



Walsall's Insight into the implementation of Family Safeguarding

The strategic journey

We launched our Walsall Right 4 Children vision and whole service transformation which aims to ensure



Our WR4C vision is driven by the principles of:

- Getting the basics right for children
- **Strong leadership** informed by **'what works'** to set our strategic direction
- Understanding the **lives and challenges** of real families and implementing **evidence based** changes that work for Walsall children and families
- Prioritising the **stability of children** in all aspects of their life
- Developing a culture of **being proud** of what we achieve with relentless drive to **improve quality, impact and outcomes**

Our
transformation
journey in
Walsall

Walsall before Family Safeguarding

High levels of deprivation in Walsall

Big conversation with parents told us professional approach can be experienced as judgemental

Systems described as too bureaucratic

High numbers on a child protection plan and high numbers going into care

High numbers of families with domestic abuse as a major factor

The national context was changing more widely (Clear Blue Water)

We wanted a collaborative strengths- based approach

We wanted to break down silos

Wanted to create resilience in families and manage risk/need more supportively

We wanted to work within localities to leverage community support for our most vulnerable families

We chose
Family
Safeguarding
because

Walsall's vision in summary



Partnership developed and initiated approach from outset

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership (which covers both children and adults)

Started work on thresholds at the front door August/September 2019

Launched Right Help, Right Time threshold document October 2019

Went live in September 2020

Had really positive feedback from staff and partners throughout

Early signs of improved outcomes

Ofsted liked it!

Walsall's Journey

Requires significant changes in way we deliver services within children's social care

Partnership, partnership, partnership

The value is all the components working together (not a pick list)

It takes time, don't lose heart

Strategic
lessons

What we learnt in the
service

Quote from Lady Hale in the Supreme Court judgment Re B (2013)

“This case raises some profound questions about the scope of courts' powers to take away children from their birth families when what is feared is, not physical abuse or neglect, but emotional or psychological harm. We are all frail human beings, with our fair share of unattractive character traits, which sometimes manifest themselves in bad behaviours which may be copied by our children. But the State does not and cannot take away the children of all the people who commit crimes, who abuse alcohol or drugs, who suffer from physical or mental illnesses or disabilities, or who espouse anti-social political or religious beliefs...

How is the law to distinguish between emotional or psychological harm, which warrants the compulsory intervention of the State, and the normal and natural tendency of children to grow up to be and behave like their parents?

Added to this is the problem that the harm which is feared may take many years to materialise, if indeed it ever does. Every child is an individual, with her own character and personality. Many children are remarkably resilient. They do not all inherit their parents' less attractive characters or copy their less attractive behaviours. Indeed some will consciously reject them. They have many other positive influences in their lives which can help them to resist the negative, whether it is their schools, their friends, or other people around them. How confident do we have to be that a child will indeed suffer harm because of her parents' character and behaviour before we separate them for good?

... a court can only separate a child from her parents if satisfied that it is necessary to do so, that 'nothing else will do'.”

[Link to full judgment](#)

How our staff experience the culture change

There is a coherence and power in the model, especially the strengths-based approach

From the earliest implementation people could see improvements for some children and their families

Group supervision allowed for in depth multi-professional challenge

The wider “learning lessons”, rather than “criticising staff” when things went wrong was hugely impactful

It actually saved time, having expertise “on tap”

Staff learnt so much from each other using this approach that everyone’s practice improves

Some of the practical things we learnt about partnerships

Those professions who are vital but not in the teams need focus and attention (School Nurses HV, DSLs)

We needed to understand what partners REALLY think about social care

We use language quite differently, not just the technical words

We have all got better at uncomfortable conversations and challenge, in a good way

Sometimes its not just about using motivational interviewing skills with families, we need to look for those “golden nuggets” where we can improve a relationship with partners, we have used learning reviews and shadowing with great success

Communicate communicate communicate, informally, formally, frequently and keep smiling even if you are explaining for the 10th time.

It is a model that values everyone's contribution working for the best outcome for families

We all agree that separation or removal a “last resort” but when it happens we will have done all we can as a collective

Aims to build short and long term resilience

Change takes time in families however,

- The earlier we engage positively,
- The earlier we establish positive and meaningful dialogue,
- The earlier we understand the trio of vulnerabilities
- The earlier we understand family dynamics and the wider environment (housing, education, risks of crime)
- The earlier we can work through families issues and **TOGETHER** work towards family stability and avoid long term state involvement

Doing it
together and
doing it early

Outcomes and impacts

What Walsall families have said

- Small Focus Group of 7 families were interviewed in May 2021
- Overall parents were all very positive of their experience with the social worker and adult practitioners
- They felt listened to, and felt the presence of a 'support network'
- The adult workers helped them to understand why Children's Social Care were worried
- They each took learning from their experience and made reference to it being an 'eye opener' or gaining perspective on their current circumstances

"I had a better understanding of where I was"

"There was trust"

"Helped me consider ways to cope and get through stuff"

"It was an eye-opener"

"Working with the adult workers put things into perspective"

"There was a time when I was really struggling, having that support network helped"

- 47% decrease in children starting a child protection plan
- 30% decrease in children moving from a child protection plan to becoming looked after
- Reduced time taken to support victims of domestic abuse and higher levels of engagement
- Reduced level of repeat police call outs
- Child journey audits show improvements in practice and in use of strength based approaches
- Interviews of staff every six months to understand their perspective and experience
- We seek the views of families and use case studies to understand impact
- Herts Peer review
- OFSTED told us

How do we know that FS is making a difference?

Peer review observation of a child protection conference showed exceptional practice engaging with a child

“As an adult worker I felt very welcomed and appreciated by my colleagues”

“The model just makes sense, we should have been doing this years ago”

“it fits in with social work values”

What have Ofsted said about FS in Walsall ?

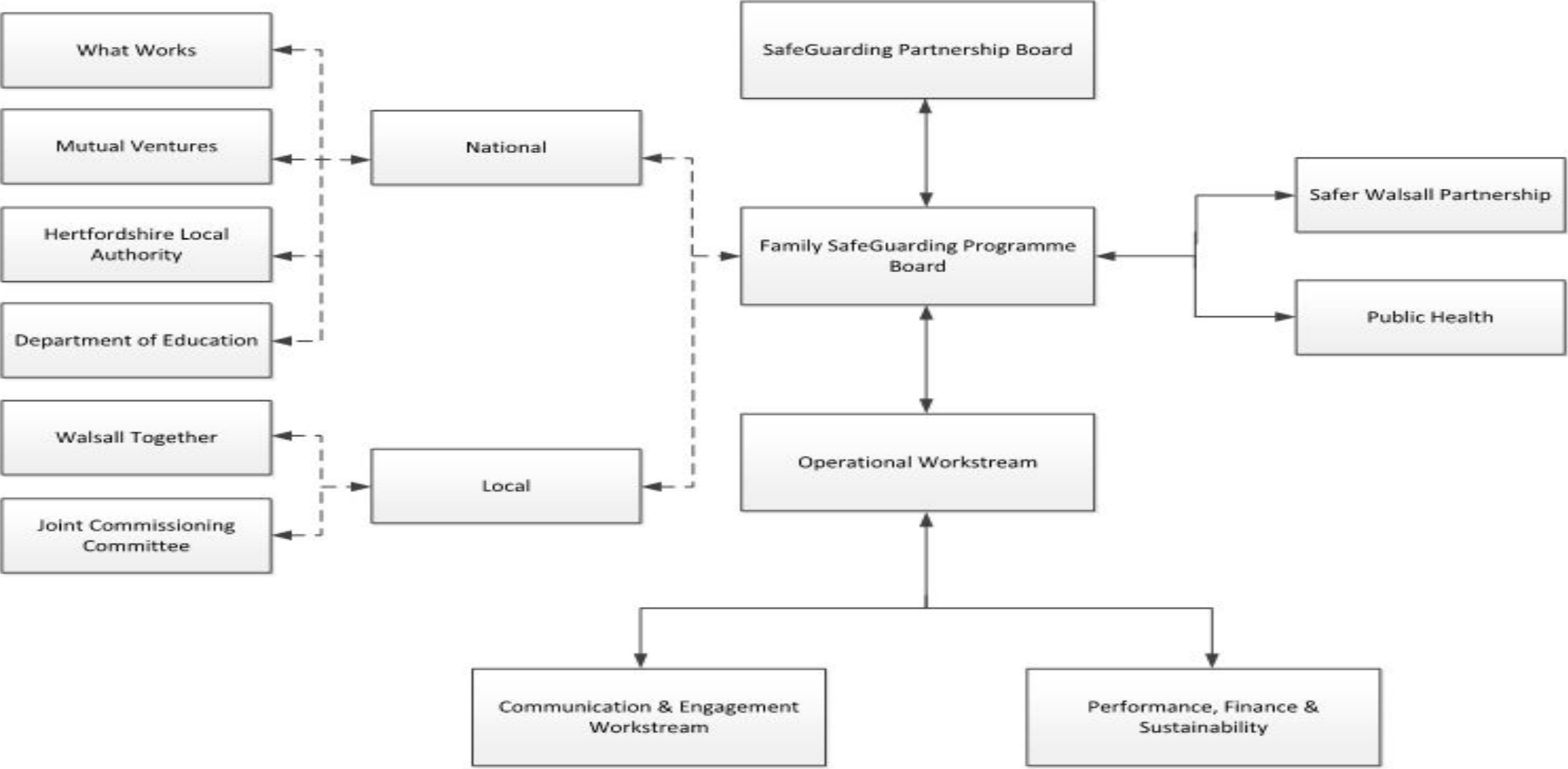
“Impressive, effective and creative multi-agency intervention in the locality safeguarding teams is providing sustained change by improving children’s Inspection of Walsall local authority children’s services experiences and reducing risks. Co-location of professionals is providing intensive wraparound support for children, which has helped parents make and sustain changes to improve children’s circumstances. Staff work sensitively and skilfully, using the implemented model of social work practice to understand parental and family histories and the impact on parents of mental illness, domestic abuse and substance misuse.”

“Effective multi-agency group supervision, using the model of social work practice in the locality teams, provides comprehensive analysis of children’s progress. Constructive challenge ensures a shared focus on the children and their needs. This helps to progress children’s plans”

“The implementation of the strength-based practice model and specialist multidisciplinary professionals in the locality safeguarding teams and support teams have accelerated the developments and improvements in partnership working at both a strategic and operational level. As a result children and their families receive appropriate and skilled multi-agency wraparound support and services that significantly improve children’s circumstances and reduce risk”

Governance

Walsall's family safeguarding governance structure



Handy hints about managing the project

- Sustainability needs to be considered from day one, not once things are running well
- Less project resource puts pressure on operational staff but helps with sustainability
- Governance needs to be a partnership approach not a LA activity (in Walsall safeguarding partnership)
- Adult specialist workers in Walsall are fixed term staff and we have had issues in recruitment and retention – need to invest in your Adult workers
- Role clarity for adult specialist workers!
- The model is not just about placing Adult Workers in Social Work Teams – requires cultural and system change across all services and the partnership relating to way in which we work with children and their families, application of thresholds and meeting need
- Whilst staff love the model it takes time for staff to embed changes in practice – MI, workbook, parenting assessment. Need to plan time for reflection and for managing cultural change.

FSM is not an add on and requires systemic change