



Task & Finish Group Report

**Scrutiny of Children's
Safeguarding in Herefordshire**



The Scrutiny of Children’s Safeguarding in Herefordshire – Review Report

Chairman’s Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Task and Finish Review Group who worked with myself and officers to ensure that we completed a fair and transparent report. This review was borne out of Herefordshire Council’s inadequate Ofsted inspection report and focuses on how the scrutiny function can be improved to ensure that our children and young people are protected and that they receive an effective and excellent service.

Since the Ofsted Inspection, there have been significant changes to the way in which Herefordshire Council delivers its safeguarding service. There has been a positive interaction between the Task and Finish Group members and the Children’s Wellbeing Directorate and it is recognised that whilst this is a Herefordshire Council report, all parties involved in safeguarding must have a consistent approach. The setting up of the new hub Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), is a positive step forward and will ensure that people who are concerned about the safety of children, are put in touch with the right person expediently.

This report recognises the excellent job that officers are doing in the Children’s Wellbeing Directorate but also highlights areas which needs more work to be done if Herefordshire Council wishes to improve its service to the community. I would like to thank all the officers we interviewed for their participation in the review and for all they do to ensure Herefordshire children are protected from harm. A special thank you must also go to the young people we met along our journey and for their contribution to the review. One of the memories I will personally take with me from the Away Day we spent with children and young people, is that they just want a consistent and reliable service.

Along our journey, we highlighted other areas for future reviews which were outside the remit of this Task and Finish Group which we feel will compliment and support our work. All Members have received a series of Safeguarding Seminars and training and are now more aware of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents. With the additional data they will be receiving, they will be able to ensure that Herefordshire Council’s safeguarding arrangements are robust and confidently challenged when necessary.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Task and Finish Group members who have worked tirelessly alongside me during this review and also to our lead officer, Julie Rzezniczek and our Scrutiny Team, Gemma Dean and David Penrose, who helped keep us “on track”. Their contribution and support has been invaluable in shaping this report.

Councillor Sally Robertson
Chairman
Improving Scrutiny of Children’s Safeguarding Services

Executive Summary

- 1.1 In September 2012, Herefordshire Council received an 'inadequate' grading following an inspection of its arrangements for safeguarding children. One of the key areas for improvement was related to leadership and governance. Scrutiny is part of the Council's leadership and governance arrangements. As such a Task and Finish Group was commissioned in December to look into the issue of improving the scrutiny function in relation to children's safeguarding.
- 1.2 In March 2013, a final scoping statement was agreed by all Members of the Task and Finish Group (see Appendix 1). As leadership and governance arrangements were a key area for improvement, the Members of the Task and Finish Group decided to look at how children's safeguarding is scrutinized now, what information could be available to the Scrutiny Committee and finally, what best practice at other local authorities looks like.
- 1.3 Although the main purpose of the Group was to look at how the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee examines children's safeguarding, it became evident that the lives and welfare of children, young people and their families are impacted upon by a range of factors and services. It is for this reason that some of the recommendations place an onus on other departments or officers.
- 1.4 The Task and Finish Group found that a small number of issues raised during their interviews with officers and staff, merited further examination and have recommended that this takes place through the commissioning of spotlight task and finish groups.
- 1.5 Whilst there are a number of recommendations that have been proposed through this Task and Finish Group, there are also a number of other elements that have been raised. These are grouped into areas of:
 - Recommendations
 - Good practice guidelines where no feedback is needed
 - Good practice that is identified as already taking place
- 1.6 During the period of this exercise, a number of interim recommendations were made that were actioned and completed before the end of the review. These recommendations applied to the provision of early reports before either the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Composition of the Task and Finish Group

Members of the Task and Finish Group were:

Councillor SR Robertson – Vice Chair of Health and Social Care Committee and Chair of Task and Finish Group

Councillor WLS Bowen

Councillor MD Lloyd-Hayes

Peer mentor – Councillor David Simmonds, London Borough of Hounslow Council

Lead Officer - Julie Rzezniczek, Interim Head of Improvement

Scrutiny Officer -Gemma Dean.

Democratic Services - David Penrose.

Context

Why Did We Set Up The Group?

In September 2012, Herefordshire Council received an 'inadequate' grading following an inspection of its arrangements for safeguarding children. Herefordshire Council is currently subject to an Improvement Notice as issued by the Department for Education.

A key element of the Ofsted inspection focussed on Herefordshire Council's leadership and governance of children's safeguarding. Scrutiny is part of this leadership and governance function.

The Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the designated scrutiny Committee to deal with all matters relating to children's safeguarding.

As a direct result of the Ofsted inspection, this Task and Finish Group was commissioned.

What Were We Looking at?

In March 2013 a scoping statement was agreed by all Members of the Group. The full scoping statement is attached at Appendix 1. The Group's term of reference was to review the scrutiny of children's safeguarding. The Group came to this decision as it was felt that the most effective Task and Finish Group should not duplicate any other improvement work that was taking place. In accordance with Department for Education requirements, Herefordshire Council currently has an Improvement Plan and an Improvement Board therefore the Group chose to undertake a peer review to explore what improvements could be applied to the scrutiny Committee in order to strengthen progress related to the Improvement Plan.

Who Did We Speak To?

Between March and September 2013, the Group convened meetings, interviews and visits to gather as much background information and seek as many views as were required to make recommendations. In doing this, the Group spoke to the following people:

- Young persons in care
- Councillor Patricia Morgan, then Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
- Councillor Jeremy Millar, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- Herefordshire Council Councillors
- Jo Davidson, Director of Children's Wellbeing Services
- Kathy O'Mahony, Assistant Director (Children's Wellbeing Services)
- Chris Baird, Assistant Director (Children's Wellbeing Services)
- Paul Curran, Chair of the Improvement Board
- Julie Rzezniczek, Interim Head of Improvement
- Social Workers at Bath Street and St Owens Street
- Children in Care Council
- Chester and West Chester Council

How Did We Engage With People?

The Task and Finish Group wanted to use as many different ways of engagement with the different interviewees. The methods used were:

- Face to face interviews. These were mostly used for senior officers, Cabinet Members and Improvement Board Chair
- Site visits to Social care workers in their offices

- Attendance of a group engagement day with young persons in care
- Members questionnaire
- Email correspondence
- Visits to other local authorities

What Did We Read?

The Group was provided with a large amount of background information to undertake this review. The documents that were used and are appended to this report are:

- OFSTED inspection report
- OFSTED Improvement Notice
- Herefordshire Council's Improvement Plan
- Herefordshire Safeguarding Protection of Children Improvement Board performance data
- Centre for Public Scrutiny guidance
- Herefordshire Council workforce report
- Herefordshire Council 'Our Expectations for Safeguarding Children'.
- Chester and West Chester – 'Our Children Matter - 39 Steps to bring some normality into their lives'.
- Local Government Association best practice guidance

Key Themes

Throughout the interviews and research, key themes were identified by the Group.

Scrutiny Committees

The scrutiny of children's safeguarding has undergone some significant changes over the past two years. Prior to April 2011, there had been a specific Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. However an Executive decision was made to combine five scrutiny committees into one main overview and scrutiny committee. This one Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to cover all topics and commission task and finish groups. The Group felt that prior to the combining of these Committees that they were kept more informed of children's safeguarding. This was achieved by regular reporting on performance and continual service updates. The combined Overview and Scrutiny was decommissioned in October 2012 and was replaced by two Committees: Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a General Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Group recognised that this substantial upheaval of the scrutiny committee has resulted in scrutiny Members not being up to date of safeguarding issues. The Members of the Group believe that there is an argument that a dedicated Children and Young Persons Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be re-established.

Recommendation: That research shall be undertaken to determine whether there should be a specialised Children and Young Persons Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This research shall be undertaken within six months and reported back to the Committee.

During the period of the task and finish review a change was made to the scrutiny function. Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny and General Overview and Scrutiny are now to sit bi-monthly. The Group were also concerned that due to the tightening of budgets that the support available for Members may be reduced.

Recommendation: That the Chief Executive, or person designated by the Chief Executive, is to provide a report on the impact of the changes to the scrutiny function and the maintenance of robust scrutiny arrangements.

As part of this task and finish review, a questionnaire was sent out to all Members on children's safeguarding. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix 2. Not including the three Members of this Task and Finish Group, 55 Members were sent the email questionnaire. Of these 55 Members only 10 responses were received. Members of the Group were disappointed at the low response rate but appreciated that this was indicative of the need for more training on safeguarding.

Recommendation: That mandatory Members children's safeguarding seminars should be delivered to all Councillors on a rolling basis.

During interviews it was considered by the Group that many Members were unaware of the ways in which they could deal with safeguarding issues if they occurred. Members were also largely unaware of their roles as Corporate Parents, and further investigation should be undertaken into ways to encourage Councillors to actively engage in this role.

Recommendation: That 'one minute guides' are created by officers for Members on how to respond to children's safeguarding issues. These shall be distributed to Members and be made available on the Council's website for the general public to view.

The Group recognised that there is a need for children's safeguarding to be more prominent in the work programme. There has been an unfair balance towards the health side of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee due to the big changes that have occurred

within the health sector. The Group would like to see a balance between health and social care re-established.

Quite often the information and data being presented before Health and Social Care Committee is very complex. Members are expected to understand and interpret this data with little or no guidance. The Group recognises that there is a need for specialist training to be given on interpreting performance information.

Recommendation: The Members of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall be provided with training in the understanding and interrogating of children's safeguarding performance data. This shall be done at least once a year.

At a meeting with young people in care the Members were concerned that the young people were not aware of the role of scrutiny with regards to children's safeguarding. The Members of the Group feel that it is essential that Children in Care and Looked After Children are aware of scrutiny and what they can expect from the scrutiny Members.

Recommendation: That a pledge should be created within three months that clearly identifies what Children in Care and Looked After Children can expect from Scrutiny Members. This will be available on the Council website.

The Group heard from a number of external officers who have stated that effective scrutiny does not entail duplication of work already being carried out by others. The Group are keen to ensure that the work that scrutiny undertakes adds value to the children's safeguarding model.

The Group were keen to create and maintain effective relationships with social workers after interviewing them during the review. They were most impressed by the openness and dedication shown by the social workers whilst they are constantly under the microscope of improvement.

Recommendation: That Members of Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee engage with social workers on a three monthly basis. This is to gain the opinion and viewpoint of the staff on the new ways of working and whether they believe them to be effective. It will also provide staff with the opportunity to suggest any areas that they believe would benefit from scrutiny.

Recruitment and Retention

The Group were concerned that in every interview that they undertook, recruitment and retention was a recurring theme. Council officers, Members, external officers involved in the improvement process all stated that what is required for a good performing safeguarding children service is a good, well qualified, motivated and consistent workforce. This is also to be coupled with effective supervision and continuous improvement. Members also had the opportunity to speak to some young people in care in which the key theme of staff arose. On this occasion it was raised by young persons that they wanted consistency and reliability from their social workers. They wanted to know who was coming to see them and to avoid as many changes in qualified social workers as possible.

As a result of their findings the Task and Finish Group made an interim recommendation that a workforce report came before the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. On 11th July 2013 the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee were able to have an overview of the approach being taken by Herefordshire Council with regards to recruitment and retention of social care workforce.

Recommendation: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissions a spotlight task and finish group to look into the recruitment and retention policies. This shall be commissioned within three months.

One final area that was raised related to the ways in which working could be supported for social workers. A large proportion of their time is spent going between the office and visits. The Group discussed ways in which this could be rectified. There is currently a review underway into the provision of mobile devices for social workers which would allow them to update records whilst out of the office. The Task and Finish Group fully supports this review and has made the following recommendation:

Recommendation: that the findings of the review into the use of mobile devices for social workers is reported to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee within six months.

Social workers also have to carry around a large amount of work with them between Council offices and visits. The Task and Finish Group were concerned that the new parking policy for Herefordshire Council now prevented social workers from being able to drop off or pick up files at Council offices. The Task and Finish Group were very aware that this could be a pressure that could be alleviated for social workers. The Group have therefore made the following recommendation:

Recommendation: That the Executive review the staff car parking policy to allow social workers to use collection and drop off points at Council buildings.

The Task and Finish Group recognises the fact that many staff employed by Herefordshire Council are on an interim or temporary basis. The Group feel it important to note that that they appreciate the work undertaken by interim staff, and that they bring a wealth of experience and expertise with them to the Council.

Recommendation: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissions a spotlight task and finish review into the support of interim or agency staff. This purpose of this review would be to ensure that the Council is doing all that it can to ensure that such workers are fully integrated into the Council

Public Participation

The Members of the Group were keen to encourage public participation in scrutiny, specifically of children in care. In an interview regarding the Children in Care Council in Hereford, the Members were very heartened to hear that substantial work was underway to get this established in Herefordshire. The Group had initially wanted to commission a task and finish group to look into the relationship between Health and Social Care scrutiny and the Children in Care Council. This would effectively have meant duplicating the work that is already being completed in this area.

Recommendation: That a report is brought before the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee within six months detailing the Council's progress with establishing an effective Children in Care Council. The report shall have a clear statement within it with regards to Members involvement.

The Members were very grateful to Cheshire West and Chester Council for allowing them to see their video on the relationship between the Council and the Children in Care Council. The Task and Finish Group strongly recommend that all Members watch this video.

The Task and Finish Group were advised that there is currently a review of scrutiny's engagement with the public being undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer and the Group endorse this work. The Group were very keen that specific regard was to be given as to the use of social media to engage with young peoples and the general public.

Multi Agency Working

The Task and Finish Group recognises that during this review they were unable to interview all partner agencies. However the Group were able to speak to Chairs of the Improvement Board and Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board, who are part of the multi agency working. Therefore the Group identified whether this multi agency approach was working effectively.

The Group heard from a number of internal and external organisations which all form part of the safeguarding children model. The Group recognises that for an effective system of safeguarding to work then all of these organisations must work together. The Group was very pleased to hear about the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and supports the development in this area.

The Group was pleased to hear from the Independent Chair of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board. The Group felt that the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee were not aware of the crucial work that the Board does. The Group were also aware that there appears to be little overview or challenge to whether the Board are fulfilling the areas within its business plan other than in the annual review of the Board's business plan.

Recommendation: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee is provided with six monthly updates on the business plan of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board.

The Group learnt of the Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council's new arrangements for joint working with the Police, Wye Valley Trust and 2gether.

IT Systems

The Group heard from staff that they were still experiencing problems with Frameworki. The Group were disappointed to hear that these problems were still being encountered but were pleased to hear that more work was being undertaken to improve the usage of the system.

The Group were pleased to hear of the new improvements to enable social care managers to use the reporting tools from within Frameworki.

The Group made an interim recommendation that an update report on Frameworki shall be provided to the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee within three months. This report is an agenda item for the 11th October 2013 Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

Performance Data

In its initial investigation the Task and Finish Group found that there was a lot of data available that scrutiny had not seen. The Group were very pleased to learn that a lot of work was going into providing data in a more strategic and user friendly way through the use of the dashboard. The Group believes that providing data in a more strategic and user-friendly way is imperative for Health and Social Care scrutiny Members. The Group also appreciates that this data is already being provided for other organisations such as the Hereford Safeguarding Children Board. Therefore to provide it to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Members would require little extra effort.

Recommendation: That re-designed performance data is reported to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Members every three months. This shall be reported electronically. If there are any areas for concern then further scrutiny will be made available such as a briefing note or an agenda item at a Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Visit to Cheshire West and Chester Council

The Task and Finish Group were invited to spend a day in Cheshire West and Chester Council. This Council has an excellent Children in Care Council where children in care regularly take part in decisions that make a difference to them. Participation is the key to the success of children in care council. The Task and Finish Group were fortunate to be able to speak to two members of the Children in Care Council who stated that participation is the key to the success of a Children in Care Council.

The Task and Finish Group were particularly interested in the pledge that had been created to identify things what children in care could expect from Members and the council. The Task and Finish Group were keen that herefordshire council also adopted such a pledge.

The Children in Care Council representatives are an active part of decisions within the council.

Recommendation: That once established the Children in Care Council should be invited to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six monthly basis. The intention would be both to tell the Committee of their work and to raise areas for investigation by the Committee.

Recommendation: That research is undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer to identify whether Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny members could act as advocates for children in care. A report shall be brought before the Committee within six months.

After speaking to officers, children and Members from Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Task and Finish Group have identified three areas in which they wish to prioritise scrutiny work.

- 1 Child protection - effectiveness of the system
- 2 Children in care - their education.
- 3 Early support - how are we getting underneath the factors?

Recommendation: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee should focus on the three priorities outlined below for the next 12 months:

- 1 Child protection - effectiveness of the system**
- 2 Children in care - their education.**
- 3 Early support - how are we getting underneath the factors?**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That research shall be undertaken to determine whether there should be a specialised Children and Young Persons Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This research shall be undertaken within six months and reported back to the Committee.

Recommendation 2: That the Chief Executive is to provide a report on how the changes to the scrutiny function will affect the ability for robust scrutiny arrangements.

Recommendation 3: That children's safeguarding seminars should be delivered to all Members on a rolling basis. These shall be mandatory for all.

Recommendation 4: That one minute guides are created by officers for Members on how to respond to children's safeguarding issues. These shall be distributed to Members and be made available on the Council's website for the general public to view.

Recommendation 5: The Members of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall be provided with training of the understanding and interrogating of children's safeguarding performance data. This shall be done at least once a year.

Recommendation 6: That a pledge should be created within three months that clearly identifies what Children in Care and Looked After Children can expect from Scrutiny Members. This will be available on the Council website.

Recommendation 7: That Members of Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee engage with social workers on a three monthly basis. This is gain the opinion and viewpoint of the staff on the new ways of working and whether they believe them to be effective. It will also provide staff with the opportunity to suggest any areas that they believe would benefit from scrutiny.

Recommendation 8: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissions a spotlight task and finish group to look into the recruitment and retention policies. This shall be commissioned within three months.

Recommendation 9: That the findings of the review into the use of mobile devices for social workers is reported to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee within six months.

Recommendation 10: That the Executive review the staff car parking policy to allow social workers to use collection and drop off points at Council buildings.

Recommendation 11: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissions a spotlight task and finish review into the support of interim or agency staff. This purpose of this review would be to ensure that the Council is doing all that it can to ensure that such workers are fully integrated into the Council

Recommendation 12: That a report is brought before the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee within six months detailing the Council's progress with establishing an effective Children in Care Council. The report shall have a clear statement within it with regards to Members involvement.

Recommendation 13: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee is provided with six monthly updates on the business plan of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board.

Recommendation 14: That re-designed performance data is reported to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Members every three months. This shall be reported electronically. If there are any areas for concern then further scrutiny will be made available such as a briefing note or an agenda item at a Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Recommendation 15: That once established the Children in Care Council should be invited to Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six monthly basis. The intention would be both to tell the Committee of their work and to raise areas for investigation by the Committee.

Recommendation 16: That research is undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer to identify whether Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny members could act as advocates for children in care. A report shall be brought before the Committee within six months.

Recommendation 17: That the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee should focus on the three priorities outlined below for the next 12 months:

- 1 Child protection - effectiveness of the system
- 2 Children in care - their education.
- 3 Early support - how are we getting underneath the factors?

Good Practice Guidelines

During the review, the Members of the Task and Finish Group highlighted a number of areas that were not recommendations but more good practice guidelines. These are areas which need highlighting but do not necessarily require any form of response.

The following good practice guidelines are:

- There should be sufficient challenge between the Hereford Safeguarding Children Improvement Board and the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board
- Scrutiny should make best use of the internal teams that they have to support the function e.g. the research team and citizen engagement team
- Officers should offer training, support and information to Members. In exchange for this officers should expect informed challenge.

Good Practice Commendations

The Members of the Group identified areas in which Herefordshire Council are undertaking good practice. It is essential that these areas are highlighted as part of this review so that they are maintained and set an example to other areas.

The following commendations were made:

- There are very good links made with social worker students in Worcester University. During the period of this review it was highlighted within the workforce report that Herefordshire Council is going to need to 'grow your own' and recruit newly qualified social workers. Therefore maintaining close connections with the university ensures that students at the university will be aware of Herefordshire's success in this area.
- The Department for Education in their 6 month review of the Improvement Plan have given 'green' ratings for some areas. The Group thought it very important to congratulate staff on the improvements made to date.
- Herefordshire Council have young persons on interview panels for social workers.

- Child Sexual Exploitation work undertaken by the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board has been received well by staff and Members.
- The Members wanted to highlight how hard the social workers work. Through their interviews with senior officers and the social workers themselves, it was very clear to the Members that, in general, they were highly conscientious and really seem to want to make a difference to young people's lives.
- There has also been a large amount of effort put in engagement with young persons. The Members would like to see this continue and are eager to support the further development of this area.
- Significant work has been undertaken to engage with young persons and Members. Members would like to see this continue and are eager to support the further development of this area.

Next Steps

The timetable contained within the Scoping Statement at Appendix 1 details the dates for next steps of this review.

It is scheduled that progress on the recommendations of this review comes before the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2014.