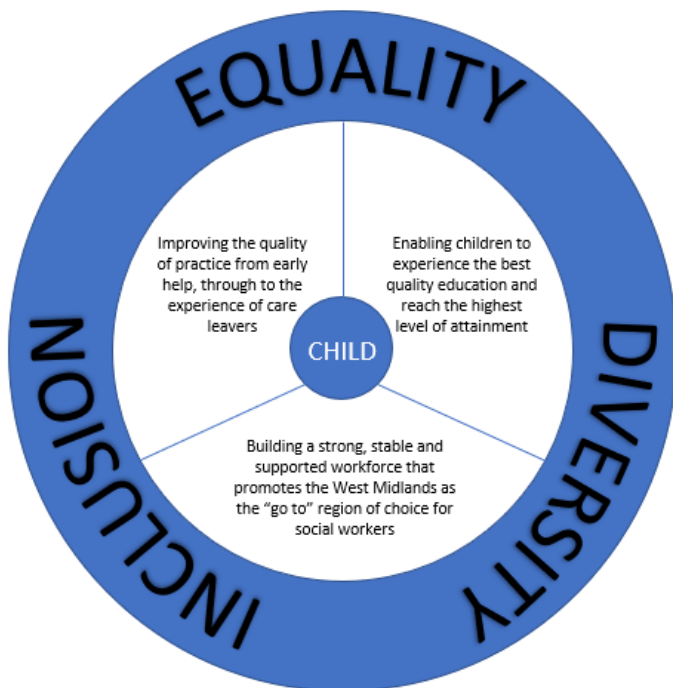


WEST MIDLANDS ADCS NETWORK

A regional improvement and innovation alliance
making the difference for children, young people and families

REGIONAL PRIORITY PLAN

2022-2024



Purpose

The purpose of this Regional Priority Plan is to articulate the aims and intentions of the West Midlands Local Authorities and Children's Trusts, working together as West Midlands ADCS Network, to harness our collective endeavours across the region to improve outcomes for children and young people. It also builds upon the legacy formed by work undertaken, with the support of DfE funding, during 2021-2022 under the auspice of COVID-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better (CRABBB).

Context for the West Midlands

The West Midlands area has 14 local authority areas. Alternative delivery models exist in three of these, with two trusts operating children's social care and one arms-length company operating all children's services on behalf of their council.

As of Sept 2022 (sign off date) Of the 14 local authority areas, one is judged Outstanding by Ofsted, six Good), six Require Improvement to be Good and one Inadequate. This represents an improved situation, with 50% being Good or better, over the last year however, remains below our stated ambition of 80%.

At this time Telford & Wrekin is the only local authority in the region designated by DfE as a Sector Led Improvement Partner, this enables them to formally share good practice and support other nominated authorities (not necessarily locally) to improve.

As a region, we start from the premise that every service has strengths and areas of good practice that can be shared; and equally that everyone can learn from others and improve on their current practice in some areas.

Context nationally

There are a number of policy initiatives, driven by Central Government that are likely to alter the landscape for children's services over the short to mid-term. These include, but are not limited to:

- Schools White Paper, Opportunity for All
- SEND review: right support, right place, right time
- Independent review of children's social care
- Levelling up the United Kingdom

In addition, the Governments response to the **National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson** is similarly likely to have an impact upon service delivery, both locally and nationally. As well as on our wider partnerships.

Acting as a representative body for the collective Directors of Children's Services, nationally, ADCS seeks to influence and shape national policy, both through consultation response and attendance at various national forums. Similarly, it has aligned its key principles to address and challenge strategic and political decision making. This plan seeks to support their underlying priorities.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Each of the Directors of Children's Services and trust Chief Executives are committed to a value that equality, diversity and inclusion must be at the centre of all work collectively undertaken as a region. It is therefore an implicit that the three key priorities embedded in this plan are supported within this overarching value.

Principles of this plan

This is a high-level strategic plan that broadly highlights the direction of travel that the DCS Network have agreed to carry forward for the next 18 months September 22 to March 2024.

This plan identifies for each of the three key priorities:

- Improving the quality of practice from the point of early help, through to the experience of care leavers
- Enabling children to experience the best quality education and reach the highest level of attainment
- Building a strong, stable, and supported workforce that promotes the West Midlands as the “go to” region of choice for social workers

which workstreams/substreams will be involved and how success will be measured, within an overarching framework of quantitative, qualitative and voice of the child.

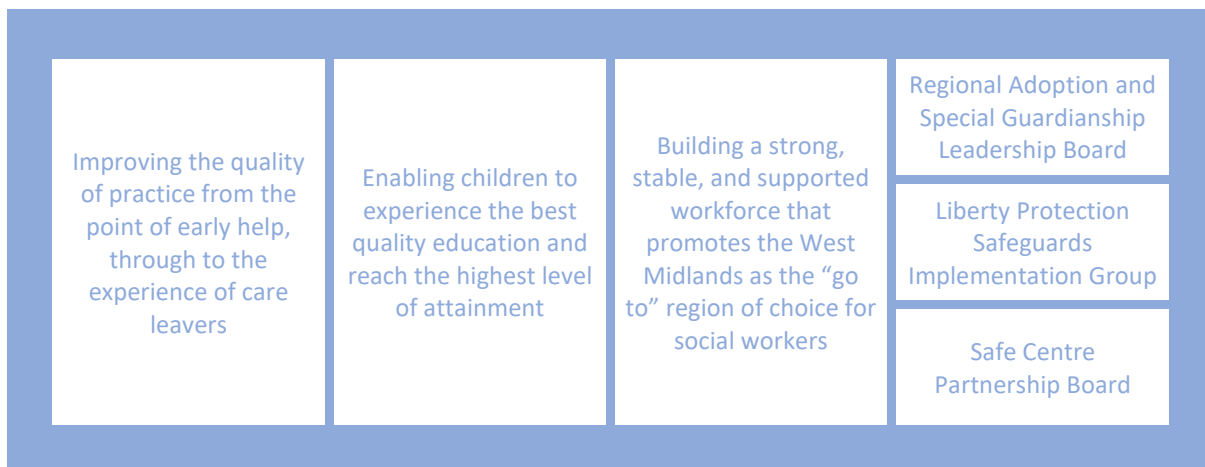
We have set out a regional governance framework to monitor the progress of the workstreams and outcomes against the measures that will report to the DCS network for oversight and ultimate accountability – this can be found at appendix A.

It is for each of those workstreams to add detail to their aspect of the plan and for them to decide how to demonstrate the outcomes have been achieved. In consultation with their respective sponsor DCS they should both update their terms of reference accordingly and periodically report, by exception, to the Regional Priority Plan Oversight Group (RePPOG), who in turn will provide a quarterly overview report to West Midlands ADCS Network.

In addition to the three priorities identified, there remains the need for three specialist workgroups/boards particularly focused upon specific areas of practice. These are:

- Regional Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board
- Liberty Protection Safeguards Implementation Group
- Safe Centre Partnership Board

Whilst these standalone from this priority plan, they have been included in the governance and reporting framework to ensure there is consistent and regular reporting into DCS Network.



Improving the quality of practice from the point of early help, through to the experience of care leavers

CONTEXT

This priority has been agreed within the context that 11 of our constituent local authority areas are currently judged as being Requires Improvement, or below, for the experience and progress of children in need of help and protection and none of our LA areas are judged Outstanding in this regard. At the other end of the continuum, judgements are more positive with eight LA areas being considered as Good for the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers, and one considered to be Outstanding in this area of practice.

A number of local authority areas identified, during the 21/22 peer challenge, that both the strength of their early help offer and their communities' willingness to access it, was an area for development. Additionally, recommendations from the Care Review are indicating a desire to shift the focus of work forward from Child in Need to a more targeted family support model. Similarly, the ADCS have set a national priority to place children and families at the centre of the levelling up agenda, starting at the point of universal services.

As part of the region's CRABBB activity a Family Hub blueprint was developed, aimed at enabling local authority areas, across the region, to create new Family Hubs, convert existing services into the Family Hub model, or expand their current network of Family Hubs, whilst retaining a localised aspect to service delivery. This piece of work has been effective in stimulating interest from all local authority areas and from it, a community of practice has emerged. As such it is anticipated that momentum will be carried forward to build upon its legacy. The Participation Lead network were also successful in securing CRABBB funding to facilitate the Regional Care Leaver Offer project. The project aims to develop a regional care leaver offer blueprint that encompasses current offers including where there are existing shared agreements of current equitability and also a proposal for aspirational changes to better meet the needs of care leavers within the region. This blueprint identifies core aspects offered in the region in addition to regional aspirations which can be utilised to influence the change and progress of current offers across the 14 Councils and Trusts in the West Midlands region. Both of these pieces of work offer a legacy, from which to build upon during the coming year, however neither stands in isolation of the child's journey and further consideration needs to be given to building a quality of practice across the full spectrum of Childrens needs.

PLAN

- Further develop the Family Hub model across the Region within the outline of the CRABBB blueprint, to support the continued development of the early help workforce and to support the development and profile of early help provision in a way that both supports the delivery of social care services and is in alignment with key aspects and/or legislatively adopted themes from the Care Review.
- To identify and share areas of Outstanding practice across the full continuum of the child's journey and support those LA areas in greatest need to address practice areas that require improvement.
- Early Help & Targeted Support workstream to seek out opportunities to offer training and development across the EH workforce with, wherever possible, a cross-link to frontline social work practice.
- Building upon areas of strength identified in the 2021/22 Peer Challenge the Principal Social Workers Network will oversee, in consultation with all workstreams, the ongoing delivery of Beyond Good Masterclasses.
- A regional launch of the Care Leaver Offer Blueprint followed by further updates to promote progress to be overseen by the Participation Leads Network.
- To develop a care leaver offer that has equitable access to services for all care experienced young people, regardless of which of our 14 local authority areas they live in as young adults. and seek consensus and sign up to these by each constituent LA area.
- To explore data analysis opportunities that would help individual local authority areas identify communities that would gain the greatest benefit from community based early help provision.
- QPPG to review policy changes including those which may be informed by the Independent Social Care Review and ensure that all appropriate networks adapt their delivery plans accordingly.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop a joint protocol with colleagues from ADASS for consultation/notification about the placement of young people with LD/autism in other LA areas. 		
OUTCOMES for CYP and Families		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families across the WM will be able to access local community-based help and support through a Family Hubs. Care experienced Young People will be able to access a WM regional core level of support and a quality of life that is not determined by which post code they reside or which Local Authority Area who cares for them. Supporting children, young people, and families at an earlier point to avoid need for statutory services. A consistently improved level of support from early help through to care leavers across the region. 		
LINKED WORKSTREAMS/SUBSTREAMS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Performance Network Early Help & Targeted Support Quality Performance Practice Group Participation Network; Workforce & Leadership Principal Social Worker Network Strategic Commissioning Network Education & Skills 		
MEASURABLES		
QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	VOICE OF THE CHILD
<p>Increase in the number of community based early help provision services operating within the Family Hubs model by 25% by July 2023. <i>(Early Help & Targeted Support)</i></p>	<p>Collation of LA audit activity to consider the impact of Early Help provision upon communities within the context of families accessing services and the range of multi-disciplinary provision. <i>(Early Help & Targeted Support)</i></p> <p>Peer review to consider broad consistency of care leaver offer between local authorities, and to identify any specific areas of regional need. <i>(DCS Network)</i></p>	<p>Survey/interview activity with children and families, both from groups accessing community based early help services and those recently referred to social care to understand the experience and impact for CYP and their families that findings of the strengths and learning to inform service developments <i>(Participation Leads Network with Principal Social Workers Network)</i></p> <p>Survey/interview activity to consider if a care experienced young person, moving between LA in our region experience a positive and consistent plan of support (Participation Network with Principal Social Workers Network)</p>

Enabling children to experience the best quality education and reach the highest level of attainment

CONTEXT

Indicators to 2021 demonstrate that the rate of young people, aged 19 years, having obtained a level 2 qualification is 80.1%, compared with an England average of 81.6%. This places the region 6th overall. The range between our LA areas is between 74% and 83.9%. There is clear divide between urban and rural areas, with the latter performing better. These figures are mirrored at KS1 Reading Expected Standard where the region is again 6th out of nine and a similar rural urban split, apart from one MBC who has the best performance, within the region, at this indicator.

The impact of Covid-19 restriction continues to have a profound impact upon school age children, in regards to the overall number of days that were effectively missed in relation to the overall number that they should spend at school between 5 and 19 years of age. Additionally, there has been an emotional and mental health impact for many children. In this respect, ADCS have identified catch up on lost education and student wellbeing as a priority for the coming year.

The recently published Schools White Paper has a stated vision, which reads:

“to introduce and implement standards that will improve children’s education, deliver the right support if they fall behind and give them the tools to lead a happy, fulfilled and successful life”

Similarly, the SEND Green Paper talks about providing the right support, right place, right time.

Both papers are destined to have a significant strategic impact on the way that local authorities interact with their education responsibilities over the coming years. Specifically, in regards to a further move towards the multi-academisation of schools and additionally the vision of an inclusive education landscape for those children living with SEND.

PLAN

- For the West Midlands to develop a shared approach to addressing the challenges posed through implementation of both the White and Green papers.
- Strive to consistently supporting our more vulnerable pupils in line with the extended role of the VSH.
- Enable and support the regions EIA’s and share their experience and learning across broader region.
- For SEND project delivery to be broadly aligned with the wider education priority plan.
- To support schools to make informed decisions around academisation/multi-academisation, including as appropriate a shared response to local authority led academies.
- To continue to support, as appropriate, the education system, and more specifically children, with the recovery from Covid lockdown issues.
- For Education and Skills workstream to continue to monitor the impacts of upcoming legislative and guidance changes and to work collaboratively to address these, report, as necessary, to DCS Network where significant impact is likely to affect overall service delivery and ensure as a region we are well informed to act on opportunities and respond to challenges as this legalisation comes into force.
- To develop a robust SEND peer review framework.
- Education performance to be considered more explicitly within the annual Peer Challenge cycle and further consideration to including the SEND Peer Challenge as an integral part of this.
- To share best practice around issues of academisation and ensure that any necessary challenge to the DfE is joined up and collaborative.
- To develop a team of Peer reviewers with experience that enhances own professional development, through mix of experienced and less experienced peer teams, as well as Coordination of regional SEND/Inclusion training/events and activity.

OUTCOMES FOR CYP		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that learning is shared across the region and moves toward academisation are effectively planned, well informed and that educational outcomes for children are positively impacted by such a move. • An improved picture of good and outstanding schools across the region • Improved attainment data. 		
LINKED WORKSTREAMS/SUBSTREAMS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education & Skills • SEND • Strategic Commissioning Network • Quality Performance Practice Group • Participation Network • Principal Social Worker Network 		
MEASURABLES		
QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	VOICE OF THE CHILD
Regional monitoring dashboard to be devised and utilised to track both schools and SEND Ofsted judgements so as to understand the impact of implementation of the White and Green Papers. <i>(Education & Skills Network)</i>	SEND peer review to be designed and analysed so as to offer a qualitative window upon broad, regional service provision. <i>(SEND Network)</i>	Key themes to be filtered and analysed from the School Survey so as to demonstrate the impact and outcomes upon children <i>(Education & Skills Network)</i>

Building a strong, stable, and supported workforce that promotes the West Midlands as the “go to” region of choice for social workers

CONTEXT

The LAIT dataset, up to 2021, shows the West Midlands as having an 18.2% social worker vacancy rate compared with a national rate of 16.2%. Aside from London, this is the highest rate of the English regions. Individual LA area figures range from 27.9% to 6% with there being no clear division between the shires and metropolitans. Agency social worker rates for the region are 16.1%, compared with 15.5 nationally. Only the South West, South East and London have worse figures. The range for this measure is between 32.5% and 2.5% and again there is no clear division between rural and urban. Social worker turnover rates are 18.8%, with a range between 38.9% and 8.7%, compared with 15.4% nationally and in this measure the West Midlands is the worst performing region. As such recruitment and retention has been identified as a significant priority for the region.

Whilst the Care review has highlighted issues in regards to workforce, across the entire children’s arena, not just social work, and has made recommendations, even if these are adopted by central Government impact may not be felt until the mid to long-term. The ADCS have also set recruitment and retention as a priority with a particular focus on disrupting the agency market and looking to other professions/industries to seek out innovation.

As part of the region’s CRABBB grant monies were secured to enable us to consider a broader approach to tackling these issues, this has resulted in the Workforce workstream being re-established to co-ordinate the development and implementation of the next regional workforce Strategy. Regional and national work is underway to address the underlying issue that there are not enough social workers nationally. To sustain progress of regional projects and to ensure continuity with regional aims, action and collaboration across the West Midlands, and more widely, is required to embed a robust and flexible workforce strategy to account for the changing environmental and political climate in which we work.

PLAN

- To share practice that helps to increase the capacity of frontline social work staff through combination of increased staffing numbers, a review of core social work tasks and increased development opportunities.
- Through marketing and recruitment increase permanency in the regional workforce and reduce the number of staff leaving the region.
- To consider the experience of BAME workers in regards to seeking senior positions and to look to find ways to further support their development/experience.
- To establish a WM Workforce strategy for 2022- 2027 informed by regional performance information that will ensure that national, regional and local priorities are delivered, and to establish and support, wherever possible, a broadly consistent employment offer across the region.
- To work closely with identified project leads including those funded by external stakeholders such as the DfE, to ensure regional decisions are made with support of recent research and data.
- To develop and approve a regional social work pathway for both career progression and continual professional development. This will include a start to finish career academy.
- To seek ways to work collaboratively with other regions, or as a nation, to disrupt the agency market, so as to both reduce reliance on temporary workers and reduce the overall cost.
- Continue to explore routes to resource further leadership development support

OUTCOMES for CYP

- To reduce our reliance on agency staff, initially to a rate more consistent with the national average and then seek to become the best performing region.
- To decrease the number of social work vacancies to a rate that is better than the national average, both as a region and individually to those LA areas that significantly exceed the national average.
- Narrow the gap between the highest and lowest rates across turnover, vacancy and agency indicators.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce agency spend for all LA's/Trusts across the region. 		
LINKED WORKSTREAMS/SUBSTREAMS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce & Leadership • Strategic Performance Network • Early Help & Targeted Support • Quality Performance Practice Group • Principal Social Workers 		
MEASURABLES		
QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	VOICE OF THE CHILD
<p>Stability of SW for LAC KPI</p> <p>Develop a dataset that demonstrates individual and regional performance against both 2021 benchmarks and ongoing national comparators and that covers, as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency Spend • Agency rate • Vacancy rate • Staff turnover • BAME post holders at tiers 1-3 (DCS, AD, HOS – or equivalent) <p>This information should be available at least quarterly and will be shared with DCS Network, Programme Governance Board and all appropriate workstreams. <i>(Workforce Workstream and SPN)</i></p>	<p>Compile and analyse exits interviews and data so as to identify reasons for leaving and offer comparisons between those moving on for positive opportunity vs. those leaving for perceived negative reasons. Consideration to also be given to average number of years that leavers have remained in the local authority area and consideration to the use of a quick fire 30 seconds regional survey once a year to all SW and allied staff, with analysis to inform a dynamic recruitment and retention plan. <i>(Workforce & Leadership)</i></p> <p><i>Share analysis of LGA and local SW Health check survey to identify effective workforce strategies and understand what matters and works for staff</i></p>	<p>Feedback report from the voice of children across the region detailing their experience of changes in social workers and IRO's, to include non-SW qualified staff as appropriate <i>(Participation Network and Principal Social Workers)</i></p>

Appendix A



Regional Priority
Plan Oversight Grou