

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 6 October 2026 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Toni Fagan (chairperson)
Councillor Ben Proctor (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Frank Cornthwaite, Dave Davies, Liz Harvey and Robert Highfield

In attendance: Simon Cann (Committee Clerk), Liz Farr (Service Director Education, Skills and Learning), Alexia Heath (Post 16 Advisor), Hilary Jones (Head of Additional Needs), Quentin Mee (Head of Educational Development), Jane Morse (Commissioning Manager), Louise Tanner (Head of Learning and Achievement), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer) and Nick James-Williams (Deputy Head of Service HPRS).

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Clare Davies and Councillor David Hitchiner.

31. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Liz Harvey was substituting for Councillor David Hitchiner.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Frank Cornthwaite stated that he had grandchildren attending a number of schools within Herefordshire.

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

34. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There had been no questions from members of the public.

35. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There had been no questions from members of the council.

36. ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

1. The committee received an overview of alternative provision (AP) in Herefordshire and the capital investment programme to increase capacity and improve outcomes for children and young people.
2. Officers explained that AP operates across three tiers: Tier 1 support within mainstream schools, Tier 2 short-term intervention aimed at reintegration, and Tier 3 longer-term provision for pupils with significant needs or permanent exclusion. The discussion focused on expanding Tier 2 and Tier 3 provision.
3. Officers reported substantial growth in demand, driven by increasing numbers of children with complex needs, rising Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties, attendance concerns and pressures on mainstream schools. The number of pupils accessing AP had increased from 126 in 2024 to 305 currently. Demand was greatest among secondary-age pupils but was also increasing in primary schools. Special schools were operating at full capacity, increasing reliance on AP.
4. Children accessing AP were disproportionately likely to have SEND, EHCPs, free school meal eligibility or looked-after status. Herefordshire also had a higher proportion of EHCP pupils within AP than comparable authorities, reflecting difficulties securing specialist placements and suitable educational pathways.
5. Members heard that access routes included permanent exclusion, repeated suspension, Section 19 duties, Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) arrangements and SEND-related needs. At the same time, financial pressures on mainstream schools had reduced access to specialist support and interventions. Rising levels of school avoidance, anxiety, behavioural difficulties and attendance issues were increasing demand for specialist and personalised provision.
6. The committee received details of the Herefordshire Pupil Referral Service (HPRS), which had 64 commissioned places but accommodation suitable for around 47 pupils. Existing facilities were described as outdated and unable to meet current levels of need, limiting opportunities for short-term intervention and reintegration.
7. Members heard that Full Council had approved a £12 million capital programme to expand and relocate HPRS and create a dedicated Tier 2 AP centre – as none currently exists in-county. Officers stated that both projects were necessary to increase capacity, improve facilities and reduce reliance on expensive out-of-county and independent placements. Work to identify suitable premises was ongoing.
8. Officers outlined strengthened commissioning, safeguarding and quality assurance arrangements, including provider monitoring, attendance tracking and safeguarding oversight. These arrangements covered both registered and unregistered providers and had previously been recognised as a strength during SEND inspection activity.
9. Examples were provided of positive outcomes achieved through AP, including reintegration into mainstream education, progression to further education or apprenticeships and attainment of academic and vocational qualifications. Officers emphasised that AP should be viewed as an intervention designed to secure positive long-term outcomes.
10. Discussion highlighted the importance of early intervention within mainstream schools. Officers noted that many pupils could be supported through Tier 1 provision and outlined SEND reforms and locality-based “Experts at Hand”

teams, intended to provide quicker access to specialist advice, educational psychology and therapeutic support.

11. Questions explored financial implications. Officers advised that insufficient local capacity increased spending on independent schools, online tuition and commissioned provision. AP placements cost around £21,500 annually compared with approximately £64,000 for independent placements. Expanding local provision was therefore expected to help manage High Needs Block pressures and reduce costs associated with tribunals, complaints and placement delays.
12. Officers clarified that the figure of 305 pupils represented all AP recorded through Department for Education census returns, not solely HPRS placements. Approximately 9.8% accessed unregistered provision, compared with 7.9% three years earlier. Members were advised that unregistered providers remained subject to council quality assurance and safeguarding requirements.
13. Further discussion focused on the wider SEND landscape. Officers advised that all local special schools were full and that shortages remained across SEMH, autism, moderate learning difficulty provision and transition pathways. Expansion of AP formed part of a wider strategy to improve sufficiency and meet future demand.
14. The committee considered delivery arrangements for the capital programme. Officers confirmed that project plans and milestones were in place, although delivery depended on securing suitable sites and any necessary adaptations. Market analysis and provider engagement continued to identify gaps and support development of additional local pathways.
15. Members also discussed future demand forecasts, operational costs and the national AP framework. Officers advised that Department for Education standards had already been incorporated into local arrangements and that projected demand informed the business cases for both schemes. The projects were expected to support educational outcomes while helping manage future High Needs expenditure.
16. The meeting concluded with confirmation that the Department for Education had approved Herefordshire's SEND Reform Plan, enabling the council to receive 90% of its High Needs Stability Grant. Officers welcomed the decision and reiterated that expanding local AP and specialist capacity would be central to delivering the reform programme, meeting demand and managing financial pressures.

The committee unanimously agreed the following recommendations;

1. **That the service publishes its reintegration strategy for young people receiving alternative provision and the measures by which its delivery will be monitored.**
2. **Herefordshire Council publish the comparator data which supports the assertion that Herefordshire has a higher EHCP share than comparator authorities.**
3. **Demand forecasts for alternative provision are provided out to 2030 to support the balance of investment in provision.**

37. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEET

1. Members examined the position of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), focusing on Herefordshire's comparatively poor performance, the groups most affected, actions to improve outcomes and whether current arrangements represented value for money.
2. Officers explained that Herefordshire's NEET performance was significantly affected by high numbers of young people recorded as "not known", largely due to staffing shortages, a long-term vacancy, maternity leave and limited tracking capacity, which reduced the council's ability to maintain contact and accurate records.
3. Officers advised that, while NEET status did not create a separate safeguarding duty, unknown young people presented additional risks. A Department for Education-approved recovery plan included reviewing unknown cases, increasing staffing capacity, weekly tracking reviews and enhanced governance oversight. Unknown cases had already reduced significantly.
4. Vulnerability factors strongly influenced the likelihood of becoming NEET. SEND, care experience, youth justice involvement, mental health difficulties and deprivation were all significant predictors, with care experience identified as one of the strongest risk factors. Many young people entering the NEET cohort had initially secured post-16 placements but failed to sustain them.
5. Officers reported that NEET and not-known cohorts were disproportionately concentrated in deprived communities. Rural isolation, limited public transport, travel costs and the concentration of post-16 provision in a small number of locations were considered important contributing factors.
6. Members received further information on the Youth Employment Hub, which provides personalised employability support, referrals, CV assistance and interview preparation. More than 400 young people had been supported, targets exceeded and many participants had progressed into employment or education. However, the service relied heavily on short-term grant funding and had outgrown its current accommodation.
7. Officers acknowledged that dependence on external grants and annual bidding rounds created uncertainty and restricted long-term planning. The current funding model was considered unsustainable, and work continued to secure additional funding while maintaining provision through partnerships.
8. Officers highlighted the role of the Herefordshire Skills Board and ongoing work to develop an Employment and Skills Strategy focused on employment pathways, work experience and entry-level opportunities. Young people often wanted to work but faced barriers including anxiety, poor mental health, limited opportunities and lack of employer feedback.
9. Members questioned why Herefordshire continued to perform worse than many statistical neighbours. Officers confirmed further analysis of the known NEET cohort was underway and highlighted engagement with neighbouring authorities, particularly Shropshire, while recognising wider national challenges affecting vulnerable young people and entry-level employment.
10. Officers clarified that young people in employment but not engaged in recognised education or training were recorded as not meeting the duty to participate rather than as NEET. Historically, Herefordshire had experienced relatively high numbers entering employment without training, particularly in lower-skilled

sectors. Attempts to encourage apprenticeship pathways had achieved limited success.

11. Officers reported that most young people secured post-16 places successfully, but difficulties often arose when placements broke down after enrolment. A lack of flexible mid-year opportunities meant young people leaving courses could face delays before accessing alternatives, increasing the risk of becoming NEET. Capacity pressures were emerging within construction provision.
11. Members expressed concern at the size of the not-known cohort. Officers explained that the council must track all resident young people, including those studying outside the county. Unknown destinations often resulted from delayed provider information and required labour-intensive tracking through data sharing and direct contact.
12. Officers clarified differences between reporting snapshots and cohort calculations, acknowledged concerns regarding staffing resilience and confirmed that additional funding had been secured for a further full-time tracking officer.
13. Safeguarding referrals were made where concerns arose, and the Youth Employment Hub routinely identified wider vulnerabilities requiring support. Outreach work, door-knocking and stronger school engagement had proven effective where resources were available.
14. Officers explained that plans to relocate the Youth Employment Hub reflected increased demand, expanded funding requirements and the need for additional space for workshops, employers and co-located services. Alternative accommodation options were being explored.
15. In concluding, members recognised the complexity of the issue and progress made in reducing the not-known cohort. Concerns remained regarding funding sustainability, tracking capacity and the need to learn from higher-performing authorities.

The committee unanimously agreed two recommendations:

1. **The executive should make contact with higher performing areas to identify good practice that could be applied in Herefordshire.**
2. **The executive should ensure sustained funding for this statutory function in order to deliver on our ambition to secure a child friendly Herefordshire.**

38. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee reviewed its work programme.

Resolved that:

The committee approve the work programme as set out at Appendix 1.

39. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Thursday 10 December 2026, 2pm

The meeting ended at 17:05pm

Chairperson