

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 26 November 2024 at 2.00 pm

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

Councillors: Frank Cornthwaite, Clare Davies, Dave Davies, Robert Highfield and Ben Proctor

In attendance: Councillors Ivan Powell (Cabinet Member Children and Young People, Lauren Rogers (Rural Media)

Officers: Simon Cann (Democratic Services Officer), Joelle Higgins (Democratic Services Support), Jessica Kaira (Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence), David Land (Head of Transport and Access Services), Emily Lowe (Talk Community Development Lead – Remote attendee), Tilly Page (Complaints and Children’s Rights Manager) Zoe Richards (Head of Service Starting Well – remote attendee), Siobhan Riddle (Principle Strategic Planning Officer), Tina Russell (Corporate Director Children and Young People), Julia Stephenson (Public Health Lead Children and Young People), Rosie Thomas-Easton (Director of Strategy and Transformation), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer)

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Jan Frances – Co-opted Families’ Representative

34. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There had been no named substitutes.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

36. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

37. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A document containing questions received from members of the public and the responses provided was published as a supplement to the agenda on the Herefordshire Council website.

38. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from members of the council.

39. INCLUDING CHILDREN'S VOICES IN COUNCIL POLICY

The committee took the report as read and the Chair explained that the item would allow for consideration of the importance that the voice of children and young people played not just from a social care perspective, but within wider society. It was noted that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) stated that children had the right to be heard and to give their opinions freely on issues that affected them, and that adults should listen to and take children seriously.

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 invited the representative from [Rural Media](#) to explain what the enterprise did.
 - The representative explained that Rural Media was a Herefordshire-based charity and social enterprise with a 30-year track record of empowering communities to share stories and make their voices heard to enable positive change.
 - In the last three years the enterprise had worked with approximately 3,500 young people - up to the age of 25 - across Herefordshire, to help equip them with the skills and platforms to be able to express their voices and connect them with decision makers/people in positions of power using a varied set of communication forms including: podcasts, exhibitions and film.
 - The Rural Media representative described a recent collaboration with a number of organisations including Talk Community to instigate a piece of work called 'Ledbury Listening', which had used creative consultation to reach around 700 8-18 year-olds from the Ledbury area. Through open conversations the project had been able to uncover many of the experiences, ambitions and ideas for shaping the town's future held by young people.
 - It was explained that 'creative consultation' involved combining traditional surveys with plenty of room for individual comments and creative pop-up sessions involving: audio recording, poetry, magazine making and portrait photography. Group and on-to-one conversations with young people had also been successful in understanding what young people were feeling and what they wanted to say.
 - The project had been successful and had given rise to the formation of a Youth Council being formed in collaboration between John Masefield High School and Ledbury Town Council.
 - It was explained that two town council policy changes had been implemented based on recommendations contained within the Ledbury Listens published report. Future involvement of young people in Ledbury Town Council planning decisions and greater facility access for young people had also been outcomes of the work carried out.

- Similar work was being carried out in other Herefordshire market towns and Rural Media had been working closely with Hereford City Youth Council to speak with young people in the city about their views and ambitions on a broad set of issues. It was felt that the key to success would be making the consultations fun and ensuring that young people were being connected to people in positions of power.
2. The committee noted that Rural Media had worked with Herefordshire Council and had been the recipient of grant funding through the council. The committee felt that the work being carried out by Rural Media provided some good examples of how the council could work collaboratively across the county to get the best out of young people and make sure their voices were being heard.
 3. The Chair explained that the council was exploring how Herefordshire could become a child friendly county and described how Herefordshire councillors and officers had recently met with counterparts from Coventry City Council and Leeds City Council to look at the 'Child Friendly Cov' campaign. This campaign aimed to ensure that Coventry was a child friendly city where young people would feel valued and supported - with a view to making Coventry the best place in the UK for children and young people to live.
 4. The Chair hoped that Herefordshire Council might consider taking on the challenge of striving to be the best location in the UK for children and young people to live.
 5. The committee noted that the report demonstrated there were excellent examples of good practice regarding coordination, consultation and engagement within the social care sphere and special education needs section.
 6. The committee enquired as to what innovative engagement methods had proven to be effective and how they had been applied.
 - The Rural Media representative stated that they had enabled children and young people to gain technical and transferable skills by providing them with opportunities to do something unique or unusual that they couldn't necessarily access through education or home schooling. A participation funnel model was in place which Rural Media had used to make opportunities available to the largest number of children as was possible.
 - It was explained that conducting focused pieces of intervention work with smaller groups allowed stronger relationships to be forged, and often children who had engaged with activities at the age of 11 would continue coming back to explore opportunities up to the age of 25.
 7. The committee enquired as to whether there was a mechanism in place to share the work of Rural Media with Herefordshire Council and the Safeguarding Partnership.
 - The Rural Media representative explained that they tended to work closely through their existing network of Herefordshire contacts such as the Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support Service (HVOSS) Youth Forum, which was made up of around 60 third sector organisations. Rural Media did not rely on just putting things through schools or on social media and used a variety of techniques and methods to promote opportunities.

8. The committee asked how the council evaluated the inclusivity and effectiveness of consultations with children and young people, especially those involving groups that were seldom heard/harder to reach.
 - The Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence explained that the Intelligence Unit was involved in this to a limited degree when services approached the unit about a particular consultation. For online surveys the unit would use Snap software, and the unit would offer advice and guidance on the questions that should be being asked, to make sure they were tailored to the audience that the consultations were being directed at.
 - Care was taken to ensure that questions intended for particular groups - such as children and young people - were engaging. As part of the commissioning process for tenders on surveys, such as the 'Children's quality of life survey' or 'Health and well-being survey', consultants on research had to be clear about the methodology that they would be using to ensure that they captured a representative example, including hard to reach sections of communities.
 - Recent surveys that aimed to capture feedback from people in deprived areas had used quota sampling, screening questions and post code information to ensure they were reaching the intended targets. The unit worked closely with the communications team within the council and frequently used the council website and social media to help promote survey activity that was being conducted.
9. The committee asked if the council used feedback loops to demonstrate how children and young people's contributions had been used.
10. The committee raised concerns that members of the City Youth Council had articulated that many young people felt they were over-consulted about things, but never heard anything back about their input. This often generated feelings of powerlessness and disillusionment within the groups being surveyed and engaged with.
 - The Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence suggested this was one of the negative points around the council not having a central coordination unit. Services would seek advice about producing and designing questionnaires and capturing particular demographics, and the information and results obtained would go back to that service, but would not be shared with services across the council - this was a potential area for improvement.
 - The Director of Strategy and Transformation explained there were some good examples of council services using feedback loops in relation to engagement activity being carried out within adult social care. Talk Community had been using different models and methodologies such as the 'You said we did' approach - where people and groups who had responded to surveys were shown how their feedback would shape and develop services.
 - The Director of Strategy and Transformation stated that there was significant learning that could be taken from other areas within the council to support the work being done in children's. Sharing consultation and engagement activities at the planning stages, by

including relevant and related services would play an important role going forward and there were various aspects of learning that could be taken from the corporate area that would translate well to children's services.

11. The committee asked if there was any evidence that publicising consultations through schools was effective across the demographics and whether or not it was good practice that should be built on.

- The Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence noted that one demographic the council was trying hard to capture was home schooled children. They had used approaches, such as creating a bespoke version of the 'Quality of life survey' for those children and young people who were schooled from home - this contained questions that were likely to be more relevant to them than those included in the standard survey.
- The Principle Strategic Planning Officer pointed out the importance of engaging with the heads of schools months in advance of carrying out surveys. This approach had recently been taken for a survey carried out in Herefordshire Sixth Form College and had yielded better results than historic engagements where consultants had gone in cold.
- The Rural Media representative echoed the benefits of prep work before engagement and consultation, and described how Rural Media typically carried out ground work 6-12 months before conducting a survey with young people - to 'wet their appetites' and to avoid being viewed as extractive.

12. The committee asked if there was a process in place to follow up and engage with marginalised children who may have fallen off the grid.

- The Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence stated that the term 'marginalised' could cover multiple areas, but gave an example of how, when trying to engage with children from deprived areas, they had used postcodes to make sure that communications were reaching the intended audience. It was acknowledged that the council was falling short in some areas, but that a review and update of its consultation guidance document, which was six years old, was a priority.

13. The committee enquired if and how the council was building capacity for training and resources for qualitative and participatory methods of co-production.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People pointed out that there was some specific capacity around children in care, but for the rest of the service there was no additional capacity or additional training. Communicating with children was seen as part of the usual experience for the workforce within children's services and was built in as part of the job.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated they were pleased with the evidence in the report that described how other services across the council had embraced and encouraged engagement with children and young people. It had also highlighted that there was no one way or method for effectively targeting groups of children and young people and that there needed to be different

engagements and opportunities for the various different groups/cohorts of children and young people.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People noted that engagement and consultation methods and approaches needed to be wide-ranging and varied to suit circumstances. For example, seeking retrospective feedback about the service from people who had suffered child abuse was likely to be more productive than live engagement at the time the abuse was taking place. Alternately, some engagement worked better when it was carried out in advance of certain activities, such as speaking to children and young people on their views and opinions around shaping and developing forthcoming council policy before it had been implemented.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People felt it was important that there was a range of methods of engagement and consultation in place across the services within the council. It was pointed out that a central team/unit guiding and receiving feedback from surveys, engagement and consultation across the council could create a bottleneck within the system and potentially limit innovative ideas and approaches with regards to engagement being used around a specific service or topic.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People urged caution regarding the idea of having a single team/person coordinating all activity in this area, but suggested that in some instances, such as working towards creating a child friendly Herefordshire, it might be of benefit to have an overarching coordinator and additional capacity.

14. The committee asked what the council's expectations of a service manager were in relation to ensuring that the voice of young people had been heard, and how a service manager would know that they had met requirements. It was also asked whose job it was to set those expectations and where they were reflected in the council.

- The Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence pointed out that there was a consultation guidance document, but that this was not currently being promoted heavily enough. There was nothing specific to children and young people within the document, although it was due to be revised.
- There was a need to ensure that the revised consultation guidance didn't just focus on formal consultations and instead encouraged principles to be built into the day-to-day approach that council officers adopted when they were carrying out their work – this would ensure the views of young people were heard on a daily basis and not just when consultations were being carried out.

15. The committee enquired as to whether there was a policy guidance document that helped managers to think about the wider complexities around the issues of consultation and engagement.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that a document of this nature would be useful, especially in highlighting and clarifying the difference between engagement, consultation, feedback and co-production. Children's services had recently done a piece of work that emphasised how participation and engagement were not the

same as obtaining service user feedback from young people about their views and opinions of the service they had received.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People suggested that a consultation guidance document would be a good place to outline the difference between engagement, participation and user feedback, with a child focus on each of those areas. The document could then be used as part of the assurance process at various levels such as CLT and scrutiny.

16. The committee highlighted concerns from members of the City Youth Council that young people felt they had articulated clearly about issues that were important to them, such as: having more free activities for teenagers, reliable public transport and mental health, but had then been approached by the council with questionnaires about these same issues. The committee acknowledged the potential risks of having a central unit for coordinating and storing all survey and consultation work, but asked how the council could ensure that it wasn't asking young people duplicate questions for which it already had the answers.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that they had a network of connections in and across the council. The City Youth Council was one group of young people, but there were many cohorts defined by factors such as: age, ability, locality and experience. The challenge was making sure there was assurance that each of these had been listened to and information obtained from surveys and consultations was easily available to others within the network if required.
- When looking at particular priorities for future plans, knowing where to go to and where to share information would be helpful and the service was committed to strengthening the network and relationships of partners with regards to sharing and funnelling information where and when it was required.

17. The committee acknowledged the benefits, at a service management level, of directorates and partners using the network effectively and talking to one another as a means of sharing information effectively, but asked how cabinet would be able to make informed strategic/political decisions without all the available information that had been obtained being pooled together in one place.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that when including the voice of children and young people in the development of the council's priority plans, the sources of various strands could be identified and any gaps addressed. Targeted consultations could also be used to bolster information required around strategic planning.
- Promoting a child friendly Herefordshire would be useful going forward, as it would keep the importance of including the voice of the child in policy development on everybody's mind and ensure it became an automatic consideration for all relevant decisions as time went on.
- The Director of Strategy and Transformation explained that planning discussions within the CLT, management and service teams were improving. Work was anticipated in relation to developing internal

service planning templates, which would focus on equalities in the broadest sense, not just children and young people. In terms of service planning and getting priorities on the cabinet agenda, the templates would go into considerable detail in relation to the widest range of protected characteristics, taking into consideration the needs and aspirations of people within those groups, including children and young people.

- The Rural Media representative emphasised that involving external organisations would be crucial in creating a child friendly Herefordshire. Rural Media was currently working around a youth activity theme of democratic participation and was considering what that looked like beyond voting. It was noted that bodies such as citizens assemblies and standing youth forums did come with large financial costs, but could potentially be transformative in embedding young people's voices into key existing decision making processes.

18. The committee highlighted the role of the Youth Parliament in Coventry and how that fed into 'Child Friendly Cov' and Coventry City Council policies.

- The Head of Corporate Performance and Intelligence provided details of the quality impact assessment that had to be completed whenever any policy changes were being considered. These assessments did not necessarily consider the voice of the child, but would look at the impact of proposed policy changes on young people. Equality factors were also considered as part of the policy developing process, these picked up the concerns of children and young people who came under a protected characteristic.

19. The committee enquired as to whether views and opinions being put forward by young people were being listened to and acted on. It was suggested that where recommendations being made were considered to be 'neutral' then these should be given automatic consideration.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People highlighted the importance of differentiating and distinguishing between consultation, co-production and engagement. It was crucial that feedback responding to recommendations from young people was honest and explained that certain suggestions had been heard and listened to, but could not be implemented.
- It was stated that as a starting point for an honest conversation with young people it would be useful to explain from the outset what the anticipated outcome or purpose of a consultation, co-production or survey was, and then follow this up with clear feedback.

20. The committee asked what the council had been doing in trying to understand what the transport issues for young people in the county were and if/how this had helped shape decisions that had been made to address the issues.

- The Head of Transport and Access Services explained the challenge involved in trying to engage children and young people on a fairly 'dry' subject such as the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The service had engaged and talked with young people, and identified that they wanted to be able to get around easily on public transport, especially later on in the evenings.

- It was acknowledged that the consultation papers for the Local Transport Plan and the Local Cycling Walking and Wheeling Infrastructure Plan (LCWWIP) were both strategic statutory documents that were dry in tone.
 - There had been engagement, but not consultation, involving speaking to young people to try and get their views, however providing feedback on the highlighted issues had been challenging because not much of what was being raised by young people was within the council's gift. Bus services were run by bus operators, train services were run and by train operators and the council didn't run taxi services.
 - The challenge was how to feed back to young people that their voices had been heard and then how to get those voices heard by operators who might be able to make changes to their services. A certain amount of bus service improvement plan funding had been allocated to Herefordshire Council, and there were plans to extend some services, but this was expensive in a relatively rural county with a low population
 - A key challenge would be considering the most effective way to direct the voice that the council was trying to capture towards the people that could actually implement changes and improvements to transport services.
21. The committee enquired how beneficial it had been to carry out very targeted and bespoke consultations – such as those used in the Local Plan – around current and live activity, compared against taking a longitudinal approach which sought to capture, through maintained dialogues, the kind of things that the council 'just wanted to know'.
22. The committee asked what the next steps were in relation to the council's objective to give children the best start in life and to capture their views and lived experiences to help shape council services.
- The Director of Strategy and Transformation explained that the council was currently in the process of reviewing delivery plans within the Council Plan and would be looking across services to see what kind of progress had been made against the deliverables that had been signed up to.
 - This would include establishing and reviewing what had been done across all services in relation to capturing children and young people's voices and evaluating: what had worked well, what could be learned and what needed to be done in the following year to continue to make an impact. It was suggested that once these reviews had been carried out the findings could be reported back to scrutiny.
 - The Director of Strategy and Transformation suggested that the co-production toolkit, providing a strategic approach to co-production for adult social care, could be learned from and potentially adapted by children's social care. While the cohorts involved were different, the principles and methodologies would resonate and be the same.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People noted that there would be benefits from sharing the toolkits and guidance documents

not just across the council, but also with the wider partnership and local businesses. This would help further promote and encourage a child friendly Herefordshire approach to activity in the county.

23. The committee raised concerns about bus passes for children being limited to certain times throughout the day, which was especially problematic for children living in rural areas.
 - The Head of Transport and Access Services explained that they were intending to meet with local bus operators to discuss whether such time limits and restrictions could be adjusted or possibly removed.
24. The committee invited comment from other attending officers.
 - The Public Health Lead - Children and Young People/Sexual Health explained that the results of the 'Children's Health and well-being survey' that had taken place at schools and colleges during the summer were currently being processed, and findings/headlines from that were anticipated for January 2025.
 - The Public Health Lead detailed how feedback from consultation with service users had informed the commissioning process with regards to the requirements of young people for a sexual health clinic in Herefordshire. It was noted that aspirations and views obtained from young people taking part in focus groups had been considerably more open and informative than would be the case via online surveys.
 - The Head of Service Starting Well stated that good practice within commissioning had been evidenced, but there was a need for greater consistency across the whole service.
 - A practical example of good practice detailed how, as part of a tender for a new children's home project, young people had been engaged with for their views on what they were looking for and expecting from a good children's home provision and this feedback was used to inform the specification. A question developed by the children was also used as part of the procurement and responses were scored as part of the tender process.
 - An enquiry made by young people regarding whether DIY training and work experience opportunities could be included by potential providers of the project was taken up by the relevant service manager to explore whether building contractors might be able to provide such opportunities in future.
 - The Talk Community Development Lead described the creative ways of engagement adopted as part of the 'Let's Talk' project, which had fed into the Early Help and Prevention Plan. It was noted that children and families had been much more comfortable sharing and engaging with community group-led events and focus groups than they would have been through more standard approaches such as online surveys.
25. The committee suggested that it might be useful if council records of home schooled children in the county were used to ensure that those children received

the same engagement material and information as children attending schools in the county.

- The Cabinet Member Children and Young People noted the healthy degree of consultation work being carried out with children and young people across the council services.

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

Resolved:

That Herefordshire Council

- 1. Review and promote good practice in soliciting, capturing and sharing the voice of the child across the service areas of the council, partners and stakeholders, ensuring that:**
 - a. this practice builds on the good examples of engagement and consultation which have been developed in some areas of council business and by outside organisations,**
 - b. children and young people are involved in that process,**
 - c. their ideas and wishes are adopted where possible, and where not possible the reasons for that are explained, and**
 - d. it engages with other services, town and city youth councils and other youth projects to ensure it understands perspectives children and young people have articulated.**
- 2. Ensures that its scrutiny committees embed the need to consider the voice of children and young people when carrying out its work.**

40. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered its work programme for 2024/25, the key points of the discussion were:

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People suggested the SEND item scheduled for the committee's January meeting might benefit from incorporating an overview of feedback from the current Ofsted inspection
- The committee agreed that the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership annual report would be included as an item in the March 2025 meeting, to sit alongside the child exploitation item. A briefing on the report with the Independent Scrutineer was also requested.
- The committee agreed to hold a workshop to consider potential topics and objectives for its work programme and future briefings including: mental health needs, quality of life, exploitation and schools attainment.

Resolved:

The committee unanimously approved the work programme that had been put before it.

41. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 21 January 2024, 2pm

The meeting ended at 16:16pm

Chairperson