

# Family Front Door

Smart information-sharing portal

Working with local partners, Worcestershire County Council has developed a smart, mobile-responsive, information-sharing 'professionals portal' that builds an accurate multiagency picture of children and their families and supports the county's Family Front Door initiative, which provides a single referral pathway for accessing council and partner support services.

## The issue and context

Worcestershire County Council and its local partners share an ambition to redesign how both professionals and members of the public gain access to social care services and associated information and advice.

As one element of this work, the county has reshaped its website to improve its focus on users and to provide a clearer customer journey for anyone seeking guidance on social care services. The process involved extensive user research and testing, including journey mapping and testing for eye movements with working groups of different types of user.

As a result, the number of pages was reduced and both the content and structure were streamlined. Information for professionals was grouped in one place and moved higher up the site.

A further important step towards realising the partners' ambitions has been the joint development of a 'Family Front Door' initiative – a single referral pathway for accessing council and partner support services underpinned by multiagency safeguarding hub (MASH) ethos. The initiative is an integral part of the county's corporate service improvement plan for children and supports the work of the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Board, which has all-party membership.

The objective is to bring together key partners, including police, social care, health, schools and the voluntary and community sector, to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults and promote their welfare by:

- sharing information at the earliest possible opportunity (a key element of the MASH ethos) so that informed decisions can be made about what support is needed
- acting promptly so that any help or intervention is delivered in a timely manner
- providing information, advice, guidance and feedback to the wider workforce so that decisions are understood and support is provided at the lowest possible level of intervention.

### Digital Transformation Programme

The work on this project undertaken by Worcestershire County Council has been funded through the Digital Transformation Programme, which is managed and overseen by the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Digital Transformation Programme was set up to help councils and their partners develop digital solutions to support their work on national programmes of transformation including the integration of health and social care, Troubled Families, welfare reform and public health.

The aim is for the digital tools and solutions created through the programme to be reused by other councils and contribute to the wider work to transform local public services.

Quick and effective information sharing between partners is clearly critical to the success of the Family Front Door concept. However, in the past, this has involved a great deal of complicated and often unproductive manual effort.

Council staff were required to accept referrals from partners through a wide range of different channels (including hand-written notes submitted via post, fax or as an email attachment), to chase busy frontline staff for extra details, to collate information from a range of disparate sources and to update the social work case files in the county's Framework-I system in a laborious way (typically involving re-keying of data).

“Under the previous arrangements, the admin team was rushed off its feet. We had four different email addresses, while faxes and other hard-copy documents had to be scanned in and the details added to Framework-I. We could come in on a Monday and find 90 emails waiting for us with no prioritisation. It was really difficult.”

**Business Support Officer,**  
Family Front Door Team

“Previously we took calls on everyone. We were almost like a switchboard. There were big backlogs and a lot of work went unrecorded.”

**Initial Screening and Contact Officer,**  
Family Front Door Team

It was therefore difficult for the partners to think and work in a truly collaborative way, despite their best intentions. The idea of developing a smart information-sharing portal that would build a more accurate multiagency picture of children and their families and enable faster and more transparent interactions between relevant partner agencies was born.

## The project objectives and targets

By the time Worcestershire submitted its bid to participate in the Digital Transformation Programme, the county had already taken several important steps towards working in a more joined-up and effective way:

- Staff in Worcestershire's Social Care Access Centre and Early Help Hub had been brought together in an integrated Family Front Door team. This team is made up of trained advisors (initial screening and contact officers or ISCOs) supported by social workers. It acts as a first point of contact for professionals and the public who wish to raise a safeguarding concern about a child. The team can decide how contacts are progressed, including whether they should be converted into a formal referral, as well as offering advice, guidance and signposting.
- Key partners had been co-located. The social workers within the Family Front Door team share offices with health and police colleagues (the latter from the Harms Assessment Unit and Child Sexual Exploitation Team), both of whom have access to their own case record systems. As well as helping with immediate triage discussions, co-location has enabled more regular face-to-face multiagency meetings to review child sexual abuse, missing and

domestic abuse cases. Staff are also able to transfer documents to each other via a secure messaging system. The joint work is underpinned by a MASH protocol that the different agencies have signed off.

While these developments represented considerable progress, the Worcestershire partners still felt there was significant scope to improve the efficiency of their information sharing to support safeguarding decisions.

The county's bid therefore concentrated on providing a digital solution to support the Family Front Door project via the development of a smart, mobile-responsive, information-sharing 'professionals portal', which would offer a personalised access point for any user with verified permissions.

The portal would be designed to complement and integrate with a previously developed children's services portal, used primarily by schools and built on the same digital platform.

The practical benefits envisaged for the professionals' portal included:

- easier and faster access for the partner agencies, including for staff working remotely or on the move, to a coordinated, validated and real-time source of information about children known to council's social care team
- greater use of online forms for referrals and information requests, reducing the need for emails and telephone calls
- a clearer and up-to-date record of the contacts received from frontline professionals from a range of organisations and what happens to those contacts
- the development of a dashboard to enable managers to monitor and prioritise the contacts coming into the Family Front Door team
- more automated transfer of information into the Framework-I system, thereby reducing re-keying and, consequently, administrative costs
- more effective MASH meetings and (over time) the replacement of physical meetings with virtual sessions where appropriate.

Under the previous arrangements, the Children's Social Care Access Centre alone received contacts each year via six different routes: telephone, fax, email, post, EduLink secure transfer and partners' own online referral forms.

Following the creation of the Family Front Door team and the delivery of the digital transformation project, the range of contact routes has now been streamlined to encompass electronic 'cause for concern' and 'request for information' forms (for professionals – see later), limited telephone contact (primarily for members of the public or for professionals in significant harm cases) and secure email for the police and probation services and some voluntary organisations. A small volume of post is still received from members of the public.

The ultimate aim of the investment, of course, was to improve safeguarding by supporting more timely and effective identification of, and intervention with, children and families at risk.

The bid said the project team would use an agile methodology and that they would make the source code freely available to other councils. Potential initial savings of £75,000 were identified from reducing the time spent on re-keying and managing failure demand and from making better use of social worker time.

“As part of our corporate priorities, there is an ongoing drive towards channel shift. This project fits in with our wider digital transformation programme and was one of several helping to make us a digital council.”

**Former Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Services,**  
Worcestershire County Council

## The approach and progress to date

Following the awarding of the LGA grant, the digital transformation project kicked off early in financial year 2016/17. The project worked in fortnightly 'sprint' cycles, which allowed for

requirements to be constantly reviewed and tested throughout the delivery period.

In the months leading up to the awarding of the grant, the project team had undertaken several high-level requirements-gathering workshops to map out what a desired solution might encompass. These workshops involved a wide range of stakeholders including representatives from local police forces, probation, area health teams, Worcestershire County Council social care and early help, drug and alcohol charities, housing associations, adult safeguarding services, women's aid charities and child protection staff.

As a result of this valuable exploratory work, it rapidly became clear that the aim of supporting MASH meetings (a significant part of the original bid), while still an important longer-term aim, would need to be preceded by some fundamental improvements to the processes of reporting and sharing information. These improvements became the focus of the project.

During 2016, the project team and their developers designed, built and delivered key elements of the new portal, including:

- A self-registration process for staff and partners who wish to use the portal. Only approved agencies with valid email addresses can register and permissions are assigned to users based on the agency they represent. Users include county council staff and co-located police and health colleagues, but also schools, GPs, hospitals (including A & E), probation officers and commissioned services such as staff in home education and missing from education teams.
- A searchable database that provides a 'single view of the child' to assist registered users of the portal in making a referral. The single view displays data on a child from both the county's social care (Framework-I) and education (Capita ONE) systems on a single screen, as well as details of who to contact for further information, such as an allocated social worker or other professional working with the child.
- Online cause for concern and request for information forms that can be used for urgent or less urgent cases as required. Both forms are available at and can be submitted via a

single point of access. The cause for concern form allows the submission to be categorised (eg missing child, domestic violence) and is 'intelligent', meaning that the professional only needs to complete the relevant sections for that type of submission. The form cannot be finally approved, and the details submitted to Framework-I, unless all the required information has been provided<sup>1</sup>.

"We don't get calls from external professionals about how to find the cause for concern form – people seem to know where it is and how to use it."

**Group Manager,**  
Family Front Door

- The ability to save and retrieve part-completed versions of these two forms and to add documents and attachments when submitting them.
- The ability for the Family Front Door team to review the information submitted and, if necessary, to request additional details from the originator of the form directly via the portal.
- A holding area within the system, linked to a dashboard, showing all the forms that have been submitted and their status. This enables identified initial screening and contact officers within the Family Front Door team to take responsibility for managing individual referrals and to allocate priority to the various submissions, if necessary changing the priority indicated by the submitter in the light of other referrals coming into the team.
- Direct integration from the portal to the Framework-I social care platform, providing an end-to-end digital solution. Once a cause for concern form is complete, it can be automatically submitted to Framework-I where a contact and referral episode on the child's record will be opened and populated and the referral will enter the relevant team's workflow. The only manual intervention is to copy and paste one section of case notes.

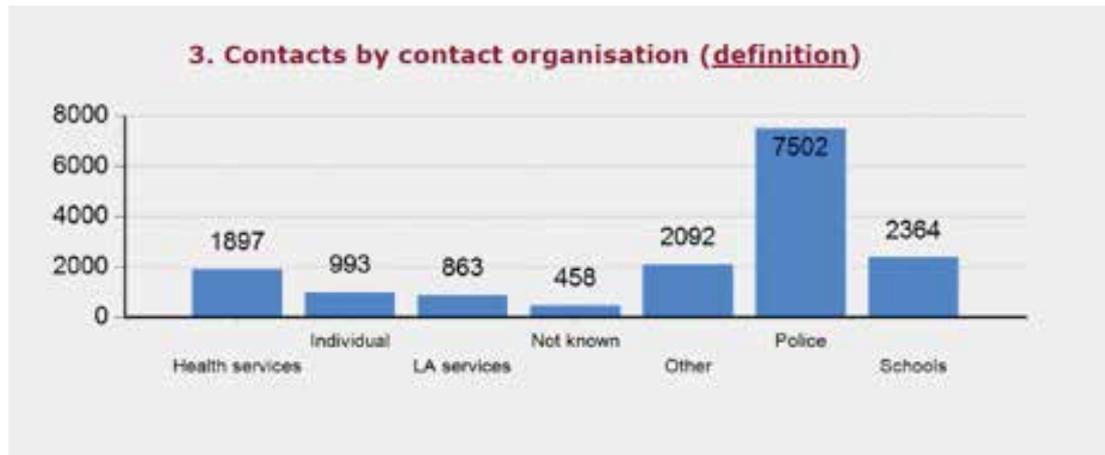


As the system became available, during September and October 2016 the project team ran a series of engagement sessions with all the original stakeholders, including staff in the co-located health, police, children's social services and probation teams. Representatives from education services and schools, the wider health community, legal services, adult services and a range of charities were also involved. More than 400 professionals participated.

<sup>1</sup> A button on the home screen of the complementary children's services portal links directly to these forms. Once submitted, forms go to the Family Front Door team and join the queue for processing in exactly the same way as if they had been submitted via the professionals portal. The Family Front Door team and schools can also exchange documents securely via the children's services portal.

Analytics have shown that between the initial launch of the portal in July 2016 and March 2017, just under 2,000 unique users entered the system to look at making a referral or requesting information. By December 2017 this number had risen to 3,500.

Meanwhile, the county continues to develop its suite of real-time reporting dashboards that monitor the number of new contacts, their source (individuals, organisations and so on), how many are accepted or rejected, pending actions and similar information. All the reports can be used to drill down into individual contacts for further investigation.



An example of a dashboard report

The dashboards enable the Family Front Door team to manage activity and performance at both team and individual level on a day-to-day basis, to target areas where the use of the online referral process can be expanded and to highlight areas where it is being used less successfully.

## The outcome – successes and challenges

The Family Front Door initiative has allowed the council teams involved in safeguarding children, and the council's management of referrals, to become more efficient and effective – greatly helped by the comprehensive and accurate information now available from the new digital system.

Annual savings of just under £75,000 have been achieved through reducing staffing by 1FTE and rebalancing the salary costs within the new integrated team, with the workforce restructured to match the skills required by the new way of working.

For example, where there were previously two team managers, there is now one overall team manager and a practice lead. The number of workers taking calls has been increased by around two posts, but a regrading has reduced costs.

At the same time, the investment in technology has encouraged the move towards a more digitally-enabled culture. For instance, the new processes and systems put the emphasis back on professionals to provide the right information at the outset, rather than having the Family Front Door team chase them.

In addition to these wider outcomes, the digital transformation project has generated a series of more specific benefits, both financial and non-financial.

## Financial benefits

There are three main areas where quantifiable savings can potentially be identified and modelled. These are set out below. Based on information supplied by Worcestershire and some modelling assumptions, the financial benefits to date can be summarised as follows:

Area of saving	Illustrative value (£)
Reduction in unsuccessful referrals	10,300
Time savings in processing referrals	12,133
Printing and postage	1,540
Reduction in telephone contact	30,564
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,537</b>

Using a less conservative estimate of the time saved through the reduction in telephone contact, this total would rise to more than £115,000.

### Reductions in the rate of unsuccessful referrals

The 30,000 contacts received each year by the Children's Social Care Access Centre under the previous arrangements resulted in 11,000 referrals to social work teams, giving a referral rate of just under 37 per cent, meaning that there was a high percentage of contact where no further action was taken.

Moreover, previously when referrals were rejected because more information was required, or the referral did not meet the threshold for intervention, team members would have to call the referrer to obtain the additional information or explain the reason for rejection.

The call itself could often take up to one hour and it was often difficult to get hold of the right person (typically a busy frontline professional), leading to much toing and froing on the phone. Even when the referrer was reached, he or she often did not have the right information to hand and a further call would be necessary. Team members then had to write up the notes.

Under the new arrangements, figures for the year July 2016 to June 2017 inclusive show that the Family Front Door team received 10,982 contacts in total, of which 4,771 were referred to children's social care, 4,634 had no further action taken on them, and 1,577 were passed to the Early Help function<sup>2</sup>. Some of the contacts passed to Early Help might later turn into a referral. However, even assuming that none of the contacts passed to Early Help turned into referrals, the percentage of contacts now becoming referrals had risen to over 43 per cent (4,771 out of 10,982), suggesting a significant reduction in inappropriate contact.

In addition, Family Front Door staff can now reply via the portal requesting further details or noting the reason for rejection. The professional can access the reply at a convenient time and can gather and submit any additional information without the toing and froing of calls.

If we apply these percentages to the 15,604 contacts received by the Family Front Door team during the period 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2017, this suggests that the team will have had to deal with some 936 fewer unsuccessful referrals than previously (43 – 37 per cent x 15,604).

Assuming each rejected referral took one hour of staff time to resolve at £11 per hour, the illustrative savings can be calculated as just under £10,300 to date.

<sup>2</sup> No further action may be taken where a contact does not meet the required threshold or where an initial assessment has been completed and it is judged that social work intervention is not required.

### Time savings in processing referrals

Discussions with staff have indicated that under the previous arrangements, dealing with a successful referral (mainly emails) took approximately 40 minutes: 15 minutes to look up all the relevant people (adults and children) on Framework-I, another 15 minutes to input the referral information and add a case note on the Framework-I system, and a further 10 minutes to type up and despatch a letter to the referrer via first class post explaining what was happening to the submission.

This would have been the case for all referrals before the new process went live in July 2016.

Under the new system, where a cause for concern form is received, an automated response confirming receipt is sent back via the dashboard to the email address of the referrer. Within 24 hours, the Family Front Door team then notifies the professional, via email, of the outcome of their referral, avoiding the need to format and print a letter. The input to Framework-I is done automatically.

Overall, then, the administrative time taken to process a referral via the new system can be judged to have halved, that is to 20 minutes, while printing and postage costs have been eliminated. As an additional benefit, the referrer no longer has to wait for a letter to arrive through the post.

During the period 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2017, 3,311 of the 15,604 contacts received by the Family Front Door team came in via the new cause for concern process. The council can therefore identify the following indicative savings:

#### Under the previous process:

Staff processing time: 2,207 hours (3,311 x 40 minutes) required at £11 per hour = £24,277

Printing and postage: £1,540

**Total: £25,817**

#### Under the new process:

Staff processing time: 1,104 hours required at £11 per hour = £12,144

Printing and postage: none

**Total: £12,144**

This gives an indicative cost saving from processing referrals of £13,673 to date.

### Feedback from Family Front Door staff

“The best part of the portal is how it enables us to map referrals directly into Framework-I episodes and this does save a significant amount of time.”

“Easily able to return to referrers with explanation of why the referral has been returned, whilst also keeping a record of what has been returned and why for audit purposes.”

“From my perspective, I feel the dashboard and also the cause for concern form visually are very clear, uncluttered and easy to access the relevant information.”

### Reductions in the volume of telephone contact

As we have seen, under the previous arrangements, the Children’s Social Care Access Centre alone received over 30,000 contacts each year via six different routes. In the year following the implementation of the new system (July 2016 to June 2017), 10,960 contacts were recorded by the Family Front Door team of which 2,566 came in via the cause for concern form.

There are several reasons for this significant drop in contact:

- The access centre used to accept a large variety of contact on many different topics. When the new Family Front Door team was established, the criteria for what would be regarded as legitimate contact were reviewed and tightened.
- Much clearer guidance on thresholds was placed on the website and communicated to partner organisations. Users should now be able to find answers to their questions and, where appropriate, submit an online cause for concern form without the need to telephone.
- Where users do call, they are directed to the relevant form and given guidance on completing it, encouraging them to communicate via the cause for concern form in the future.

The financial impact of this reduction in contact is difficult to establish with any certainty because figures showing the breakdown of contact (telephone calls, emails and so on) under the previous arrangements are not available. Similarly, all contact that comes into the Family Front Door team, other than that received via cause of concern forms, is grouped under one heading.

However, if it is assumed that one third of the 30,000 previous annual contacts came in by telephone (ie 10,000 calls) and one third of current annual contact that is not received via a cause for concern form also comes in by telephone (ie 2,800 calls)<sup>3</sup>, it can be posited that telephone contact has reduced by around 7,200 calls per annum.

Applying the Socitm figure of £2.83 for handling each call, this would give an annual saving of £20,376 or £30,564 for the period from the launch of the system in July 2016 to December 2017.

Given that many of the calls received previously would have involved discussions on complex issues of safeguarding and referral thresholds, an alternative view would be that Socitm's £8.62 cost per face-to-face transaction might be more appropriate. Applying this figure would give illustrative annual savings of just over £62,000 or over £93,000 to date.

## Non-financial benefits

In addition to the financial benefits above, the new processes and system have generated a range of non-financial benefits. Many of these contribute to staff time savings and therefore productivity but have been included here because their impact is difficult to quantify precisely. They include:

### **Clearer, faster and more customer-focused processes**

The thresholds for intervention or support are much more clearly defined, which has contributed to the reduction in the percentage of unsuccessful submissions noted earlier. Previously all contact, however inappropriate, was accepted and logged on the Framework-I system. Where a submission does not meet the required threshold, Family Front Door staff can now respond to the submitter using a templated email and a link to the online threshold guidance.

Under the former arrangements, there was no overview of all the referrals coming in. Something important might therefore be located at the bottom of a pile. Now Family Front Door staff can allocate a priority to referrals and start quickly on the most important ones. If an urgent case comes in first thing, it can be in triage by 11.00 am the same morning. Cases therefore get into the system earlier and in a more prioritised way, helping to ensure the family situation does not deteriorate further.

The council still needs to prepare some letters to parents telling them what is being proposed for their child. Previously there was always a backlog and in some cases the admin staff had to draft these letters. However, as they did not know the cases, they would have to call the member of staff working with the family to confirm the details. Now, the initial screening and contact officers have time to prepare the letters. A series of letter templates, containing appropriate legal statements, have also been set up within Framework-I. Not only is the internal process more efficient, but parents also benefit from a quicker and clearer response and those who need support can get it sooner.

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<sup>3</sup> 10,960 total contacts – 2,566 via the CfC form = 8,394. Times one third = 2,798.

### **Some feedback from professionals on the cause for concern form**

“Very clear to use and complete. Print and save option works well.”

“I filled in an online cause for concern notification last week which was quite straightforward.”

“Clear guidance on filling in cause for concern notification. Staff always there to help even if you shouldn't really be ringing them!”

### **More accurate and secure information**

The volume of hand-written submissions has greatly reduced, meaning that the Family Front Door team spends less time going back to frontline staff to clarify the details on poorly written referrals, but instead can concentrate on making a quick decision and putting the necessary support in place.

The cause for concern form specifically asks whether consent for an intervention has been sought and obtained (generally a requirement for anything other than child protection). Previously this detail was often omitted, necessitating a follow-up call to the person submitting a referral.

Meanwhile, the fact that details of a referral can automatically be transferred into Framework-I has helped to eliminate transcribing errors. Data is recorded exactly as the submitter sent it and is received in a more standardised and user-friendly format.

Finally, certain types of hard-copy documentation, such as faxes, have been eliminated, improving data security.

“A lot of information before was ad-hoc, poorly recorded or difficult to analyse because it was held in individual spreadsheets or emails. Now we have a much clearer picture of the data we hold, which means we can really make use of it.”

### **Former Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Services,**

Worcestershire County Council

### **More collaborative working across partners**

Via the linked children's services portal, the council and schools can exchange documents securely in a way that was not previously possible. Family Front Door staff also have access to fuller information on pupils than before, while schools can book appointments with community social workers via the portal. Corresponding electronically via the portal has cut down on the delays that used to be experienced in communications between the council and schools.

As part of the multiagency approach, co-located social care and health staff also now have access to each other's systems. Previously, phone calls had to be made between the different agencies to see whether a case was open or to request information such as GP details or a client's NHS number.

It is estimated that looking up information on the respective systems takes half the time previously required for a phone call – a significant time saving, if not one that was a direct result of the council's digital transformation project.

### **Better operational and performance management**

Before the introduction of the new system, different teams kept tallies of the types and volume of contacts, often in different formats. These tallies were then collated and entered onto a spreadsheet. Inevitably, some contact went unrecorded and the actual volume of work did not show up accurately. Now, all electronic contact through the system is logged automatically.

A weekly report was then produced from the above spreadsheet, which the team manager used to allocate work. Under the new system, team leaders and the group manager receive real-time data on activity and performance, allowing them to adjust resourcing in a much timelier fashion.

As a result, the Family Front Door team are now much better placed to meet the 24-hour target for decisions on contacts received by the service.

“The fact that the system keeps details on when each action was completed really helps when chasing up customer enquiries about the progress of referrals or when dealing with any customer complaints.”

**Initial Screening and Contact Officer,**  
Family Front Door Team

### **Greater transparency and better decision making and auditability**

Everyone from councillors, to senior and group managers to frontline staff, can now get access to the same reliable performance and reporting data, which leads to better evidence-based decision making and supports continuous improvement.

Councillors and senior managers now receive a comprehensive report on safeguarding issues and trends at their monthly Budget and Performance reviews. The report includes data on the number of referrals and performance against processing KPIs. Regular reports are also submitted to the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Board, which meets quarterly.

Previous Ofsted inspections had highlighted delays and lack of performance information. The council can now present a real-time map of what has been done with each referral, by when, and is therefore in a much stronger position not just to meet its internal performance targets, but also to demonstrate its effectiveness to external agencies such as Ofsted.

### **Greater staff engagement and job satisfaction**

The new processes and systems have made the jobs in the Family Front Door team more fulfilling and give staff the opportunity to spend more time thinking about improving their working practices and developing new solutions. The initial screening and contact officers, for instance, now play an enhanced role in profiling children and tracking down other family members.

Meanwhile, the admin support staff can concentrate more on core tasks such as maintaining team calendars, organising room

bookings and so on, rather than firefighting emails and faxes. Many of these tasks did not get done in the past.

Feedback from staff forums have therefore shown greater levels of job satisfaction and engagement.

“We've all got more time to do our jobs properly in the way we'd want to do them.”

**Business Support Officer,**  
Family Front Door Team

## **The challenges**

While the new processes and digital system have brought many benefits, several challenges remain:

- The focus for the cause for concern form is naturally safeguarding, which makes up a high proportion of its use. However, there are occasions where frontline professionals may wish to provide more general support to a family – for instance, where parents are struggling with their children's behavioural issues. In some cases, the use of the current form has led to inappropriate escalations within the county. So, there is work still to do on the structure and layout of the electronic forms.

“I understand the concept of the online form, but it needs to be generic enough to fit all my work.”

**Community Public Health Nurse**

- Some frontline professionals miss the immediacy of dealing with county staff over the phone. As one respondent commented: “We got a decision immediately and it was easier to understand what was happening.” The unproductive manual effort and duplication involved in county staff typing up the conversation and dealing with the follow-up form that the referrer would then submit was, of course, largely invisible to those same frontline professionals. There is a need, therefore, for continuing dialogue with them about the benefits of the new processes and system and how these can continue to be developed to meet everyone's needs.

- Requests for information on people known to the council's social care teams come in from a wide range of different organisations including GPs, schools, other councils, police and probation, the courts, Ofsted, the Disclosure and Barring Service and fostering and childcare charities. While an increasing number are using the portal's request for information form, there are still some organisations – for instance, the Probation Service and The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service – which submit forms in their own format, making it difficult to deal with them in an automated way.
- Meanwhile, the police force straddles county boundaries, presenting Worcestershire with the challenge of integrating its solution with the police systems via an open API (application programme interface). The police do not currently use the cause for concern form because of this lack of integration, preferring to communicate via secure email.
- Finally, there is the perennial problem of ensuring that staff keep their details up-to-date on core systems such as Framework-I. As the manager of the Integrated Safeguarding Team at Worcestershire Health and Care Trust commented: "However good the single view of the child is, if social workers don't update their telephone numbers, it's really difficult to contact them."

## Key learning points

The key learning points from the digital transformation project include:

### **Communicating the value of an Agile development process is vital**

The project team found it challenging to get a regular commitment from all stakeholders to the bi-weekly meetings required by the agile methodology. Representation at both the sprints and user testing sessions varied significantly throughout the development. At times feedback was limited and some last-

minute changes were not as thoroughly tested as the project team would have liked.

However, after the first few sprints, those stakeholders who did get actively involved began to see the benefits of reviewing their business processes in detail and designing and testing a solution iteratively and in small bites. Meanwhile, the team learnt that communicating the benefits of the agile approach and getting upfront buy-in from both services and partners is crucial – ideally with representation from the 'shop floor' rather than just managers.

As a result of its experience, Worcestershire has developed its own tailored Agile Project Life Cycle (see Appendix 1) which will underpin future agile projects and ensure service areas commit to the delivery approach before the delivery of a solution is begun. It is now Worcestershire's 'bible' for delivering agile projects.

"Really understand your business and get your own ship in order before you start building your IT system."

**Group Manager,**  
Family Front Door Team

"You need to persuade people that it's their system and encourage a whole culture of ownership. This is what you'll need to commit in terms of time, but this is what you'll get out of it. Above all, start with usability – make things easy to use and intuitive, then you'll get real value."

**Former Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Services,**  
Worcestershire County Council

### **Try to ensure your digital solutions are flexible**

Particularly in the case of transformational projects, the ultimate shape of the solution may be uncertain, and practice is likely to change quickly. Moreover, councils are under constant scrutiny and pressure to provide ever greater value for money. They need constantly to be thinking about what 'good' will look like in the future.

In these circumstances, it is important that any digital development is as flexible as possible in two important respects:

- in the way development work is organised between in-house and external resources
- in the adaptability of the digital tools themselves.

In Worcestershire's case, the county's digital platform provides a large degree of flexibility and all development on the platform is done in-house. This means, for instance, that the Family Front Door team, working closely with their colleagues in IT, can change forms quickly.

To give a practical example, there was an issue around consent on the cause for concern form which was generating a lot of chase-up calls. The Family Front Door team wanted to change the question and the IT team did it overnight.

“Make sure you have the right relationship with your IT team and the development rights – that way, you're not beholden to anyone.”

**Group Manager,**  
Family Front Door Team

### **Don't underestimate the resources required to implement change across multiple agencies**

As we have seen, the Worcestershire system has a very significant number and range of likely users – potentially any organisation or professional with safeguarding concerns. The county therefore faced a task of considerable scale and complexity.

While the team did carry out extensive engagement and training sessions on the new system, they acknowledged that even more could have been done – and, indeed, remains to be done as staff change and new organisations wish to use the system.

It is important therefore not to underestimate the level of resources required for the successful roll-out of a new system used by multiple agencies.

“There should have been more training at the beginning. Forms are being rejected because my staff don't understand what is required.”

**Service Lead,**  
Worcestershire Health and Care Trust

## Next steps

The county and its partners are envisaging a range of future developments ranging from the specific to the more strategic.

- The Family Front Door team is looking to expand the questions on the cause for concern form so that professionals can indicate more clearly the type of intervention required, for example, early help support rather than safeguarding action. The team is also planning to work more closely with community social workers to help them use the system more effectively.
- Greater use of visualisation tools is seen as potentially very valuable. Worcestershire staff believe that the dashboards in the current system, for instance, have really helped bring data to life.
- Some key organisations involved in safeguarding, particularly the police and probation services, do not yet use the cause for concern form because of the need to capture information in their own systems and a lack of integration with the county platform. However, some smaller police teams have recently started to use the form. Health professionals generally use the standard process, but some individual teams submit referrals in a different way. Work is already underway to align these different processes more closely in the future.
- Having sorted out the basic processes, there is an opportunity to look at how the support for MASH meetings can be improved. County staff would like to create an improved environment where staff can find the right information, share it at meetings, document it and get it back

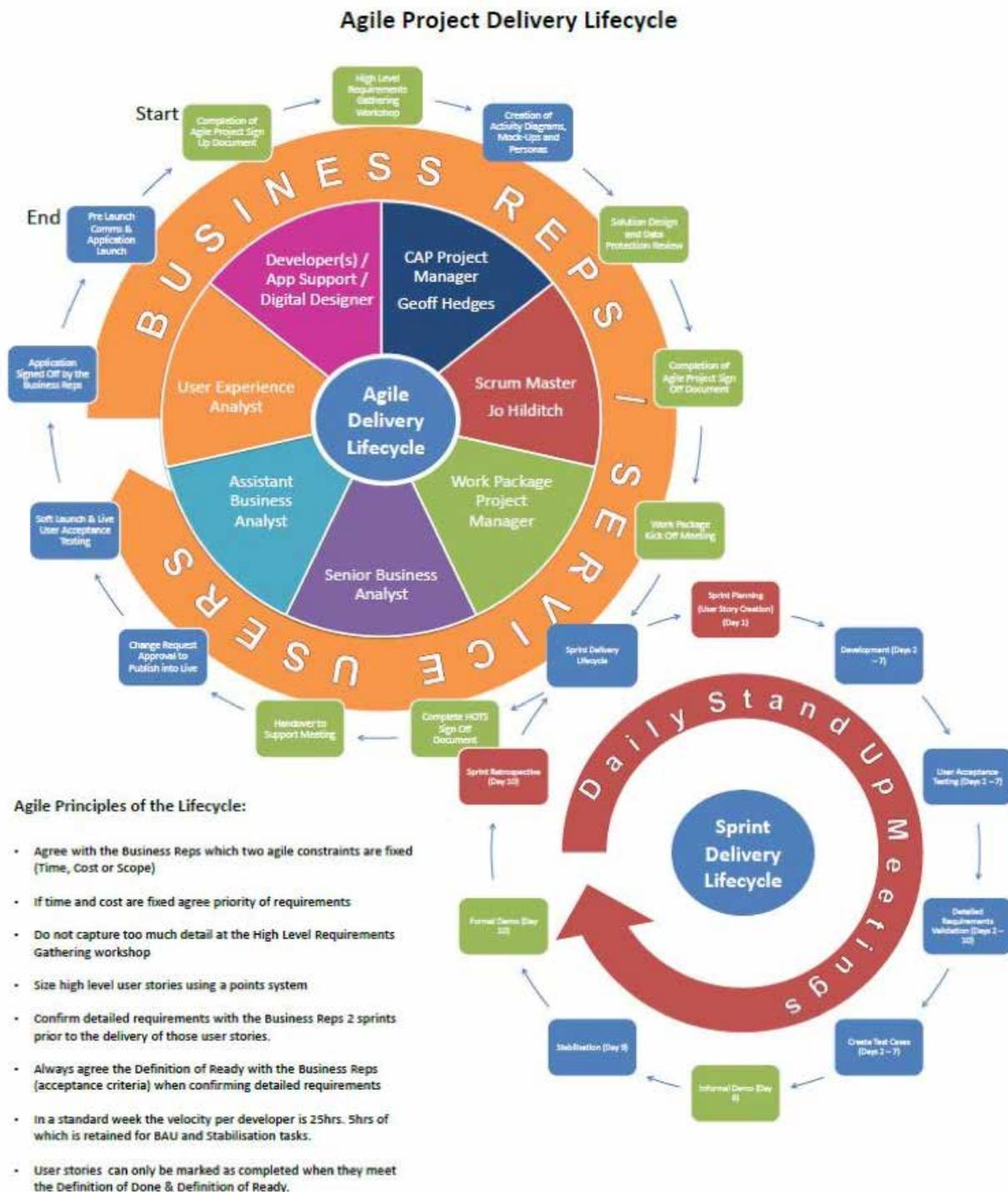
into the participants' different systems. Safeguarding, of course, covers adults as well as children, so the plan during 2018 is to begin mapping out how each agency's business needs can best be met, as well as what any solution should look like in terms of security.

- Finally, the work with partner agencies on this project has helped the county to become involved in wider data sharing projects with partners such as the Worcestershire Office of Data Analytics (WODA), which is looking to improve how agencies share data throughout Worcestershire. WODA now gets a monthly opportunity to talk data with chief executives and chief constables across the area, exploring how the partners can leverage their collective strengths, insight and data to develop a true 'place' perspective. The challenge is that all budgets are separate, and it is difficult to allocate money to digital initiatives at a time when frontline operations are under such pressure.

"The work done so far is a fantastic starting point for building much closer working relationships and practices. None of this would have been possible with the volume of rich insight generated by using the cause for concern form."

**Former Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Services,**  
Worcestershire County Council

# Appendix 1 – Worcestershire’s agile project delivery lifecycle



For further information on how to run an agile project for a digital solution, please see the Government Digital Service website: <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile-delivery/agile-government-services-introduction>

## Contact for further information

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