

Scrutiny Report

The relationship between the Family Front Door and Schools

August 2019

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Foreword

Our Children's Services has undergone considerable change and improvement since the Ofsted Report in 2017 and the Task Group feel that it is important that the hard work and commitment involved is recognised.

However, when speaking to a number of schools about the service I and a number of colleagues have found that schools had some concerns about their relationship with the Service. It was with this in mind that we wanted to investigate what issues schools were experiencing and how they perceived the current service so that recommendations could be made to improve our service even more.

We sent a simple questionnaire to all schools and offered to visit those schools who responded in order to gain more detailed information. From a total of 242 Worcestershire schools, the Task Group received 30 questionnaires and visited 15 schools, including all tiers and a further education college. We also met with officers at all levels and we thank them for their time and the detailed information provided.

There were a number of areas which were mentioned by schools including the need for parental consent before they can make a referral, follow up of referrals and the actual referral process.

We have made a number of recommendations, which we hope will be acted upon by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families.

Family Front Door

Background and Purpose of the Scrutiny

1. The Family Front Door (FFD), Initial Contact and Referral Team is the central point for all referrals for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years and living in Worcestershire where there are safeguarding or child protection concerns for them.
2. Launched in July 2016, the FFD brings together functions that were previously provided

The Task Group's approach

8. Evidence has been gathered from a variety of sources including Officers of Worcestershire County Council (the Council), the Independent Chairman of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (now Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Children and Families. The Task Group also visited the Family Front Door and invited all schools to provide feedback on how things were working from their perspective. Members of the Task Group then went on to visit a variety of the Council

Recommendations

15. The Task Group has identified a number of areas which it believes require further consideration, and they have set out their recommendations in respect of these issues.
16. In drawing up the recommendations, the Task Group has been mindful of what the Council can and cannot influence and recognises that some of the points raised in this report may be answered in the Cabinet Member's response. The Task Group is also mindful that the service may have moved on since the Task Group contacted schools. However, at the time of writing, these recommendations made were based on what the Task Group was advised during its Scrutiny.

Consent

Recommendation 1: The Task Group urges the CMR and Director to clarify and reiterate to

The Family Front Door

Ofsted

38. Monitoring Visits to track the Council's progress. To date there have been seven such visits with three of these visits having had a specific focus on the Family Front Door service, culminating at the time of writing in a full Ofsted Inspection, the results of which were published on 29 July 2019.
39. feedback received was that 'the local authority has taken steps to tackle the serious weaknesses and is now beginning to make progress to improve services for children

60. **Early Help** Schools referred to a variety of early help mechanisms that they use, both in school and via signposting to other agencies in the community. Schools can also access the Early Help and support is also available from Designated Safeguarding Lead Network and Looked After Children (LAC) events. In addition,

Articles 4 and 2(s) of the 2005 Act in CSW

61. **The Safeguarding Advisor Education** provides training and support for DSLs to equip them for making referrals to the FFD, Early Help and Family Support. The Safeguarding Adviser organises network meetings and events and has set up a system of Safeguarding Champions in each area to facilitate additional support locally. The Safeguarding Advisor Education also completes 1:1 audits in individual schools where extra support is required and can provide guidance through other formats including by telephone and email.

62. **Community Social Workers (CSWs)** There is a small team of CSWs who offer both telephone and face to face advice and guidance on the WSCB Levels of Need Guidance and its application. The Team will also signpost agencies to services that can help support a family. Agencies can also access assistance from the team to help them undertake Early Help Assessments and develop Early Help Action Plans. Any professional who wants advice regarding a specific child can book a telephone

Schools experience

73.

talked to a variety of professionals to seek such advice according to their individual circumstances, some examples included Social Workers, CSWs, FSWs and School Nurses.

82. The Task Group was advised by the Director of CFC that unless there were immediate significant concerns that a child was at risk of serious harm ie Level 4, parental consent should be sought prior to making a referral to the FFD. The Director further explained that historically the CSC had not been uniformly obtaining and recording parental consent, an issue highlighted by the 2017 Ofsted Report

88. Signposting was seen as an area where significant improvement could be made. A number of schools reported a lack of guidance or signposting to appropriate sources of support, where a referral did not meet a certain threshold.
89. Other schools referred to inaccuracies experienced e.g. forms being mis-read leading to potentially concerning outcomes; instances where information from calls had been recorded inaccurately or not recorded at all, lengthy delays in support being set up and parents losing faith in the system when no action/updates were received by the school. The Task Group felt that it may be helpful if outcome letters included more detailed information on early help including links to web pages. The Officers informed the Task Group that some instances of feeling out of the loop were probably relating to when cases were closed or stepped down to targeted family support. They also highlighted that schools were often frustrated when referrals were made by other agencies, and therefore the school would not be informed that a case had been transferred to EH.
- 90.

some suggestions as to how schools could assist with ensuring a more streamlined process and contribute to more effective partnership working:

They highlighted that the FFD routinely receives a number of inappropriate calls from schools, when the nature of the call is not relevant to the FFD, for instance regarding contact issues or early help. A table showing the level of contact from schools and the outcome from these is set out at paragraph 5

Appendix 1 - Schedule of Activity

Date	Activity
11 February 2019	Background to the setting up of the Task Group discussed and information needs
19 and 21 February 2019	Visits to the Family Front Door (FFD)
26 February 2019	Tina Russell, Assistant Director, Safeguarding services Emma Brittain, Service Manager FFD and Targeted Early Help Family Front Door and partnerships (WCF) Denise Hannibal (Safeguarding Advisor Education)
6 March 2019	Social Worker - Family Front Door Initial Screening and Contact Officer Emma Brittain, Service Manager FFD and Targeted Early Help
20 March 2019	Task Group members only review of Questionnaires
29 March 2019	Derek Benson, Independent Chairman of the WSCB Sue Haddon, Business Manager (WSCB)
April to May 2019	Visits to 15 individual schools
15 April 2019	Denise Hannibal, Safeguarding Advisor - Education Community Social Workers
10 May 2019	Task Group Members only

Appendix 2 Questionnaire to Schools

Worcestershire's Family Front Door (FFD)

As you will be aware, when a child is at risk of significant harm, a referral to Children's social care must be made without delay, via the Family Front Door (FFD). This questionnaire is being sent to you from a Council Task Group which is reviewing the effectiveness of the working relationships between schools and the FFD, particularly since the recent changes to the process in late November 2018.

1.	<p><i>(a) Has your school made referrals to the FFD <u>in the last 3 months?</u></i></p> <p><i>If so, how many referrals have you made?</i></p>	
2.	<p><i>(a) What specific guidance do you follow when making referrals to the FFD?</i></p> <p><i>(b) Does the guidance enable you to feel sufficiently well- equipped and confident to direct referrals appropriately?</i></p> <p><i>(c) If not, please explain your difficulties/concerns.</i></p>	
3.	<p><i>(a) Have you been satisfied with the service you have received when you made a referral?</i></p> <p><i>(b) If yes, please advise why it worked well</i></p>	

6.	<i>If you were advised that your referral was not an appropriate referral for the FFD, did you receive clear signposting to an appropriate service which could offer help?</i>	
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7. (a) *Have you noticed any changes (either positive or negative) in the service in the last 3 months in relation to?*

*Agency contributions to case discussions
The process for making referrals
Relationships with social workers and managers*

(b) If so, please provide details

Appendix 3 - Documents received by the Task Group

Worcestershire Safeguarding hub Childrens Multi Agency Arrangements Jan 2018
internal operating policy.

Worcestershire Children First - Staffing structure January 2019 v1

WSCB Multi Agency Levels of Need Guidance to help support children, young people
and families in Worcestershire (Sept 2017)

Family Front Door Audits presentation

FFD and Partnerships -

Welcome to Children's Social Work Services

The Family Front Door, Initial Contact and Referral Team is the central point for all referrals for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years and living in Worcestershire where there is safeguarding or child protection concerns for them.

This team receives referrals from professionals, members of the community, family members, children and young people directly. Please contact the Family Front Door directly telephone [01905 822666](tel:01905822666)

Children's Social Care respond to levels

