

SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA FOR

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 7 May 2024

2.00 pm

**Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane
Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

4. MINUTES

Pages

3 - 18

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 12 March 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Toni Fagan (chairperson)
Councillor Liz Harvey (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Clare Davies, Robert Highfield, Jim Kenyon, Ben Proctor and Rob Williams.
Stuart Mitchell (Co-opted Member Parent Governor Secondary)

Present remote: Anna Eccleston (Co-opted Member Parent Governor Primary), Jan Frances (Co-opted Member Families' Representative)

In attendance: Councillor Ivan Powell (Cabinet Member Children and Young People)

Officers: Darryl Freeman (Corporate Director Children and Young People), Victoria Gibbs (Service Director Early Help, QA and Prevention), Rachel Gillott (Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Simon Cann (Committee Clerk), Alfie Rees-Glinos (Democratic Services Support)

187. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Sam Pratley (co-opted member Diocese of Hereford)

188. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

None.

189. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

190. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received. A correction was requested to record that Jan Frances (Families' Representative Co-opted member) had sent apologies for her absence ahead of the meeting of 23 January 2024.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2024, including the requested correction, be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

191. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions received.

192. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions received.

193. CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE

The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support provided an overview of the report.

- The service had reduced the number of children in its care from a high of 412 in 2022/23 to a current figure of 396. It was acknowledged that this figure was still high in relation to the West Midlands and statistical neighbours, but it was on the right trajectory.
- Significant work had been done in relation to pre-proceedings, which were now at parity with statistical neighbours.
- The service was adopting a more restorative approach with families and was reducing the number of proceedings taking place through the use of family group conferences. There had been 29 family group conferences in the last three months and these had allowed families to come up with their own solutions and to work on plans with the service.
- The service was reunifying children and supporting families to be together and currently had 29 children who were placed with their parents.
- It was noted that 17 children who were due to come into care in the last quarter had been able to stay at home with support from ECHO. It was explained that ECHO was the edge of care team, which supported families with children staying at home through the use of systemic therapy and intervention of drug and alcohol workers.
- In Herefordshire the figures for vulnerable unaccompanied asylum seeking children had risen from 6 children in 2022 to 38 at the current time. The Home Office provided some contribution towards the care of those children, but this didn't cover the costs and it did not cover those in the post 18 age group.
- Of the children that were currently in placements, the service had 111 in external foster care and 92 in-house. An area of strength within the service was in the number of children that had been placed in the care of family and friends who they were familiar with, this provided stability, which typically continued through for those leaving care.
- There were currently 44 children in residential placements, this number fluctuated and was reviewed regularly. The cost of residential placements was high and it was a national challenge to try and bring the costs down. The service continued to step young people down from residential placements where appropriate.
- The service was continuing to recruit foster carers in-house and was working with its kinship carers – both groups were paid the same amount at the basic level, although foster carers could receive a higher payment once they moved through the scheme.
- Placement sufficiency was a key priority and the sufficiency strategy had been refreshed.
- Support from the Leeds partners and the restorative practice model was enabling the service to work alongside families, children and carers, and the expectation was that the number of children in care would continue to decrease.

The chair invited comments and questions from The Committee, the principle points of discussion are summarised below:

1. The Committee enquired if and how the restorative practice approach was changing the Corporate Parenting Service in Herefordshire and whether it was

making a significant difference in terms of how children were experiencing the care system.

- The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support pointed out that this was the first part of the journey. All staff at the first sector had been trained, but the training now needed to be cascaded to partners and the whole of Herefordshire Council. It was making a difference and had set up a clear framework to ensure that the service was working with and not to families. Systems and forms used within the service were being changed and updated to incorporate more restorative language and techniques. The new approach was having an impact, but there was still a lack of consistency across the board, which would require continued attention.
2. The Committee enquired about the differences in support between people who were kinship fosterers and people who were not fostering, but were relatives who were looking after children.
- The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support stated that there was no difference in support between the two groups in terms of training and support provided.
3. The Committee suggested that people who voluntarily decide to become foster carers frequently had more time to prepare for the change than kinship carers who were often thrust into the situation at short notice. It was asked if more funding should be made available to kinship carers to help them modify their houses and lifestyle and encourage them to take on the role and responsibility.
- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People recognised and acknowledged the contribution made by kinship carers and explained that all cases were looked at on the basis of individual circumstances. The service would be looking at the recently published government national strategy for kinship and aimed to ensure there was a fair package in place for all carers.
4. The Committee suggested that discussion in the Fostering Panel had identified a potential need for closer connections and links between housing and fostering/kinship caring. It was asked if priority could be given to carers in need of suitable housing, as this might reduce the need for costly residential placements.
- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained that the service was working with colleagues in Community Wellbeing to see if they could share approaches relating to housing and carers going forward.
5. In response to a question from The Committee, The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support gave an overview of the journey a child would go through in relation to kinship care and family group conferences. The service director highlighted the potential differences between kinship care and foster care and the manner in which family dynamics arising from complex relations between children, parents and grandparents could often necessitate additional support for kinship carers.

6. The Committee requested more detail regarding the staffing, training, monitoring and impact of family group conferencing within the County.
 - The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support pointed out that the number of dedicated staff had risen from two to four. There had been heavy investment in the service, including family and systemic therapists, drug and alcohol workers and specialist workers who knew how to support young people in difficult times. The number of family group conferences had tripled over the last three months and recruitment was underway to cover the expansion.
 - Regarding monitoring and impact, it was explained that the manager for that part of the service produced a monthly report detailing comments from families about the conferencing - feedback was collected after every session. The report could be made available to the Committee if it wished to see them.
 - In terms of impact, 17 children who were on the edge of care had been able to stay at home, those cases would be reviewed after three and six months to ensure that the intervention had had the desired outcome.

Action: The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support to provide the Committee with the monthly family group conferencing report.

7. The Committee asked about the support older children in the system were getting regarding career and education choices and enquired whether there were any examples of where the Council had assisted young people in obtaining meaningful work experience and roles.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained that the Council was a corporate parent to 393 children and that it needed to network to find work experience for children to progress. Through personal contacts, the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board had been able to assist young people in obtaining work experience and employment in the fields of sport and policing. The Council's legal team had also been involved in creating shadowing opportunities for youngsters interested in the legal profession.
 - The Corporate Parenting Board was currently profiling its members in order to build up a database of skills, interests and areas of expertise that might be beneficial in assisting and supporting young people in transitioning into the wider world and engaging in the things they were interested in. This profiling exercise would aid the development of ambassador roles and would be spread out further to include other councillors and colleagues from across the Council's workforce.
8. The Committee heard that the timeframe for action between initial concerns about a child being raised and a kinship placement was, between 12 and 16 weeks - certain elements of the process such as DBS and police checks could not easily be sped up. During this period the child and family would receive support from social workers, family support workers and in some instances the ECHO team.

9. The Committee heard that social workers and independent review officers would listen to and capture the voice of the child prior to a kinship/foster placement, the views of professionals such as teachers would also be collated and acted on where appropriate.

10. In response to a question from The Committee about placing children in private schools, The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support explained the service was working with a trust that arranged specific care and had identified two children that may move to residential school placements.

11. The Committee enquired about unaccompanied asylum seeking children, in relation to quotas, anticipated future numbers, experience of children and whether the County had the capacity to look after the children.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People informed the Committee that numbers had risen whilst the hotel for asylum seeking children had been open in Herefordshire, but that the hotel had now closed. The quota was 0.1% of the child population in the county, and the child population in Herefordshire had dropped from 36,000 to 34,000 so the quota would be pegged at 34.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained that Herefordshire didn't have sufficient infrastructure in place to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children in terms of culturally appropriate placements and support services, it didn't have a mosque for example and quite often children were moved on to more metropolitan culturally diverse areas. The Council was currently working with commissioners to increase services and the updated Improvement Plan would contain a strategy for looking after unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

12. The Committee asked if there was an increased risk of exploitation/harm to children being sent outside of the County.
 - The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support acknowledged that statistical research showed that any child placed at a distance could be at increased risk. The service had worked to place unaccompanied young people in large groups, which enabled care workers to visit all of them together. Personal advisors and social workers were visiting them more frequently and if there was any sort of problem the group would be moved together rather than on an individual basis. However, one typical advantage of placing children at distance was the improved access to mosques/places of worship and support services.

13. The Committee asked how much the service knew about the preferences of asylum seeking children.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained it was a mixed picture. Many children had provided positive feedback about staying in Herefordshire, whilst others had expressed a preference for staying in larger more cosmopolitan environments, where they had greater access to services and groups of peers with a similar language and culture. It was anticipated that the mixed response would change

over time as Herefordshire built up its services. The challenge would be not just finding appropriate accommodation locally, but improving wraparound services in terms of language, culture, education and religion.

14. The Committee stressed the importance of striking a balance between providing asylum seekers with familiar cultural connections, but simultaneously integrating them into British culture.
15. The Committee enquired about the ECHO service and feedback on the service from families.
 - The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support explained that ECHO worked with both young people on the edge of care and children who were already looked after. It provided support in returning children to their families, especially those who had not lived with their family for some time. The service helped by providing additional visits and some systemic therapy for the families to understand the changes in dynamic. It also provided support with initial family group conferencing. ECHO had been in place for about two to three years and had been expanded due to the successful outcomes it was producing. It was currently meeting needs and the Committee was offered the opportunity to view the monthly report on outcomes produced by the service.
16. The Committee asked about details concerning the reunification process and whether a child would first of all be supported by the edge of care service before being considered for reunification.
 - The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support explained that reviews took place every 6 months and the service continually considered whether a child should go home and if it would be safe. An assessment of parents would take place before reunification and where positive changes had occurred, a process would commence that involved increased contact and family time, along with possible overnight stays. If that went well the service would continue to build on this, but each case was individual.
17. The Committee enquired as to whether reunification had been successfully rolled out in Herefordshire and if it would have an impact on the number of children within Council care.
 - The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support responded that the service had had additional resource to support some of the families and that it was a better process for considering children and families being together. It was not about bringing down numbers, but making sure children who should be at home were at home. It was also about helping parents to understand the process they had been through and what they needed to do to for their children to be returned. It was improving, but there was still a way to go.
18. The Committee asked how the service was improving from an outcomes point of view and what kind of measures/indicators were being used to provide assurance

that the service was achieving improved outcomes. The Committee also enquired about the key danger indicators in place that would provide early information when things weren't going in the right direction.

- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People stated that the service was working with its partners to look at referrals, contacts and multi-agency response to risk across the board. In the last four months there had been a reduction in the numbers of child protection plans (of almost 60) and the service had seen a gradual reduction in the numbers of children coming into our care over the last 12 months. There was a need to step away from the historical culture of being risk averse, where everything had escalated up through the system. The service and partners were making an impact and had seen reductions in numbers within the child in need, child protection and looked after children cohorts. The service was much more stable, with much better practice management oversight.
- In terms of outcomes for children in care, it was explained by the corporate director that a lot of work had been done with health partners to ensure that those children got health assessments and reviews throughout the year. Many of the Herefordshire schools were rated good or outstanding and together with the virtual school they did a good job of ensuring looked after children were not educationally disadvantaged.
- Regarding danger indicators, the greatest risk factor was stability in recruitment and the workforce. There were many excellent agency staff, but too many families had experienced a change in social worker during the year.
- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People suggested that the greatest indicator things weren't going right, would be if the service started to see the numbers of children coming into its care increasing again. The numbers had come down steadily over the last 18 months and the service was now performing better than the England average. It was about ensuring that the service had got the right children in its care, rather than just being focused on the numbers. However, if that number did start to turn and go in the wrong direction, then that would be an indicator that something was not right.
- An inability to increase the proportion of the workforce that was permanent over the next year would present a significant risk for the service in terms of sustainable and embedded improvement.

19. The Committee noted the levels of re-referrals within 12 months at 30% and repeat child protection plans at 37%, and queried whether these were acceptable levels or were children 'boomeranging back' a sign that discharging them was not providing them with a robust environment.

- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People pointed out that the re-referral rate was at 28% and was coming down from 38% last year, with the national average being about 20%. Some re-referral within a year would be expected, as the service only stayed involved for as long it needed to at the time and then circumstances might change.
- There was significant work going on in the MASH regarding decisions being made around contacts and referrals.

- The re-referral rate was moving in the right direction, it was higher than it should be and the director stated that he would be more comfortable with a figure of around 20-24%.
 - Regarding the repeat child protection plans, the corporate director stated that the figures for the last two years showed a healthy performance, but the longer term picture jumped about and was symptomatic of a risk averse culture and partnership.
20. The Committee enquired about the difference in responsibilities between family group conference coordinator and social workers.
- The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support explained that family group conference coordinators support a family to come together to find their own solutions. The role of the social worker was completely separate and they were allocated to the child. The Committee was invited to observe a conference for greater insight into how the process worked.

Action: For the Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support to arrange an observation of a family group conference.

21. The Committee asked for further details regarding pathway plans.
- The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support explained that a pathway plan set out all clear expectations and informed the young person about what the service would do and also what they could expect as they moved into the wider world - it should be updated after every significant event or at six months.
 - The service had a group of young people supporting it in co-producing and redesigning pathway plans. The service was required to keep in touch and support young people up until the age of 25, but often individuals might want to step away from the service and make independent choices, however should they wish to, they can return for assistance having previously stepped out.
22. The Committee noted that Leeds City Council had a team that worked with under 25s who had had a child removed and enquired if Herefordshire Council had an equivalent service.
- The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support explained that the service was looking at schemes similar to the [Mockingbird](#) programme and was also working with those within the care leaver group who had had a child. When an adoption decision was made, the recommendation for support always included an offer of support for the future, as often a family/parent may not take up immediate support, but would decide they needed it further down the line.
23. The Committee asked for details regarding the number and structure of data analysts within the children's service of Herefordshire Council.
- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained that the service had a Performance and Information team consisting of analysts who compiled, collected and produced data, this team used a software tool called Power BI to bring together and present its data.

- It was noted that whilst the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership didn't have a dedicated analyst, each of the partners within the partnership did have analysts and performance and management information teams.
24. The Committee asked for it to be noted that it would like to add arranging a visit/observation of family group conferencing and a look into the virtual school to The Committee's work programme.
25. The Chair of the Herefordshire Corporate Parenting Board suggested that the Committee may wish to add 'evaluating the effectiveness of the Ambassador role' as part of its future work programme.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee unanimously approved the following recommendations.

Resolved that:

- a) The report in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service is considered; noting the progress made since 2018**
- b) The Committee determine any recommendations it wishes to make to secure further improvement in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service.**

194. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

The Service Director Early Help, QA and Prevention provided an overview of the report, highlighting a number of key points.

- Following the local elections in May 2023, the Corporate Parenting Board had reviewed its terms of reference and membership, these were endorsed by the board at its meeting on 16 August 2023.
- The board had met in August 2023, October 2023 and January 2024, its next meeting was scheduled for 13 March 2024.
- The new terms of reference gave the board a wider membership in relation to: officers of the council, elected members and partner agencies.
- The revised membership had brought a renewed focus to the board and a richness in relation to discussion and areas of specific focus - particularly in understanding the experience of children in care and care leavers.
- The board had been well supported by the Local Government Association who had facilitated two workshops for members, one in November 2023 and one in January 2024. The board had completed a self-assessment exercise as part of the work, which would be reviewed at future board meetings.
- One key outcome from the workshops had been the measuring of confidence of members of the Corporate Parenting Board. A brief survey had been undertaken following the first workshop in November, which indicated that over 70% of members felt confident in discharging their statutory responsibilities, further surveys would be undertaken going forward.
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy had a number of key priorities including: homes and housing, health and well-being, learning, development and having fun, relationships, identity, belonging, listening, hearing and understanding children in care and care leavers, safe and protected Independence in adulthood. The Corporate Parenting Operational Group, which was a multi-agency group,

was overseeing the implementation of the priorities and the strategy was due to be renewed as a result of the two most recent visits by Ofsted.

- The timings of the Corporate Parenting Board had been amended to allow for engagement with the service's children in care and care leavers. At the most recent meeting in January the board received a presentation from the participation worker in terms of some of the co-production that had been happening with children in care and care leavers. Two young people were expected to attend the 13 March board meeting as part of the widening of its membership.
- Regarding types of information used to understand the circumstances of children in care and care leavers, the board now receives regular performance reports that look at: the numbers of children in care, their circumstances, where they are living, the support for accompanied asylum seeking children, whether young people are in suitable accommodation and their status in relation to education, employment and training. The board also looked at the duration of children who are in care.
- The board was focusing on children in care and young people in care, care leavers as parents and the service's role as corporate grandparents.
- The Virtual Head was a regular member and a standing member of the Corporate Parenting Board and would be making a presentation during the 13 March meeting on the latest outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- At the last Corporate Parenting Board meeting in January, the focus had been on: sufficiency for children in care and care leavers, the quality of accommodation, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and supported accommodation for 16-17 year olds who were care leavers.

The Service Director Early Help, QA and Prevention talked through a series of [slides](#) relating to the Corporate Parenting Board, covering off:

- Corporate Parenting Board Membership
- Elected Member attendance
- Work Programme January 2024 – November 2024
- Corporate Parenting Plan: Education
- Corporate Parenting Plan: Impact
- Care Leavers in Employment, Education or Training (EET) data
- Engagement and Participation, including 'You said, We Did'
- Placement type data
- Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation data

The report was opened up for discussion

1. In response to a question from The Committee, the Service Director for Early Help, QA and Prevention explained that educational attainment of care leavers in Herefordshire was measured by the virtual school and that information relating to this would be included in the virtual school autumn report.
2. The Committee enquired why the Corporate Parenting Board papers were not public and asked what assurances could be given that the board was functioning as intended.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained that the decision to not make the board a corporate body - with public meetings - was a local constitutional issue and that different councils could choose whether or not to make the Corporate Parenting Board a corporate body.

The director explained that he was happy to work with the chair of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that the papers were shared openly and widely.

3. The Committee expressed concerns about the 50% figure of 19-21 year olds in employment and the Key Stage 4 performance figures provided.
 - The Service Director for Early Help, QA and Prevention pointed out in response, that the Key Stage 4 figures did compare favourably against national figures, but that every young person was unique in their needs and that some young people had suffered extensive trauma, which impacted on their learning, development and key stage achievements. It was pointed out that the virtual school was aware of issues impacting the development of local young people and that this shaped and informed additional support measures being put in place on an ongoing basis.
4. The Committee asked if, in addition to internships/shadowing roles, whether the service provided work experience positions for young people.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People responded by highlighting that work experience was provided partly through the mainstream schools and Virtual School Champion. The virtual school provided the Corporate Parenting Board with detailed information on this and work experience was considered very important in helping young people formulate their plans and their careers.
 - The Service Director for Early Help, QA and Prevention pointed out that corporate parenting ambassadors and champions also played and would continue to play a key role in helping to deliver opportunities in relation to apprenticeships and shadowing opportunities.
5. The Committee enquired as to whether there was a system of additional wraparound support in place for children in the education system who had suffered trauma, to ensure that they achieved the grades they were capable of while in the education system - as there wasn't always a second chance to go back around and try again later when they were in a better position.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young people pointed out that there were examples where people had returned to the education system when they were in a better place and had achieved their full academic potential, however the director agreed that there was a definite need for timely support for children who had been traumatised and assisting them in gaining access to education at the right time. It was also suggested that the Committee might want to revisit the work of the virtual school at some point during the coming year, as it could provide a different context to the discussion.

Action: Add a visit to the virtual school for consideration as part of the work programme.

6. The Committee was in support of councillors using their life experience to provide opportunities for looked after children, and to act as ambassadors within their

local communities to encourage local business and organisations to provide meaningful opportunities for young people.

7. The Committee suggested that communications from the Council (such as business rate/council tax bills) to local businesses and organisations could contain a statement asking whether they could do anything to support looked after young people in the County by providing work experience or job opportunities for them. It was also suggested that networks within the local authority and its contractors should be being exploited to their full potential.
 - The Corporate Director for Children and Young People stated that the corporate leadership team was currently looking at enablers for the Improvement Plan - these would extend and develop the range of apprenticeships that might be available across the whole of the council and its contractors – with a view to creating apprenticeships and learning opportunities for children in care and care leavers. The director noted the suggestion about a leaflet/message being included with council tax bills and stated that it would be given consideration.
8. The Committee noted that the Local Government Association training module contained a number of pointers about what a good local authority might do in relation to corporate parenting, these included making corporate parenting updates a standing item at full council and introducing a mechanism by which members of the council could write cards to looked after children celebrating their successes.
9. In response to a question from the Committee about the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2024 attached as Appendix 1 to the main report, the Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support clarified that it was the current strategy and not a draft (as stated at para 8 of the main report). It was explained that the strategy was going to be refreshed and made more aspirational, with greater input from young people and parents.
10. The Committee asked if the forward plan could be updated to reflect when the updated strategy would be coming forward. The Committee also suggested that the updated document would benefit from more 'down to earth' language and terminology.
11. The Committee requested sight of the action plan that went alongside the strategy.
 - The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support responded that they would be happy to provide the Committee with the plan and would welcome feedback on it.
12. The Committee asked how much work had been done in relation to life stories.
 - The Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support explained that there were many different types of life story work. One area that had previously come in for criticism from Ofsted was that work around a

child's life journey wasn't always being adequately evidenced on file. To remedy this, a full training programme for relevant staff had been conducted. Staff from areas of the service that had excelled in evidencing life story information were working with and supporting other managers to ensure a high standard was achieved and maintained in all areas

- In relation to the more therapeutic life story work - which was typically a longer term piece of work carried out with young people who had gone through traumatic experiences - the service wanted to move away from its current spot purchase provision model and build an established relationship with a dedicated provider. The service was working with finance and commissioning to achieve this ambition going forward.

13. The Committee suggested that a recommendation regarding the introduction of some element of public visibility within the Corporate Parenting Board meetings might be useful in helping to share the work being done as part of the improvement journey.

14. The Committee enquired about Appendix 6 contained within the [Corporate Parenting Board Strategy 2022 - 2024](#) and asked for clarity as to the role of the elected members sitting on the Corporate Parenting Board.

- The Corporate Director provide an assurance that they would clarify the wording in the updated strategy in order to clearly outline what was expected from the elected members sitting on the board.

15. The Committee asked if the voice of children in care and care leavers was influencing policy and service provision through the board in a sufficient way and whether there was more that could be done in enabling children in care and care leavers to influence decision makers, strategies and development plans in Herefordshire.

- The Service Director for Early Help, QA and Prevention stated that the service had a renewed commitment from the Corporate Parenting Board to directly hear the voices and lived experience of young people. The Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support had been working with a small group of young people in terms of supporting them to attend the board on 13 March, so that they could feed in their views.
- There were other areas where young people had started to influence operational delivery, such as: co-producing pathway plans, challenging the service's offer for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and engaging with partner agencies in terms of co-producing health passports for care leavers.
- There was more work to do in terms of how to support and enable young people to feel comfortable and confident in being able to attend in person and engage with the wider membership of the board. The refreshed strategy would be encouraging more of a co-productive way of working with children and young people.

16. The Committee enquired at to what lessons had been learned in relation to listening to and including the voices of young people.

- The Service Director for Early Help, QA and Prevention noted that historically the groups of children engaged with had been too small and did not necessarily reflect the diversity of experience of young people. There was also a need to properly prepare young people so that they would be able to actively engage and challenge the service in relation to how it needed to improve. It was acknowledged that reports needed to be written in a more accessible and down-to-earth format.
 - The service had been running the Coram BAAF Bright Spots survey, which was expected to return a report in the next few weeks. The feedback would hopefully provide a good understanding of the issues that were important to children in care and care experienced young people. The results would be used to inform the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and the refresh of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan.
17. The Committee asked what systems were in place to gather, manage and collate information from the many face-to-face and day-to-day interactions between young people in the Council's care and the various different agencies and partners involved. It was asked whether young people participating and engaging with the Corporate Parenting Board and other bodies could gain access to information that would enable them to synthesise the kind of issues that they needed to represent on behalf of other young people.
- The Corporate Director for Children and Young People explained that there was now a Children in Care Council and that the Young Person's Council had met for the first time on 12 March 2024. Regarding bringing information from various face-to-face engagements across the service together, so that it could be synthesised into clear accessible messaging, that was a work in progress.
 - Young people were currently helping the service in terms of co-producing the Participation Strategy and one message coming through had been to 'just get on with things'.
 - Young people had highlighted there was a need for clarity of communication and avoidance of prematurely announcing initiatives that were months/years away, which raised expectations and then led to disappointment.
18. The Committee noted that a visit from local school children to observe the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee at work had been agreed in principle.
19. The Committee noted that the tone of the writing style adopted in sections of the Corporate Parenting Strategy did not come across as genuine and might not be accessible to young people. It suggested this was something to consider when the strategy was being refreshed.

Resolved: That it be recommended to the executive that:

- 1. Herefordshire Council to suggest proposals to make Corporate Parenting Board meetings more accessible to elected members and the public**

2. Herefordshire Council to extend opportunities to write letters and cards celebrating the success of its looked after children.

Resolved: That the Committee approve the proposed meeting dates for 2024/25:

7 May 2024, 30 July 2024, 17 September 2024, 26 November 2024, 21 January 2025 and 18 March 2025.

195. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 7 May 2024 2.00pm

The meeting ended at 16:48

Chairperson

