

## **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 21 January 2025 at 2.00 pm**

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

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

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

**Officers:** Simon Cann (Committee Clerk), Ruth Coals (QA Lead for Implementation of Working Together 24), Kathryn Cobain (Chief Nursing Officer and Director of Quality H&W ICB), Kevin Crompton (Independent Scrutineer), Anne-Marie Kemp (Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager), Heather Manning (Head of Safeguarding & Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults, Children and Children Looked After), Alfie Rees-Glinos (Democratic Services Support Assistant), Tina Russell (Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People), Superintendent Helen Wain (Chair of Community Safety Partnership/West Mercia Police), Christine Wellington (Head of MASH and Assessment), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer)

### **42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Jan Frances (Co-opted member families' representative).

### **43. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

No named substitutes had been received.

### **44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **45. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

### **46. 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. Supplementary questions and responses given, are attached at Appendix 1 to the minutes of this meeting.

**47. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

No questions had been received from members of the council.

**48. HEREFORDSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP - YEARLY REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS REPORT 2023-24**

The Independent Scrutineer introduced and provided an overview of the report focusing on the progress, challenges and future actions of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP).

It was explained that the report covered the period from April 2023 to March 2024 and evaluated governance, data management and multi-agency collaboration in safeguarding children. It was noted that the partnership structure had undergone revisions to align it with the 'Working Together 2023' national guidance.

**Progress and key achievements**

It was pointed out that multi-agency governance processes were clearer and more structured, which had led to an improvement in accountability.

The partnership had developed a multi-agency data set to track safeguarding issues across services. More effective data sharing had helped partners to identify risks faster, and the use of audits, performance reviews and case studies had increased insight into the service effectiveness.

The improved response to child exploitation was noted and the 'Get Safe' team was highlighted as an example of effective multi-agency collaboration. Police intelligence had been used to identify hotspots for exploitation risks and there had been stronger information sharing between agencies, which had led to more timely interventions.

There had been increased training for social workers and police officers to recognise and address safeguarding concerns. New policies and procedures had been introduced for case audits and performance management.

The role of independent scrutiny had been strengthened to ensure objective evaluation of the partnership's performance and the lead safeguarding partners had approved a new scrutiny plan, which aligned with national expectations.

**Challenges Identified**

The Independent Scrutineer explained that embedding the Working Together 2023 guidance had required policy updates, training and procedural changes and that full implementation was still in progress.

It was noted that whilst data sharing had improved, analysis across agencies still needed refinement. Each agency collected separate data, making it difficult to form a unified picture of child safeguarding issues, but the quality and effectiveness group had been working on integrating and analysing multi-agency data more effectively.

Staff turnover in social work and key safeguarding roles remained a challenge, but the partnership was focusing on retention strategies and improving supervision quality.

Regarding case file quality and documentation issues it had been noted that some care plans and assessments lacked child-centred language, which made it hard to track

meaningful interventions. It had been pointed out that social workers needed to improve recording and documentation especially for children with complex needs. It was also stated that managers needed to ensure better oversight of case work to prevent delays in interventions.

### **Future Actions and Next Steps**

The Independent Scrutineer outlined the next steps for the partnership. There would be a need to strengthen and enhance governance measures to hold agencies accountable for safeguarding performance, along with regular multi-agency reviews to ensure ongoing progress.

The multi-agency data system would need to be refined to provide clearer insights on child safety trends and ensure better coordination between the police, social care and health sectors.

Additional training needed to be provided for frontline workers to enhance risk assessment and case management skills and there was a need to increase awareness of Working Together 2023 guidance across all safeguarding agencies.

There would be a drive to expand early help services to prevent children from entering the child protection system, along with greater engagement with families to support at-risk children before serious intervention was needed.

The Independent Scrutineer praised the overall progress made by the partnership in relation to governance and child exploitation response, but pointed out that further improvement and refinement was required in data usage. The partnership also needed to continue embedding national safeguarding guidance effectively.

1. The committee welcomed the progress that had been made, but enquired whether the list of safeguarding concerns was too focused on national issues that weren't relevant to Herefordshire and that local risks were being missed or not adequately addressed.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People pointed out that the list addressed everything on the national agenda. All items were dealt with proportionally and there was a risk of developing a false sense of security by focusing too heavily on certain areas and not highlighting and being aware of everything on the national agenda.
  - The Superintendent West Mercia Police highlighted the risk of associating and linking certain issues to certain ethnic groups.
  - An assurance was given that safeguarding policies were regularly updated based on evolving risks and that local risk assessments ensured safeguarding efforts reflected Herefordshire-specific concerns and were applied proportionally.
2. The committee asked what 'good' would look like and where the partnership expected to be in a number of years.
  - The Head of MASH and Assessment stated that 'good' would involve partners working well together, talking with families and ensuring consent from families was sought. It was also important that, where

appropriate, people were signposted to early help rather than the heavy end of child protection.

- It was pointed out that timeliness in responding to risk had improved and almost 97% of all information was being assessed with a decision made within 24 hours, and that this would continue in the coming years.
  - The Chief Nursing Officer and Director of Quality Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board explained that partners were actively challenging each other and that ability to safeguard was no longer a red-rated risk.
  - The Head of Safeguarding & Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults, Children and Children Looked After highlighted the connections being built and grown regarding leaders within providers, whereby organisations were linking in with children's services, education and other areas to formulate plans around the table for children and families. It was anticipated that in the future this kind of activity would be strengthened through hub working.
3. The committee enquired about the impact of leadership changes within the partnerships and if the structure in place was robust enough to ensure stability.
- The Independent Scrutineer explained that changes to leadership within children's services had been well managed and had had a positive impact, although it was noted the situation was slightly more complicated within adult's services.
4. The committee welcomed the inclusion of recommendations at the end of the report, but suggested that given the report was had been released some time ago it might have been useful to include an appendix containing the implementation plan with associated partnership lead information and timescales for implementing recommendations.
5. The committee enquired about what assurance was sought that the learning from case audits had been successfully embedded in the various aspects of the partnership's working.
- The Independent Scrutineer explained that the joint case review group used a spreadsheet of actions to monitor progress and there were challenges from partners when action was not happening. Where it was identified that action wasn't happening there would be a review and as part of the audit process partners would be required to demonstrate how they were complying with safeguarding duties, they would also be required to demonstrate that learning from case reviews had been embedded within the organisation.
6. The committee enquired about the ability of agencies to analyse and act on multi-agency data. It was asked if data use had improved since the previous report and whether it had moved from not being used at all, to being used to look back and to the future as a predictive tool.
- The Independent Scrutineer explained that the partnership was now actively collecting and analysing multi-agency data and was looking to collaborate with Worcestershire's safeguarding Partnership to form a joint data group that would share learning.

- There was a still a reactive element to data use, which meant it was being used to assess past performance rather than predict future trends. The plan was to move away from historical analysis to predictive modelling. In future safeguarding strategies additional data analysis expertise would be sought to improve forecasting capabilities.
7. The committee enquired as to how quickly Working Together 2023 was being implemented, especially in relation to the 'Think Family' approach.
- The Independent Scrutineer state that implementing the Working Together 2023 statutory guidance had been challenging, but engagement was improving and plans were in place to finalise the integration of multi-agency data for a shared data set. Multi-agency audits with a stronger focus on cross-agency collaboration would be taking place and improved training for agencies was being put in place to assist them in meeting Working Together 2023 requirements.
  - It had been a priority to embed the Think Family approach to ensure that all agencies worked collaboratively with families. The current partnership pledge lacked explicit reference to working with parents/carers, but plans were underway to update the pledge and embed the Think Family model into all safeguarding policies and training. Practitioner checklists were being put in place to ensure family engagement and restorative practice initiatives would further strengthen collaboration with families.
8. The committee asked for an update regarding education and multi-agency collaboration.
- The Independent Scrutineer explained that there had been improved education sector engagement, with designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) participating in discussions and networking events to ensure information was being shared with schools.
  - There had been greater education and voluntary sector involvement in decision making although more work was needed in this area. It was noted that there was a stronger challenge culture among partners and that cross-agency training sessions would maintain consistent safeguarding standards.
9. The committee asked what was being done to ensure case reviews and learning implementation was being embedded with a view to improving child protection outcomes.
- The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People explained case review processes had been tightened to ensure learning was effectively embedded. A joint case review group actively monitored whether learning from past reviews was being incorporated into practice. Actions from serious case reviews were now tracked to ensure that agencies implemented improvements.
10. The committee asked if further updates on case management improvements could be provided in future meetings.

11. The committee raised concerns about care leavers under the age of 25 falling into a gap between the children and adult safeguarding partnerships and whether the children's safeguarding framework should extend to care leavers.
  - The Independent Scrutineer explained that a joint triage process existed, but lacked formal integration with children's safeguarding reviews and there was no clear mechanism in place to ensure care leavers continued to receive safeguarding oversight.
12. The committee felt that formally including care leavers in the Children's Safeguarding Partnership framework and ensuring multi-agency reviews included past care leavers, when relevant, would be useful.
  - The Independent Scrutineer explained that there was a potential need to advocate for national policy changes to strengthen care leaver safeguarding.
13. The Committee asked about the status of continued funding for the partnership.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that the budget for the partnership remained secure for the coming year and that future funding discussions would allow for alignment with West Mercia Police and other local safeguarding boards.
14. The committee requested that next year's report be added to the committee work programme with a view to bringing it to the committee as early as possible.
  - The Statutory Scrutiny Officer confirmed that a next year's report had been added to the committee's work programme.
15. The committee sought an explanation and guidance for elected members of the council in the context of their duties as corporate parents, especially in relation to care leavers under the age of 25.
16. The committee expressed frustration around not having access to information on children that they were corporate parents of, which limited their ability to support and assist the children.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the role of the corporate parent was defined within legislation, but suggested that guidance and clarity on the responsibilities of corporate parents could potentially be provided by children's services and director of governance and law.
17. The committee enquired about historic comment made by the Department of Education that the speed of the roll out of multi-agency restorative practice training was not keeping pace with that of children's social care.
  - The Independent Scrutineer explained that this situation had been addressed over the last year and that partners present in the room would be able to confirm that.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that single agency training for education, health and other partners had been delivered and that the focus had moved to delivering joint training sessions.

- The Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager explained that 20 joint training sessions had been scheduled to take place between January and March 2025.
- The Head of Safeguarding & Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults, Children and Children Looked After stated that single and joint training sessions in health were fully booked.

18. The committee asked how many practitioners had been trained and how many needed to be trained.

- The Safeguarding Partnerships Business Manager explained that a review would take place at the end of March 2025 to establish the need for further training.

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

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The partnership ensures that recommendations from the 2024-25 annual review of effectiveness onwards have an identified partnership lead and an indicative timeframe for completion;**
- 2. The partnership appends an implementation plan for the recommendations in its 2024-25 annual review of effectiveness; and**
- 3. Herefordshire Council's director of children's services and director of governance and law provide guidance to elected members on their corporate parent responsibilities in the event of a significant incident, or death, concerning a care leaver under the age of 25.**

#### **49. MONITORING VISIT FEEDBACK**

The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People introduced and gave an overview of the report, which focused on the summary letter following the Ofsted monitoring visit that had reviewed Herefordshire Council and its partners' efforts in protecting vulnerable children from extra-familial risk, particularly child exploitation. An overview of the directorate's responses to the Ofsted findings was also provided. The key points covered are detailed below:

The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the purpose of the Ofsted monitoring visit had been to assess the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding, with a primary focus on how Herefordshire's children's services, police, and partners protected children from exploitation and extra-familial risks (such as gang involvement, criminal/sexual exploitation, and abuse outside the home). The visit was part of an ongoing review following previous criticisms of Herefordshire's child protection services.

#### **Areas of Improvement**

The Multi-Agency Working and "Get Safe" Specialist Team was praised as an effective multi-disciplinary hub focused on identifying and addressing child exploitation risks. The team worked across various agencies, including police, education, health services, and children's social care. Information-sharing between agencies had significantly improved, making interventions more timely and targeted.

Early Help and Risk Identification was being used effectively to screen cases quickly and provide intervention at the right time. The front door services (referral and assessment processes) enabled timely risk assessments, helping children access appropriate support before risks escalated.

There was evidence of proactive intervention regarding disruption and prevention work. The police had identified and disrupted exploitation hotspot and multi-agency teams had been working together to prevent exploitation. Schools, social workers, and police were engaging in awareness campaigns and intervention efforts.

Ofsted had noted an improved quality of risk assessments and had noted that social workers had a clear understanding of risks and that case assessments were detailed and comprehensive. Risk assessments were leading to effective protective actions for children.

Social workers and frontline staff had expressed confidence in leadership, stating that senior managers were visible, supportive, and committed to improvements. A strong culture of improvement and accountability had also been noted among staff.

### **Areas for Improvement**

The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People noted that Ofsted had described some child protection plans as "formulaic" rather than being tailored to individual children's needs. While social workers had been able to verbally describe bespoke plans, written records had sometimes lacked specific, child-focused language.

The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that with regard to parental engagement and initial meetings, the findings noted that parents and young people were not always involved early enough in risk assessment meetings. Ofsted suggested securing parental consent and engagement earlier to improve the effectiveness of initial safeguarding interventions.

The findings indicated that some vulnerable children with complex needs were experiencing multiple placement moves, increasing their risk of exploitation. Ofsted had flagged concerns about teenagers in care struggling with placement stability, making them more vulnerable to extra-familial risks.

Ofsted had noted that supervision was taking place regularly, but it was not always driving effective case progression. Some cases had shown signs of drift and delay, particularly those involving high-risk adolescents.

Return home interviews for missing children were generally timely and effective, but not enough children were engaging in them. Approximately 60% of children offered an interview accepted it, but Ofsted suggested increasing participation rates.

The Superintendent West Mercia Police explained that the 'Get Safe' model had strengthened police involvement in safeguarding. Police were focusing on disrupting exploitation hotspots and ensuring better intelligence-sharing with social services.

A new "Voice of the Child" initiative was underway to train officers to better identify signs of exploitation.

The Superintendent West Mercia Police acknowledged that more work was needed to fully integrate the 'Think Family' approach, ensuring families were actively involved in prevention efforts.

The Chair invited debate on the report from the committee members:

1. The committee welcomed the progress noted in the Ofsted report, particularly improvements in multi-agency cooperation and risk assessment.
2. The committee asked how quickly changes were being embedded into practice.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that actions had been agreed and were being implemented in response to the findings and Ofsted was expected to conduct another follow-up visit in the coming months. A progress update would be scheduled for a future committee meeting.
3. The committee enquired as to whether all social workers were receiving adequate training in writing child-centred care plans.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People gave an assurance that moving forward all social workers would use child-centred language in care plans and would be provided with additional training and would be instructed to improve record-keeping by ensuring that children's voices and individual circumstances were clearly reflected in case notes.
4. The committee stressed the need for a more structured approach to engaging families in safeguarding discussions.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People explained the service was committed to reviewing its approach to parental involvement to ensure that families were included and engaged with earlier in the risk assessment process. The service would explore and consider ways in which safeguarding meetings could be made more inclusive for families.
5. The committee asked what could be done to boost participation in missing child Interviews.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that multiple follow-up attempts would be made to engage children in these interviews and make sure that they felt safe to share their experiences.
6. The committee raised concerns about ensuring vulnerable teenagers received stable, long-term placements.
  - The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People described how a critical review of approximately 20 unstable cases had been launched - led by senior management - to explore ways to provide greater stability and potentially reunify some young people with their families. The service was working towards reducing placement moves for vulnerable young people.

- Social workers were instructed to include a summary of the previous three months' supervision notes in each report, ensuring better case continuity and accountability.
7. The committee asked whether there were enough experienced social workers to manage complex cases.
- The Interim Corporate Director Children and Young People confirmed that while agency workers were still being used, the council was prioritizing recruitment and retention of permanent staff. Case allocation was being carefully managed to ensure experienced workers handled the most complex cases.
8. The committee noted that the Ofsted monitoring visit had highlighted significant progress in safeguarding vulnerable children. The committee acknowledged the improvements but stressed the need for continued oversight to ensure long-term change.
- The Cabinet Member Children and Young People noted that the Ofsted report had been strong and that hopefully this would be reflected across other areas of work.
  - The Cabinet Member stressed the importance of acknowledging that this had to be a multi-partnership effort to ensure that not only professional agencies, but also communities were aware of the risks and were able to elevate concerns when they had them. It was challenging and complex work that needed to be carried out right to protect children and families who were vulnerable.

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

**Resolved:**

1. That the committee note the report.

**50. WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee agreed to hold a work programme meeting at an unspecified date.

**51. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 18 March 2025, 2pm

**52. APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES**

**Supplementary questions from members of the public – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, 21 January 2025**

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary Question	Question to
SPQ 1	Mr James McGeown	council's constitution references 'statutory' co-opted members.	Children and

	Weobley	<p>You have no Churchmen:</p> <p>"I won't be recommending a replacement from the Diocese until I am satisfied that there is any point,"</p> <p>Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001 and constitution require Herefordshire Council to recruit three: There is but one!</p> <p>4.5.7 of the constitution require "teaching sector" and "families" Representatives: There is but one!</p> <p>Can you provide reassurance that should this committee continuing its 2025 work program it wouldn't be operating against the The Local Authorities (Committee System) (England) Regulations 2012, The Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001, and Herefordshire Council's constitution?</p>	Young People Scrutiny Committee
<p><b>Response:</b> <i>Section 4.5.7 of Herefordshire Council's constitution allows for the appointment of co-opted statutory education representatives to its Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, one representative as nominated by the diocese of Hereford and one representative as nominated by the archdiocese of Cardiff. It also allows for the appointment of three parent governors as elected from the school sector. However, although we require these positions to be filled, this is not required for the committee to continue to operate. It may still lawfully meet and carry out its work with vacancies to its membership.</i></p> <p><i>Herefordshire Council continues to seek nominations to the co-opted statutory representative positions on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.</i></p>			

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary Question	Question to
SPQ 2	Mr Eddy Parkinson Leintwardine	<p>An internet search shows this council in 2016 placed a child with a sex offender in Bradford. The child told BBC news "My whole time up there was torture, every day was a struggle, not having my parents there," adding he had suffered physical and verbal abuse while living there, but not sexual.'</p> <p>I have met professionals concerned about current failures of duty of care by this council.</p> <p>Children may be being placed into the care of</p>	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

		<p>persons deemed such a risk to children that police have made referrals based on legitimate concerns that could lead to prosecution.</p> <p>Will the council undertake a full forensic review of cases past and present to be sure that no children are in placements with registered sex offenders or those flagged by police as a potential danger.</p>	
<p><b>Response:</b>  <i>We are keen to give further assurances in this matter. Therefore, the Director of Children's Services (DCS) with support from appropriate service directors, will carry out a review of all current placements to provide additional senior management overview in each case. We will review for each Disclosure and Barring Service DBS and police information pertaining to the individual carers to at the time of the suitability assessment, alongside a review of the fostering approval panel minutes. We will review any cases where any new allegations of sexual offences have been made post placement and will ensure the risk assessment and outcome decision in relation to each case is appropriate, basing our review on the starting position that no child should be placed with any person convicted of sexual offences against a child. We will cross reference all Police registered Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) level 2 and level 3 offenders against our list of registered carers to ensure if any child is placed with any MAPPA individual a risk assessment of suitability has been completed. We will also share communications with all staff on this review to reiterate our position on this matter. We will complete this work by 31<sup>st</sup> March 25.</i></p>			

The meeting ended at 16:56

**Chairperson**