

Supplement – schedule of questions received for meeting of children and young people scrutiny committee – 19 January 2021

Agenda item no. 4 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Dr Whalley, Hereford	<p>Herefordshire has a centre in Bromyard of which it should be proud. The Hope centre, established through highly effective local entrepreneurial activity, via Europe and government funding, has a proven track record, over two decades, of powerful work across a rural community. It successfully engages the most challenged children and their parents. Recent research from Nuffield Foundation states whilst, " The funding environment for early years services is tough ...we should be looking at the opportunity to offer wrap-around and integrated services in ECEC settings..cohesive services for children and families... ,with key workers they trust".</p> <p>The Hope Centre is just such a service; these poorly justified proposed cuts will significantly destabilise the provision. Officers argue for a centralised Hereford based model; how could this possibly be as effective as the seamless service currently offered, in which local families have such confidence?</p>	Cabinet Member Children and Families

Response:

There is a high regard for the Hope Family Centre and the wider role that it fulfils in the Bromyard area, and the Council wishes to continue its positive working relationship with Hope for Children & Their Families Limited to enable effective partnership working throughout the local community.

The proposals are that a contracted service, valued at £25,000 per annum, is integrated with the service that is provided for the rest of Herefordshire. It is not proposed to make any cuts to the resource, and it is intended that the change will deliver more direct support for vulnerable children and families.

Providers that are contracted by the Council for a wide variety of services are aware that contract funding is agreed for a fixed period and are encouraged and expected to make long-term plans for the end of a contract so that their other activities may continue. Similar planning is also necessary when charitable or grant funding can end.

Only the senior management of the in-house service is centralised. Operational teams, including early years support workers and community connectors work in areas covering the north and south of the county, and can work flexibly from office bases, community settings or home. They have developed local knowledge and networks over several years, with strong partnership working with the local health visitors, midwives, GPs, early years settings, schools and community organisations to identify and support children and families that might need some additional Early Help.

This county-wide approach has successfully delivered sustainable change for many vulnerable families in line with the National Troubled Families Programme. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Herefordshire has achieved second and first quartile rankings compared to nationwide local authorities in achieving positive outcomes for vulnerable families and is the second highest performing area in the West Midlands.

In line with the national troubled families programme, where sustainable change has been achieved for families (through EHA interventions) it is possible to claim funding under payment by results arrangements. Since October 2018, 135 successful claims have been made for families solely or partially supported by Children’s Centre Services of which none were recorded for the Bromyard Reach area.

PQ 2	Dr Stevens, Hereford	Would the council agree that good management of the Children's Centre service can just as easily be maintained through modern contract management, working in partnership with an acclaimed and validated provider like the HOPE Centre, as through an in-house service?	Cabinet Member Children and Families
<p>Response: Externally provided services are overseen by good contract management arrangements, with good partnership working between the Council and the Provider being a key element. The current arrangements, whereby children's centre services are managed and delivered across most of the county by the Council and by an external provider in only the Bromyard area, mean that there is some duplication of overhead costs that the in-house service would be able to absorb.</p>			
PQ 3	Ms Tait, Bromyard	Would the Council agree that without full costings for the proposed new centralized delivery of Children's Centre services in the Bromyard Area, it is difficult to evaluate if this will be a saving?	Cabinet Member Children and Families
<p>Response: The proposed changes aren't intended to achieve a cost saving, but are expected to achieve additional efficiencies. For the same price of the contract, the council will be able to deliver more direct work to vulnerable families than has been provided. The council will be able to provide added value by absorbing the overheads, such as accommodation, administration and management alongside the services that are delivered in other parts of the county and without the need for any additional budget.</p> <p>Integrating the £25,000 resource into the council service will provide a full-time post that will deliver at least 20 hours of direct work to families per week, increasing from the 11 hours required by the contract and the average 17.5 hours that have been provided. The operational team can also provide further direct work through its early help information and signposting officers and community connectors.</p>			
PQ 4	Ms Falconer, Hereford	Given the state of deprivation in Herefordshire in general, exacerbated by the pandemic, would the Council agree that the excellent service provided by HOPE to the Bromyard community for excellent value for money is something that the Council might learn from, rather than subtract its commitment to?	Cabinet Member Children and Families
<p>Response: The Council continues to acknowledge the wider value that the Hope Centre provides to the local community, and the high regard with which local people have for it. The Council is committed to continuing to work in partnership with the Hope Centre and other local services, as we do in all parts of the County and we will also continue to learn from the best practice developed in other areas.</p> <p>The proposed changes relate to the provision of a contracted service. As a fixed-term contract, there has been no commitment given or implied that funding would continue into the future. It is intended that the proposed changes will increase the capacity for direct work with vulnerable families in response to an Early Help Assessment (EHA), and that such work can be provided wherever it emerges across the county including in those areas that may be more deprived.</p>			

The countywide EHA approach has successfully delivered sustainable change for many vulnerable families as part of the National Troubled Families Programme. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Herefordshire has achieved second and first quartile rankings compared to nationwide local authorities in achieving positive outcomes for vulnerable families and is the second highest performing area in the West Midlands.

In line with the national troubled families programme, where sustainable change is achieved for families (through EHA interventions) it is possible to draw-down funding under payment by results arrangements. Since October 2018, 135 successful claims have been made for families solely or partially supported by Children's Centre Services, of which 39 have been achieved during the coronavirus pandemic (since April 2020). None of these claims were for families supported in the Bromyard Reach area.