

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 30 July 2024 at 2.00 pm

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

Councillors: Clare Davies, Dave Davies, Robert Highfield and Ben Proctor
Co-opted Member: Sam Pratley (Diocese of Hereford)

In attendance: Simon Cann (Committee Clerk) Steve Eccleston (Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager) Tilly Page (Complaints and Children's Rights Manager) Alfie Rees-Glinos (Democratic Services Support) Tina Russell (Corporate Director Children and Young People) Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer)

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Frank Cornthwaite, Councillor Rob Williams and Jan Frances (co-opted member families' representative).

11. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meetings were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings held on 7 May and 13 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A document containing questions received from members of the public and the responses given, plus supplementary questions and responses given, is attached at Appendix 1 to the minutes.

15. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from members of the council.

16. CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMPLAINTS

The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager introduced and gave an overview of the report. The key points covered included:

- The report focused on the municipal year from April 2023 to March 2024
- It looked at corporate complaints and statutory children's complaints representations that were made to the local authority.
- The report showed an increase in complaints, but also an increase in responses and improvement in response times to complaints.
- The report showed a decrease in escalations to stage a two and stage three of the statutory procedure.
- An error was corrected to reflect that 77% of complaints were resolved at stage one of the process and not 81% as was shown in the report itself.
- The report showed the number of referrals that were submitted by the Local Government Ombudsmen in the last year and compared that against data from the previous five years (since children's complaints were moved into corporate services).
- The report showed that 56 complaints across the whole council were submitted to the ombudsmen, 12 of those related to children services and 7 of those were fully investigated.
- The report included a breakdown of the types of complaints received. Clarity was provided on service failure complaints, which in some instances could simply relate to a follow up phone call not being made or email not being, so these were not necessarily major complaints.
- Common reasons for complaint escalation were included.
- It was highlighted that there was a persistent increase in complaints, but both the complaints and children's services were continuing to work on improving with ongoing improvements to the procedure.
- Responding to complaints within timescales had improved significantly over the last 12 months.

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. The committee enquired about how the service and users would know that complaints being received were actually informing and improving practice.
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager explained that when a complaint was assigned to an investigating officer they would complete a lessons learned template, which was fed back to and collated by the complaints service. The responsibility of learning from complaints fell to the service area the complaint was made about.
 - When a complaint was escalated to stage two or three of the statutory process, independent investigating officers would make recommendations that would relate to both the complaints service and children's services, and these recommendations would be taken forward to improve the practice, with any recommended changes being embedded in the practice of social workers, team managers and everybody involved.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People emphasised the importance of collating the learning logs, as these helped in developing new practice standards and changes in policy that could be implemented across the service. Learning issues relating to individuals and teams could be addressed via training or management intervention within the service.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People emphasised the importance of recording and sharing data relating to compliments received about the service. The director provided examples of 'Shout outs', whereby compliments and praise received from the public and workers for staff and teams within the service could be highlighted and learned from.
2. The committee asked if complainants were notified of changes to the service/actions taken as a result of their complaints.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that complainants would be notified of recommendations for actions to be taken forward as part of their complaint outcome.
 3. A committee member pointed out that the report only provided statistical data on complaints rather than actual examples of complaints.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the report was intended to give an overview of the complaints service, but stated that providing example of complaints would not be problematic.
 - As part of Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan and working with partners in Leeds, the intention was to make the complaints process even more robust, by ensuring the complainants were spoken with at the beginning of the complaint process and that audits were in place to check this was taking place.
 - Using independent people to undertake investigations at stage one of the process was another improvement being considered.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People suggested that the committee may want to revisit progress being made through the Improvement Plan at the end of the year.
 4. The committee enquired if it might be possible to arrange an informal session with families and get feedback from them about the process. The importance of obtaining input from young people and families was stressed.
 5. The Committee asked what was being to remedy the culture of failing to address the central core of complaint.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that at the beginning of the process the complaints team would record and establish the accuracy of what the parent or young person wished to complain about.
 - It was explained that the additional value of an investigator meeting at the outset, was that they could provide their understanding of the complaint and then agree, in writing, with the complainant what the scope and anticipated outcomes of the complaint were. Holding a conversation at the outset about what could and couldn't be achieved through the process was extremely important.
 - It was important that right at the start of the process complainants understood and were shown how to access each stage of the complaints procedure and what could and couldn't be achieved through the process.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stressed that there was a desire to bring complaint levels down, but suggested it was important to maintain a sense of perspective when considering the number of complaints

received in relation to the number of families and young people the service was working with.

6. A committee member asked if there was a mechanism in place for adoptive parents to input feedback or make complaints about the service.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that when an individual had adopted a child they had the same rights to make a complaint or offer feedback as anybody else. The complaints process was there for everybody to use. The Director also pointed out that Herefordshire Council worked within ACE (Adoption Central England), which ran support and information groups for all adoptive parents.
7. The committee asked what could be expected if the authority was operating at an outstanding level, such as Leeds was, and how would it be possible to measure and establish the impact the complaints service was having.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that one of the best ways of understanding whether a complaints process was working, was if complaints were reducing. A reduction and stabilising of the level of complaints would be in evidence, but there would still be a level of complaints in evidence.
 - There were breakdowns that could be done of specific service areas to establish if complaints were coming in from a particular part of the service and compliments would also highlight and provide feedback as to where the service was having a positive impact.
 - The service didn't currently formally ask parents and children whether they felt that a complaint had been dealt with in a satisfactory manner, but this could be incorporated in future. It was suggested that if complainants didn't progress to stage two of the process then that was an indicator that they were satisfied with the outcome at stage one of the investigation.
8. The committee suggested that people not moving on to stage two of the process did not necessarily mean they were satisfied with the outcome of stage one and that there were other factors that may have influenced their decision not to pursue the complaint any further - they may simply have felt that there was no point.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People acknowledged that some people might not move to stage two because they felt there was no point or, through communication with the service, understood that stage two would not achieve the outcome they desired.
 - The Director believed that in many cases the core of the original complaint was dealt with at stage one and complainants were happy that their issue had been resolved,
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager pointed out that complaints weren't closed without having any correspondence with the complainant, and phone calls and emails were used to follow up and establish if complainants were satisfied with the process and response. Complaints were only closed after a defined period of time.

9. The committee enquired what mechanisms were in place to demonstrate that changes, such as restorative practice training, were actually impacting practice and culture within the service.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that they felt the culture of an organisation was the people. A training course would not necessarily develop a culture, and that culture was defined by the way people spoke and interacted with one another.

10. The committee enquired as to whether or not a rising numbers of complaints should be seen as a positive or negative development.
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager suggested that rising numbers of complaints could be an indication that the work done over the last 18 months, in embedding an effective complaints procedure, had resulted in a higher level of complaints flowing through.
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager stated they were under no illusion that the service was perfect, but felt that the increase perhaps indicated that some, but not all families, felt they could come and make a complaint and that the service would: listen to them, hear their concerns and work with them to seek resolution whether that was at a stage one or two of the process.
 - The service was keen to reassure people that complaints were being taken very seriously by the council and the increase may have been the product of making the complaints process more accessible. Feedback to the service indicated some families were encouraging other disillusioned families to try using the complaints process, because the system had changed.
 - The complaints website page and contact details had been streamlined for ease of use, there was a permanent team of staff in place and the complaints service had been separated from the freedom of information service.

11. The committee asked for an update on historic complaints and a timescale for when a line would be drawn under those complaints.
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager explained that rather than having the service manage existing concerns, the previous Corporate Director had agreed that families should be offered the option to go through the complaints procedure again. Not all families had chosen to do this, as they were disillusioned with the process, but the service was offering reassurance that the procedure was different and that the statutory guidance was now being followed.
 - The service had been able to resolve many of the historic complaints, and those that remained outstanding were often the result of to people not wishing to utilise the complaints procedure. Efforts were being made to encourage people to use the improved process, but the service did not wish to push anybody into using a procedure they did not feel comfortable with.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that in terms of drawing a line under historic cases there was not an open door for people to come in with complaints that dated back years and years, partly because investigating such cases would not likely result in an historic outcome/decision being overturned or add value.
 - Historic cases in the system would be completed where possible, but staff and resources now had to be concentrated on dealing with peoples' current experiences.

12. The committee asked if the service was satisfied with the speed and manner in which complaints were being processed and dealt with.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that there was room for improvement, but the timeliness of completing complaint investigations had improved.
13. The committee enquired if personality clashes were considered as complaints.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that personality clashes were not a category as such, but where a complaint or concern was raised about a member of staff, then that worker and the manager would have a conversation about the complaint and reflect on what had happened.
14. The committee asked about the process of requesting a change of social worker.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained it was important to listen to the voice of and recognise the needs of the child rather than the parent in certain instances where a change of social worker was being requested. Building good relations was paramount to achieving positive outcomes, but where a relationship between a social worker and family was not working well there were mechanisms for adjustment.
15. A member of the committee asked how they could check that what they were being told by officers was the same as what the public would reflect, especially in instances where questions being asked by committee members on behalf of members of the public were met with data protection restricted responses.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the reason the service would not go into detail about issues members of the public raised with committee members was that it would result in a duplication for the service. Members of the public were advised on and had access to the complaints process, which they could use themselves. Using scrutiny to discuss a complaint that was going through the stages of the process would essentially result in unwanted duplication of work, which was a drain on time and resources. Scrutiny was about looking at the big processes rather than focusing on individual cases.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that one of the key elements of Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan would be reaching out to more children, young people and their parents to obtain proactive feedback on the service rather than waiting for complaints to come in. Comments gathered at the end of assessments, interventions, conferences and child protection meetings would provide the service with opportunities to obtain 'here and now' feedback on how users were finding the service.
16. The committee enquired as to what data the service had in relation to people who weren't complaining, and whether people from certain ethnic backgrounds or particular parts of the system were less likely to complain.
17. The committee considered whether groups were not complaining because the system was working well or because the mechanisms for them to complain weren't in place.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that any questions asked about the complainant were voluntary.
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager stated that the only information available about the complainant was what the complainant was willing to provide, and that information requested by the service related to what their involvement with the child was. There were no request for gender, ethnic background and other such information.
 - The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager had discussed the issue with the Equality Officer, who had concluded that if complainants wished to provide additional personal information they could.
 - The service did not wish to deter people from complaining by asking them to complete a form at the same time as they were making a complaint.
18. The committee acknowledged the rationale behind the approach, but were concerned that it meant the service didn't know if there were particular groups shut out of the complaints process.
19. The committee suggested that such knowledge gaps could potentially be filled through the use of occasional surveys.
- The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager stated they were happy to take the suggestion regarding surveys forward as a recommendation.
20. The committee asked how the corporate director intended to stop the process of duplication and resulting trauma caused by certain families having to go through and repeat the complaints process again and again with no satisfactory resolution.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that they were not going to repeat what their predecessors had done. The key issue was to find out what the outcome the complainants - be they historic or otherwise - wanted to achieve and then to have an honest conversation with them about whether that was an achievable outcome or not. It was noted that anybody anticipating that there would be a satisfactory outcome reported by every individual parent that had made a historic complaint, would likely be disappointed, because not all cases would necessarily be resolved with the desired outcome.
 - The service was not intending to duplicate or ask families to duplicate what they had been doing, but would instead focus attention on what it was families were seeking as an outcome and to make sure that there was due process.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People hoped to have the historic cases completed by March 2025, but if this was not the case, then any successor would be given very clear guidelines about what was outstanding, so that there was no further duplication.
21. The committee requested a description of how the complaint had been dealt with historically.
- The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager provided an overview of the operation of the service and noted that one of the biggest changes and improvements in the new operation was in the way that complaints were being dealt with through the statutory process rather than corporately.

- The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager stated that all complainants were advised that they could contact the Ombudsmen about their complaint at any time throughout the process.
 - The expectations of complainants were managed by explaining that in many instances the Ombudsmen would conclude that the complainant had approached them prematurely and return the case back to the local authority until earlier stages in the process had been completed/exhausted.
22. The committee enquired about the rise in complaints that the Ombudsmen had deemed to be premature and returned to the authority.
- The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager suspected it was about educating and sharing information with families to make sure that families understood the local authority's complaints procedure and when would be advisable to approach the Ombudsmen. This could potentially be communicated effectively via the Council's website.
23. The committee raised concerns about two similar complaints to the Ombudsmen – regarding correct process not being followed and applied - being upheld within a six month period and what action had been taken to avoid this occurring again.
- The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager explained the process could be difficult to follow and was currently being looked at by the NCMG (National Complaints Manager Group) and hopefully the review would result in clearer guidance, which would make it easier to determine which process should be followed.
24. The committee suggested that it should have more frequent sight of the complaint pipeline and information about resolved complaints.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated they would be happy to provide the committee with a quarterly report on the data the service was receiving, although there would need to be guidance from the committee to officers regarding whether the reports were being requested as information only documents or for use as substantive agenda item reports.
 - The Cabinet Member Children and Young People, stressed the most significant issue as being the need to rebuild trust and confidence in the service. There was still a significant way to go, but it was reassuring to see that certain families had gained confidence in the service to such an extent that they had stepped forward to become part of the improvement journey.

At the conclusion of the debate, the committee discussed potential recommendations and the following resolutions were agreed.

Resolved that:

- 1. That Herefordshire Council review and revise the information on its website concerning complaints, to include information on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman process, and information on where to seek assistance.**
- 2. For the children and young people service to report to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee within six months on the demand, flow, and timeliness of complaints. The report should include an analysis of those complaints and the ongoing development of the complaints process.**

- 3. That scrutiny recognises the work undertaken in partnership with Leeds City Council around complaints and asks that consideration be given to**
 - i. having an independent professional investigate and document the complaint and desired outcome**
 - ii. understanding the demographics and protected characteristics of people making complaints and**
 - iii. ensuring that children's young people's and families' views are incorporated into that review.**

17. FAMILIES' COMMISSION UPDATE

The Corporate Director Children and Young People introduced the report and provided an overview of the background, purpose and output of the Families Commission. The Director detailed that in September 2023 the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee had discussed the Families Commission report and received an update on progress being made by the service.

The Director explained that Herefordshire Children's Services had continued to undertake work around the outputs of the Families Commission. Phase 2 of its Improvement Plan included a range of opportunities for children, families and the public to continue to feedback on their experiences of Herefordshire Children's Services and to engage in the development of the service.

It was explained that the Improvement Board was due to share the Phase 2 Improvement Plan with the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 17 September 2024 and Cabinet on 26 September 2024.

The Corporate Director drew the committee's attention to a specific number of areas covered in the update report detailing ongoing work that would be incorporated into Phase 2 of the improvement plan, including:

- Early help activity and projects relating to the Community Safety Fund and, My Family, My School, My Community
- The strategic review of Peopletoo and the locality model.
- Continuation of the delivery of restorative practice, particularly in relation to new staff and throughout the partnership.
- Engagement and participation of children, young people, parents and carers
- The SafeLives review of domestic abuse responses in Herefordshire and domestic abuse training
- Complaints (which had been covered previous in item 7)

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points discussed are detailed below:

1. The committee enquired as to what the Safeguarding Partnership was doing to ensure that complaints procedures in every agency across the partnership were: accessible to families, working well and recording findings.
2. The committee asked if there was a need for a portal on the partnership web page that could provide people with access to the different partner complaints procedures.

- The Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager explained there was a complaint tile on the Safeguarding Partnership website, which guided people through to the relevant partner website - where they could access the appropriate complaints procedure.
 - The Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager referred to the Section 11 Audit Process as contained within the Children Act 2024, which required individual agencies to have robust child safeguarding practices in place. It was explained that partners would respond to an audit, which would then be checked and challenged by the Independent Scrutineer to establish what had been done to address issues in areas that had been identified as being inadequate or needing improvement. This information would then go onto an audit portal where partners were required to detail how they had addressed issues, what lessons had been learned and how processes or culture had changed as a result of a complaint being made.
3. The committee enquired about the roll-out of restorative and relational practice to partners and if/how this would be done at pace.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained partners were keen to receive the training, but capacity issues had slowed the pace of roll-out. Social workers and social carers were filtering the themes of the practice through to partners informally, but it was a priority of the Leeds partners to ensure that formal training sessions were rolled-out across the partnership as soon as possible.
 - The Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager pointed out of the importance of distinguishing between how the term 'restorative practice' could take on a different meaning depending on context. As an example it was pointed out that restorative practice could relate to working with families to restore damaged relationships, but could also be used to describe a means of early resolution of an issue when used in the context of the complaints process.

4. The committee referred to paragraph 8.E in the main report:

“How will Herefordshire Children’s Services support social workers to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of parents and families and enable their participation in planning to keep their children safe and promote their wellbeing?”

The committee enquired how the service would support social workers especially in relation to ensuring caseloads were manageable.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People, explained that the work being done around the workload focused on 'good conditions for practice', which aimed to ensure that the conditions were right to enable staff to deliver good practice. Factors including; manageable caseloads, access to managers, regular supervision, good (and clear) practice standards, along with a robust and easy to use IT system, were all being focused on to ensure that social workers and all staff were supported in delivering good practice.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that caseloads, particularly within children in care teams had been stable recently. However, there had been some challenge in the assessment teams and the service had been keeping a close eye on this to ensure they could react to caseload spikes in a swift and effective manner. In some instances, agency workers could be used to help manage situations, but ensuring the conditions of

practice were right was key to maintaining long-term and continued stability, which in turn would ensure Herefordshire Council was an employer of choice.

5. The committee referred to the cultural friction described in the report and enquired why certain partners had not always been supportive of the restorative approach.
6. The committee asked how it would be possible to determine if restorative approaches were being taken forward and if improvements were being made as result.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that they had not personally encountered any resistance to the restorative training from partners, but described situations where there had been confusion between restorative practice and management of risk. It was hoped that this would come to light, in a helpful way, once the training was delivered to partners.
 - The Corporate Director noted that from experience it appeared that partners were very keen to adopt ways of working that included: 'Think Family, engagement of the wider family and strength-based approaches.
7. The committee enquired how the service would know that practice was changing within partnerships.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People identified two areas that could be used to determine if the practice was working. Firstly asking children, young people and parents about how they felt the partnership was working together, whether they felt the right professionals had been involved and, if not, which professionals they thought should have been involved. Secondly key performance indicator data could provide some headline around quality; repeat assessments and repeat child protection plans were good indicators of whether the service and what had been achieved was allowing families to step down and sustain.
8. The committee asked for further detail about the 'Think Family' approach.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that Think Family was a term applied to an existing practice, which involved widening focus from, for example, just a parent and their child, to bringing in the wider extended relatives and considering the impact they had on an individual's life. It involved using knowledge of an individual's wider family/network to be able to link them up with appropriate services that could help them. Think Family tied in with and would be bolstered by effective locality working and locality models. The Director confirmed that the Think Family approach would be embedded as a way of working across the partnership.
9. A committee member suggested that the layout of the report and its content made it difficult to gain a sense of how much progress had been made in addressing the questions that had emerged from the Families Commission.
10. A committee member requested assurance that recommendations from the Fostering Panel would be given weight and sufficient attention.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People gave the committee an assurance that they would check where recommendations from the panel -

relating to general service development - went and ensure that responses and feedback were looped back to the panel. An assurance was also given that recommendations relating to specific children would be incorporated into the child's case.

11. The committee enquired as to what a 'child friendly Herefordshire' would look like.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People suggested that a child friendly Herefordshire would involve people being able to see the importance of children in all of the council's policies and procedures. The Director felt that local politicians/councillors - as elected representatives of the public - should also play a key role in providing feedback from the public and support in shaping Hereford into becoming a child friendly place to live.
12. The committee suggested that the idea of child friendly Hereford should be included as part of the discussion in the 'Including children's voices in council policy' item scheduled for the committee's November meeting.
 - The Cabinet Member Children and Young People gave examples of child friendly activity carried out at Leeds, and suggested that achieving child friendly status wasn't a destination, but a concept and a way to exist, which needed to be embraced by the council, its partners and communities.
13. The committee enquired about the long-term sustainability of early help and families and community support projects that were being funded through the Police and Crime Commissioner and My Family, My School, My Community.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that they had one eye on what would happen when the funding for those services ended, as it would not be a simple case of the council taking over future funding for those projects.
 - The Corporate Director explained they had taken on the role of Senior Responsible Officer and together with the Head of Service for Early Help were working closely with content providers to make sure that the added value the projects were bringing to families was understood. When what had and hadn't worked was understood, it would be possible to establish where future funding income for growth and alternative services might come from - to ensure that there was no 'cliff edge' for the families that had been worked with through the projects.
14. The committee highlighted instances where information about available funding for groups such as youth clubs had come through late and noted that in some instances when funding was approved it was processed too late to be used properly. The committee suggested that when funding for projects was available and approved, it needed to be processed swiftly.
15. The committee noted that every family that had participated in the Families Commission had expressed a desire to ensure that their painful experiences should be used to improve the service, so that others didn't have to go through what they had. The committee asked if the service was 'getting there' in terms of improvement or whether there was still work to be done.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained there was still much work to do, but was pleased with Phase 2 of the Improvement Plan. There would be a refocusing of the Improvement Board with the quality assurance framework, which would triangulate around the key performance indicators, the audit and the service user feedback about whether or not the service was improving.

At the conclusion of the debate, the committee discussed potential recommendations and the following resolutions were agreed.

Resolved that:

- 1. That Herefordshire Council provide analysis of funding provided through the Police and Crime Commissioner and My Family, My School, My Community to demonstrate that funding and resources are focused on delivering sustained early help and support for families and communities.**
- 2. The funding available to support development of a child-friendly Herefordshire is distributed as rapidly as possible.**

18. WORK PROGRAMME

Due to time limitations the committee agreed to refer the work programme item until the next scheduled meeting.

19. CHAIR UPDATE

No updates were provided.

20. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 17 September 2pm

21. APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Questions from members of the public were published as a supplement to the agenda here:

[\(Public Pack\)SUPPLEMENT - Item 5 Questions from members of the public Agenda Supplement for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, 30/07/2024 14:00 \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

Responses to supplementary questions are detailed below:

Supplementary questions from members of the public – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, 30 July

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms. Hannah Currie Hereford	Given the issues raised historically about inaccurate and false data being processed and shared with third parties and in the past few days Paul Walker has written personally to me to apologise for again incorrect processing of personal information in just the past 10 days. Do you not	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

		think it is time to accept that the case of ‘BT & GT (Children : twins – adoption)’ was not an isolated incident of a "deliberate act to mislead" and either support a call for a public inquiry or agree that the time and resources need to be made available for the independent reviews the families were promised?	
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Response by Cabinet Member Children and Young People

As reported to scrutiny in the Families Commission update report “alongside the work of the service to address the key consideration coming from the panel report, there have been further follow up meetings with families who attended the Commission to further address questions that related directly to the families. For those families where additional questions were raised by the chair of the independent panel directly to the local authority, further meetings were offered to families by the Leader of the Council, The Lead Member for Children’s Services, the Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council and the Corporate Director for Children and Young people. A number of families attended further meetings represented by the Service Director for Improvement, the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Children’s Services. Each meeting clarified a number of issues, concerns and ‘bottom lines’ which were subsequently followed up to resolve relevant matters for individual families”

This work has been an independent review and the experiences of those families has been heard and have or are being addressed on an individual basis as necessary.

As a council, we are committed to delivering the best for our children and families and this commitment is set out as a priority in our Council Plan. The inspection by OFSTED of Children’s Services in June 22 has provided a comprehensive review of concerns relating to practice that requires improvement. We have accepted the findings of that inspection and this has been the basis for the children’s improvement plan. A phase two of this plan was agreed at the Improvement Board on 17th July 24. Herefordshire children services improvement remains under the scrutiny of Ofsted through regular monitoring visits and the DfE through the Commissioner with additional support from Leeds as a sector led improvement partner and the scrutiny of the multi-agency improvement board. The decision for any public inquiry rests with the secretary of state and not with the LA, our priority is to ensure our financial and staffing resources are focused on making the improvement required.

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary question	Question to
PQ 2	Mr. James McGeown Weobley	Thank you for most useful answer, you state: “Parental views should be recorded within an assessment or written as a separate document and placed on file and referenced within the case file to ensure they are linked to the appropriate assessment.” This is exactly what I wanted and have been trying to achieve through my understanding of your “Children’s Representations and Complaints” procedure. Since 20 th June I have submitted nine formal	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

		<p>complaints. All on different dates. All raising new issues. All Royal Mail, Plough Lane, delivery confirmation. Not a single acknowledgement and reference have I received.</p> <p>I have now followed your suggestion:</p> <p>“If you would like to provide detail to the DCS” and have sent “Tina Russell DCS”, package of everything including “Notice of Intent” to seek help from Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.</p> <p>Will this ensure everything’s reviewed?</p>	
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Response by Corporate Director Children and Young People

A written response from the Corporate Director Children and Young People was sent directly to Mr and Mrs McGeown addressing the issues raised in this question.

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary question	Question to
PQ3	Mrs. Megan McGeown Weobley	<p>I believe you have misunderstood the question.</p> <p>It is about inappropriate use of MARF which was why NFA recording commenced October 2018. Therefore you have not answered the question:</p> <p>“Is it still an ongoing intention and desire of Herefordshire Council to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals and NFA’s”?</p> <p>If yes and in 2023 alone there were 884 not progressed, including a significant number of loving families of good standing who didn’t want interference in their lives from Local Authority.</p> <p>To help reduce this number would it be a good idea to formally make Social Workers of all ranks aware of:</p> <p>“Right Help Right Time” guidance from “Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership”. This contains statutory guidance for Local Authority intervention and based on experience there appears some lack of knowledge of its existence or understanding of its contents?</p>	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Response by Cabinet Member Children and Young People

There will always be a number of “contacts” received in MASH that need social work oversight to make a decision based on what that appropriate pathway to a service that best meets the child’s needs is. We support all members of the public to refer any concern they have for the welfare or protection of a child through to MASH. Our partners understand that where they make referrals into MASH, parental consent must be sought, unless the referred concern relates to a child protection issue. We do not seek to get involved in families lives

where they do not want us to and we balance this with ensuring we are acting on our legal duty to investigate concerns regarding significant harm that are reported to us.

We are continuing our work with partners to ensure they have the knowledge, and a system that supports them, to send requests for support services direct to services so families can receive the right help in a timely way. Importantly this will also reduce any unnecessary workload within the MASH system. We have recently developed the process between Early Help and MASH for professionals and we are in the process of developing a “locality model” for our children services, so we can promote closer connectivity with the early help offer and between partners working as a multi-agency team alongside children, young people and their families.

The Herefordshire Children Safeguarding Partnership is leading work to implement the new Working Together 2023 and we are now delivering against our Improvement plan Phase 2. Within that work, we are developing our “Think Family” approach, providing training to partners on Restorative Practice and are rolling out multi-agency training to ensure, as a multi-agency group, we understand how best “restorative practice” works in practice with children and families. All these activities will give us opportunities to ensure our staff and our partners are well cited on our threshold guidance “Right Help Right Time”

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary question	Question to
PQ 4	Ms. Maggie Steel Hereford	My question is this, how will you engage with the public, so that you can properly scrutinize what officers are writing and distinguish between what is written to assuage you and what is really happening on the ground?	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Response by Cabinet Member Children and Young People

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee recognise the vital importance of hearing the voices of children, families and members of the public.

It is important to note that the cabinet member(s), officers and multi-agency partners who present their reports to scrutiny are also engaged, in various ways, with members of the public and those who have been, or continue to use the Childrens Services. Scrutiny takes how children, young people and families have been engaged and how their experiences have influenced work into account as it scrutinises presentations made. It is not appropriate in many instances to require members of the public to explain their own very personal circumstances during committee proceedings

It is important to contextualise, the principal role of scrutiny is to influence the policies and decisions made by the council and other organisations involved within local multi-agency working. Scrutiny is a formal meeting convened in public to enable locally elected members to transact local authority business with the object of scrutinising and reaching decisions – or formulating recommendations as a basis for those decisions for how it believe services can be improved.