

Agenda

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Tuesday 7 May 2024**

Time: **2.00 pm**

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

Notes: Please note the time, date and venue of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

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If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format, please call Simon Cann, Democratic Services Officer on 01432 260667 or e-mail simon.cann@herefordshire.gov.uk in advance of the meeting.

Agenda for the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Chairperson Councillor Toni Fagan
Vice-chairperson Councillor Liz Harvey
Councillor Claire Davies
Councillor Robert Highfield
Councillor Jim Kenyon
Councillor Ben Proctor
Councillor Rob Williams

Sylvia Cockroft - Archdiocese of Cardiff
Anna Eccleston - Parent Governor Primary
Jan Frances - Families' Representative
Kate Joiner - Committee's Discretionary Nomination
Stuart Mitchell - Parent Governor Secondary
Sam Pratley - Diocese of Hereford

Agenda

Pages

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive apologies for absence.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

To receive details of members nominated to attend the meeting in place of a member of the committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of interests in respect of Schedule 1, Schedule 2 or Other Interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.

4. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12 March 2024.

[Papers to follow]

HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS

The deadline for the submission of questions for this meeting is 5pm on Wednesday 1 May 2024.

Questions must be submitted to councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk.
Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted.

Accepted questions and the responses will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

To receive any written questions from members of the public.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

To receive any written questions from members of the council.

7. CHAIR UPDATE

For the Chair to communicate or receive updates on any work and activity relevant to the committee's remit.

8. INTRODUCTION TO FOSTERING

9. WORK PROGRAMME

To consider the work programme for the committee.

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Thursday 13 June 2024 2.00pm

The public's rights to information and attendance at meetings

In view of the continued prevalence of Covid, we have introduced changes to our usual procedures for accessing public meetings. These will help to keep our councillors, staff and members of the public safe.

Please take time to read the latest guidance on the council website by following the link at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings and support us in promoting a safe environment for everyone. If you have any queries please contact the governance support team on 01432 261699 or at governancesupportteam@herefordshire.gov.uk

We will review and update this guidance in line with Government advice and restrictions.

Thank you for your help in keeping Herefordshire Council meetings safe.

You have a right to:

- Attend all council, cabinet, committee and sub-committee meetings unless the business to be transacted would disclose 'confidential' or 'exempt' information.
- Inspect agenda and public reports at least five clear days before the date of the meeting. Agenda and reports (relating to items to be considered in public) are available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings
- Inspect minutes of the council and all committees and sub-committees and written statements of decisions taken by the cabinet or individual cabinet members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting (a list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report). A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
- Access to a public register stating the names, addresses and wards of all councillors with details of the membership of cabinet and of all committees and sub-committees. Information about councillors is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title. The council's constitution is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution
- Access to this summary of your rights as members of the public to attend meetings of the council, cabinet, committees and sub-committees and to inspect documents.

Recording of meetings

Please note that filming, photography and recording of this meeting is permitted provided that it does not disrupt the business of the meeting.

Members of the public are advised that if you do not wish to be filmed or photographed you should let the governance services team know before the meeting starts so that anyone who intends filming or photographing the meeting can be made aware.

The reporting of meetings is subject to the law and it is the responsibility of those doing the reporting to ensure that they comply.

The council may make a recording of this public meeting or stream it live to the council's website. Such recordings are made available for members of the public via the council's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/HerefordshireCouncil/videos

Public transport links

The Herefordshire Council office at Plough Lane is located off Whitecross Road in Hereford, approximately 1 kilometre from the City Bus Station.

The location of the office and details of city bus services can be viewed at:
www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1597/hereford-city-bus-map-local-services-

The seven principles of public life

(Nolan Principles)

1. Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

2. Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Title of report: Introduction to Fostering

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 7 May 2024

Report by: Service Director (Corporate Parenting)

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To provide the scrutiny committee with an introduction to fostering.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The introduction to Herefordshire's Fostering Service is considered;**
- b) **The committee determine any further information it wishes to receive; and**
- c) **The committee determine any recommendations it wishes to make in respect of Fostering Service developments and improvements.**

Alternative options

1. The committee could not consider the introduction to fostering. This is not recommended as the Fostering Service is a key improvement and development priority for the Council.

Key considerations

2. The Herefordshire Fostering Service is part of the Corporate Parenting Service located within Children's Services. In accordance with Ofsted (July 2022) inspection for Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and the 'inadequate' judgement, Children's Services is

on a journey of improvement. The Children's Service Improvement Plan includes specific actions in relation to improving and developing Herefordshire's Fostering Service, including;

- The capacity of the Fostering Service Workforce
 - The retention of existing Foster Carers
 - The recruitment of new Foster Carers
 - The overall sufficiency (number, type and choice) of provision to meet the needs and circumstances of local children in our care
3. Starting from a very low base, progress has been made to address the above priority actions, although further improvements are still needed.
4. In October/November 2022, stakeholder reference group meetings with key stakeholders, including Foster Carers, which were undertaken to consult about the details of the proposed Children's Improvement Plan. Consultation with Foster Carers in reference groups revealed a significant loss of trust and confidence in the service and repairing this relationship has necessarily been a continuing priority that continues to be addressed in collaboration with Foster Carers.
5. Our Foster Carers are a valuable resource who provide care and make a significant difference to the lives of children in our care. It is important that our Foster Carers feel, and are, well supported in the roles they provide. We are a lot of our Foster Carers and they deserve every support we can provide so that our children in care receive the best care possible to ensure their safety and wellbeing so that they achieve improved outcomes and achieve their full potential in their childhood and in life in general.

Community impact

6. The County plan has an ambition to "strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together" and this includes the following ambitions to;
- Promote the safety and wellbeing of local children and young people, including Herefordshire's children in our care
 - Promote the recruitment and retention of Herefordshire's Foster Carers who care for our children in care

Environmental Impact

7. There are no environmental impacts as a result of this report which is for information purposes.

Equality duty

8. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
9. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The Fostering Service welcomes applications from all members of the community and is ambitious in seeking placements to meet the needs of all children in our care

Resource implications

10. There are no resource implications as a result of this report which is for information purposes

Legal implications

11. There are no legal implications as a result of this report which is for information purposes.

Risk management

12. There are no specific risks directly associated with this report which is for information purposes only.

Consultees

13. None.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Introduction to Fostering Presentation

Background papers

None identified.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Communications	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by

Click or tap here to enter text.

Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

**Children & Young People
Scrutiny Committee**

An Introduction to Fostering

7 May 2024

Introduction to Herefordshire Fostering Service

- Herefordshire Council provides a range of Foster Care provision to children in care of the Local Authority through its in-house Fostering Service
- Unlike Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), which are private or voluntary organisations, the Fostering Service is a Local Authority resource.
- The Fostering Service currently has **168** approved fostering households, with the capacity to care for **272** children in our care
- A broad break down of our approved fostering households is as follows;
 - 86 x Foster Care households
 - 69 x Connected Care households (also known as 'Family and Friends' or 'Kinship Carers')
 - 15 x Respite Carer households
- There are currently 25 Foster Care households that have some capacity to offer respite or short-term care.

Staffing In the Service

- A priority improvement action in 2023-24 focused on stabilising and building capacity in the Fostering Service workforce to deliver more relational and restorative support to Foster Carers and address the recruitment and retention priorities
- In the last year the Fostering Service has stabilised its management structure by appointing a;
 - Seconded Head of Service who is a permanent Council Employee
 - Permanent Service Manager; and,
 - 3 Permanent Team Managers
- The service has 20 permanent practitioners and 11 agency practitioners.
- There is an on-going and active recruitment campaign to attract permanent staff into the Fostering Service

Service Re-Alignment

- In January 2024, a proposal was agreed for the Fostering Service to be re-aligned in order to deliver a more efficient and effective service with more clearly delineated roles and functions
- The Fostering Service now has four teams, which are as follows;
 - Recruitment and Assessment Team
 - Connected Persons and Special Guardian Team
 - Fostering Support Team
 - Home Finding Team

Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

- The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team comprises of a Team Manager, Recruitment Officer, Marketing Officer, Training Officer and 2 Fostering Assessing Social Workers.
- The Team is responsible for:
 - Attracting new foster carers through pro-active marketing campaigns
 - ○ Recruitment activity, including engagement, initial visits and responding to enquiries
 - Undertaking assessments (known as Form F assessments) for mainstream foster carers
 - The provision of training for all Foster Carers, including with prospective Foster Carers being assessed
- A new permanent Team Manager recently started in April 2024

Fostering Recruitment Developments

Some of the recent recruitment developments include:

- There are now regular Newsletters, including a Training Newsletter, sent to Foster Carers, to improve communication
- Digital marketing, with improved social media activity and a revamp of information events has helped to start promoting the role and importance of fostering with Herefordshire
- Development of the recruitment strategy through the successful retention of current Foster Carers who will champion and promote becoming a Herefordshire Foster Carer, including a £500 referral scheme for Foster Carers.
- New Foster Care marketing recruitment campaigns
- Increased quality assurance and scrutiny of recruitment enquiries and assessment standards
- Plans for Foster Care Fortnight (13 – 16 May) are being finalised with activities and events to promote and celebrate our Foster Carers and the role they play with our children in care.
- Currently recruitment activity indicates that 5 assessments are in progress, 2 enquiries will progress to assessment upon receipt of applications and 3 other enquiries are progressing to initial visits.

Connected Persons & Special Guardian Team

Staffing:

- Permanent Team Manager (started March 2024),
- 8 social workers (2 permanent, with 1 more joining shortly, plus 6 agency)
- 1 permanent Kinship Support Worker (offer just made)

19

The focus of the team is;

- Viability and full assessments for Connect Persons and Special Guardians
- Supervision and support for Connected Persons and Special Guardians.
- Private Fostering

Connected Persons & Special Guardian Team

Priorities:

- Undertaking viability assessments and completing full assessments in accordance with statutory guidance, practice standards and agreed timescales
- Awareness raising for PF and identification of PF children, review PF policy and process
- Foster Panel training regarding Connected Foster carers
- Designated Administrative support to help support progress of all necessary checks and ensure compliance
- SGO policy and Family & Friends policy

Fostering Support Team

Staffing:

- 2 Permanent Team Managers (1 started in February 2023 and 1 more joins in May 2024)
- 4 full time permanent social workers of which 2 permanent social workers who work 0.5 FTE, and one permanent social worker who works a 0.6 FTE role
- 1 full time permanent social worker recruited and due to start in June 24.
- 1 part time permanent social worker (0.5) recruited and due to start in May 24
- 2 full time agency social worker currently, but this will reduce to 1 0,5 FTE agency social worker once new appointments starts.
- 2 Fostering Support Workers, both permanent positions of which 1 is currently on maternity leave.
- **The focus of the team is to;**
 - Supervise and support Foster Carers, as per the National Minimum Standards (NMS, 2011)
 - Include our Foster Carers who are approved or dual approved to provide short term, long term, respite, overnight short breaks and/or supported lodgings (for young people aged of 18-21 years of age).

Fostering Support Team

Priorities:

- To ensure that the Fostering Support Team are well supported with clear managerial guidance, regular supervision and work in an environment of high challenge and high support.
- To ensure that our foster carers are supported and supervised to ensure compliance in regards to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering being met.
- To continue to promote placement stability.
- To retain of 'good quality' foster carers to ensure that our children / young people are offered high quality care and support. This retention priority along with the recruitment of foster carers will reduce the cost of seeking alternative placements externally.
- To develop new and updated policies and guidance e.g. for Supported Lodgings, the Foster Carer handbook is updated.
- To provide efficient and effective administration to track all necessary references, checks and reporting to achieve and maintain compliance.

The Home Finding Team

PRIORITIES

- To identify and secure suitable provision, including;
 - Residential Care
 - Foster Care (IFA)
 - Supported Accommodation
 - Short breaks
 - Secure welfare for vulnerable children and young people age 0-25
- To ensure value for money for the Council.
 - To work strategically with providers to secure sufficient local provision
 - To secure local homes for local children

23

**The Home Finding Team
Identify planned & emergency homes for Herefordshire children in care**

IMPROVEMENTS

- Relationships with providers
- Prompt and accurate payments to providers for services provided
- Negotiations with providers
- Quality assuring homes for our children
- Collating Data
- Communication with relevant professionals
- Taking prompt and effective action to safeguard our children when required

Herefordshire Fostering Panel

- The Fostering Panel's function is to make a recommendation about a person's suitability to be a Foster Carer
- The Fostering Panel considers the terms of the person's approval, including the number and age of children, and makes its recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker
- The Panel has a Panel Advisor (currently interim) to advise Panel members and manage the relationship between the Local Authority and the Panel, including quality assuring practice and feeding back to everyone involved with Panel work
- Panel members are independent of the Local Authority and representative of the local community in Herefordshire. Panel members also included elected members; Cllr Diana Toynbee and Cllr Robert Highfield
- There have been 3 new panel members recruited within the last 12 months.
- There have been 22 panels held between March 2023 - March 2024.
- Panels consider new Foster Carer approvals of Foster Carers and Connected carers, annual reviews, changes to terms of carers approval, post LADO reviews, resignations and notes exemptions to terms of carers approval.
- A Fostering Panel brochure introduces Panel Members so Panel invitees know who they will meet when they attend panel.
- Feedback from Fostering Panel invitees reports a positive and welcoming experience.

24

Any questions?

