inform service evaluation and development. Similarly a framework to capture learning from complaints is under development.
48. There are effective processes for tracking children missing from the school roll and identifying their safeguarding needs. A recently commissioned service will provide choice for those being interviewed when returning after a period of being missing. There are early stage discussions with leaders from the communities which make up the diverse population of Worcestershire to ensure safeguarding needs are met for children in supplementary schools and madressahs.
49. The children's services commissioning strategy forms part of the council's evolving commissioning approach. The aim is to increase co-operation between potential providers including smaller providers in a creative way so that services are closely matched to meet local need. There are good indications this approach is successfully developing the market and generating new solutions from new providers. Action has been taken to de-commission some services and re-commission others based on key outcomes and delivery measures for example, the de-commissioning of the youth service. The re-commissioning of the CAMHS contract has successfully reduced waiting times and re-shaped service delivery based on feedback received from young people. The commissioning team recently won a national award for creativity in providing community based speech and language therapy services in recognition of the effective involvement of parents and professionals.

50. All children's community health services are commissioned using pooled budgets. New contracts actively promote the use of CAF across agencies. Good action has been taken to implement lessons learned from serious case reviews and progress is monitored rigorously by the WSCB serious case review subgroup. This includes a monthly practice newsletter to social work staff and road shows at health service access points. This has raised safeguarding awareness across children's social care and health professionals such as in their assessments and practice to support safeguarding in maternity services. Good progress on the actions plans resulting from serious case reviews is demonstrated through the thematic multi-disciplinary audits conducted by the WSCB and the enhanced performance framework developed by the social care Performance Improvement Board.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 3 (Adequate)

51. Performance management and quality assurance is adequate.
52. The scrutiny of safeguarding activity has been strengthened at a political level by elected members who are proactive in their challenge of safeguarding in action. This is underpinned by senior managers who provide effective challenge for managers of front line services and social workers and managers including senior managers are being held to account for their performance. This work is supported by good data collection, retrieval and transparent management reporting systems on key areas of service operation. These reports provide an accurate account of progress including celebrating good performance.
53. The WSCB is delivering its core business plan and it is increasingly effective at providing challenge and coordinating the improvement of safeguarding performance across the partnership such as the introduction of the new missing children protocol. There are good examples of lessons learned from serious case reviews and thematic audits helping to shape policy, procedure and practice such as reporting on areas of weakness in the prompt escalation of child protection concerns involving children with a disability.
54. The Safeguarding Improvement Board is effectively overseeing the implementation of the Safeguarding Improvement Plan. Although initial progress was slow the pace of change is increasing and actions are beginning to make a difference. There is good use of external consultancy and peer review. However, performance indicators for the evaluation of domestic violence responses remain underdeveloped within the Children and Young People's Plan and the formal audit arrangements for children in need plans is subject to review. Management oversight of cases has improved significantly. The quality of the multi-agency case file audit undertaken for this inspection provides an accurate evaluation of

performance. Good management oversight was seen on all cases examined by inspectors.

55. Significant action has been undertaken to strengthen the quality assurance arrangements across operational management within children's social care including a practice concern/note system which is providing evidence regarding performance including good practice to drive improvement. Specific management meetings are held to discuss the progress of complex cases to unblock issues to prevent drift and address shortfalls in team performance which is making a difference. Nevertheless progress to improve the quality of assessments, plans and social work practice is slow. Children's social care's own case file audits show that the quality of assessments and consistency in social work practice is too variable overall. This remains a significant challenge for the authority.
56. Although the council has been slow to implement performance development plans (PDP) for staff across the children's social care workforce this is being addressed through the Workforce Strategy Work Plan which was launched in November 2011. There has been an increase in training particularly for managers to improve supervision. All managers at every tier have attended a 'leading your people' course as part of a management development programme. Human resource data has evolved significantly and this is assisting in the delivery of the Workforce Development Plan. Many children's social care staff have completed a staff review and development plan (SRD). However, only a small proportion of these have been uploaded on to the council's electronic record system so it is difficult to evaluate impact. All NQSWs have a PDP as part of their induction.
57. The most recent management information shows that the rate of staff supervision is good and management oversight of the cases examined by inspectors was good overall. Some children with a learning difficulty and /or disability have a child in need plan that is reviewed at least annually, but the allocated social workers do not always receive supervision on these cases regularly. This is an omission. The use of equality impact assessments has improved. They are being used to influence the shape of services - for example, informing the adaptation of service provision for young people with disability. The workforce strategy has been strengthened to ensure the workforce reflects the diverse population of Worcestershire. Plans are in place to deliver revised equality and diversity training across the service.

Partnership working

Grade 3 (Adequate)

58. Partnership working is adequate.
59. All partners have worked well together with the council on the safeguarding improvement plan. Although partnership work is good at operational level and outcomes have improved from a low base overall the

quality of service provision, service responses and safeguarding outcomes are judged only adequate.

60. The WSCB has produced a new access to service threshold document which has been disseminated across the county through a range of information workshops. This has improved partner agencies' knowledge and understanding of the threshold for access to children's social care and the early indicators are that this has made a difference resulting in the right children being referred to children's social care. The impact of this learning is being tested through the corporate annual survey reported to the WSCB. Partners report confidence in timely effective responses to referrals from the Access Centre and that they have good access to experienced, qualified social workers to discuss safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding concerns are being managed effectively through good quality information and timely responses. This is supported by the recent appointment of three dedicated social workers and the co-location of the Police with children's social care at the Access Centre. This is particularly evident in relation to the management of domestic violence responses and the availability of information for schools. Partners across the statutory sector report a 'step change' in the commitment to and effectiveness of working together since the previous inspection and also the manner in which the WSCB holds member agencies to account. For example, action following a serious case review has resulted in GP representation on the WSCB. This has facilitated improved information sharing and partnership working and the identification of trained safeguarding leads in local practices.
61. Protocols for work to prevent homelessness in young people and development of outreach services has reduced the number of those aged 16+ becoming looked after. Adult substance misuse and mental health services now generate CAF assessments and there are examples when they have taken the lead professional role. Multi-agency child protection arrangements (MAPPA) and multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) arrangements are working well; they are monitored closely and subject to scrutiny through the WSCB annual report.
62. There are robust arrangements in place to hold individual member agencies and WSCB subgroups to account through a programme of reporting managed by the WSCB. The subgroup for operational effectiveness has been instrumental in providing a constructive forum to challenge practice and resolve problems. It also facilitates good two way communication between the WSCB and practitioners. This group works closely with those leading on multi-disciplinary audits. However it is not clear that learning from these audits has made a difference although plans are in place to evaluate impact. There is evidence of partnership working in many of the cases audited particularly where there is a robust specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time limited (SMART) plan. However there are some noticeable gaps in partnership working in the involvement

of school nurses in children in need planning, core groups, and by CAMHS. In addition health practitioners do not routinely receive children in need and child protection plans.

63. Although plans to recruit lay members on the WSCB have not yet been actioned, the work of the board benefits from the views of young people through representation made by their own Shadow Young People's Board. The WSCB training strategy is informed by a thorough needs analysis and review of its existing provision. The strategy focuses on achieving common core professional competencies in safeguarding practice. Although progress is being made some identified areas of work have not been addressed such as increasing the range of safeguarding courses at Levels 2 and 3. Effective action has been taken to respond to user feedback and address inequalities in some provision for children with disabilities and identify vulnerable children from ethnic minority communities. More emphasis is being given in schools and police settings to learning and acting on the views of children and young people. This work is at an early stage.

Record of main findings:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Adequate
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Adequate
Quality of provision	Adequate
Leadership and management	
Ambition and prioritisation	Adequate
Leadership and management	Good
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Partnership working	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate