Supplement – schedule of questions received for meeting of children and young people scrutiny committee – 23 March 2021

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Shore, Bartestree	The Fertile Heart", RSE curriculum at St Mary's RC High School in Lugwardine, teaches that men were "created to initiate sexual relationships" and women to be "receiver responders". This normalises a dangerous gender power imbalance in sexual relationships with the message that women are passive recipients of male sexual acts. This both undermines equality and the importance of understanding consent in sexual relationships. Would the committee agree that this teaching puts both young women and men at risk and is in fact a safeguarding issue that requires Children's Services to act accordingly?	Chairperson of Children's Scrutiny

Response from Assistant Director Education, Development and Skills

We are aware of the programme of study called Fertile Hearts. To the best of our knowledge the school is teaching the programme as recommended by the Archdiocese of Cardiff. It is part of the Catholic education programme and the Archdiocese is responsible for the content of the programme, not the school and not the Local Authority. The school is responsible for how it is taught. We have been advised that it has been implemented in accordance with all required consultations. As such we (as in the Local Authority) cannot prevent its use. Some council members have significant reservations about the programme which has attracted media coverage and the content of the programme is under review. We have been reassured that the Archdiocese keep all new programmes under review, including this one, and will take account of the feedback they have received. We will maintain a contact with the Archdiocese to seek reassurance that the content is kept under review and used appropriately. The programme does not of itself breach Equalities Act legislation.

The Local Authority does not have the power to intervene or challenge the Archdiocesan policy on this programme. The mechanism of challenge to the operation of the policy exists by either parents, pupils, or staff claiming discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, and to the policy itself through the overview provided by the schools' Inspectorate or the Secretary of State.

The policy meets current DFE requirements and as such it allows for the teaching of different faith based perspectives and enables and encourages discussion and debate on such issues.

There have been external evaluations, including inspections and a section 48 (Diocesan inspection) and Ofsted in recent years, neither of which have highlighted any concerns with the wider safeguarding issues raised above. That said, as a consequence of reservations about the content, we will seek to ensure the Archdiocese does keep the content and way of teaching it under review.

Response from the Chairperson of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Officers have outlined above how the Council has very limited influence in respect of the curriculum that is taught in local faith schools and I recognise how frustrating and difficult it is for some residents to understand. I myself before becoming involved in Children's Services did not appreciate this. I know there is concern regarding relationship and sex education taught through the 'fertile hearts' teaching material, I understand that concern and the cabinet member children and families has previously commented on the use of the resource. When the council is informed of safeguarding concerns involving children it will investigate and as a committee we retain an oversight of the performance and effectiveness of those safeguarding services that respond to such reports. With respect to the issue you raise I will remain in contact with the cabinet member to understand and question how the council may be

working with the Archdiocese of Cardiff to explore the concerns that have been raised. If there is any role for the scrutiny committee to play this can be considered for inclusion on the committee's work programme however I do reiterate that the Council has no power over what schools under the Archdiocese of Cardiff choose to teach within Herefordshire.			
PQ 2	Ms Liddle, Hereford	In November, Cabinet Members were alerted to NEW concerns from the public about the safeguarding of victims of peer-on-peer rape; concerns were expressed that not all victims were being shielded from the alleged perpetrator in school. Despite knowing these concerns, Officers have refused to undertake a review of the 2020 alleged rape cases to ensure that no child has been left in class with someone they have identified as the rapist. An FOI request has now established that there were 2 alleged peer-on-peer rapes reported in 2020, suggesting that a review could be completed swiftly. Can the Cabinet Member children and families shed any light on what, to members of the public, seems to be an extraordinarily negligent position taken by Officers and a distressing repetition of the mistakes of the past?	Cabinet Member Children and Families
Response: We do apologise that we will not be able to provide details about the two incidents you referred to in order to protect the confidentiality of all children concerned. In the 2 cases, the local authority looked thoroughly with key partners, and we were assured that safeguarding measures were put in place in the two occasions in a timely and appropriate manner. We assure you that we were not aware of any referral from internal or external organisations, or individuals with regard to alleged peer on peer rape or sexual assault for children living in Herefordshire that haven't been looked at and responded to appropriately. We would like to remind all individuals and organisations that it is a legal requirement to report any serious safeguarding concern as soon as they become aware to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in order that pupils may be safeguarded quickly.			
PQ 3	Name and Address supplied	In September 2020, Councillors praised the work of families who have been raising awareness of peer-on-peer sexual abuse since 2016. Apologies were made for the failure to take seriously warnings of the risks to children. Officers promised to listen to the voices of victims through a process of reconciliation. Six months on there is still no process underway. Furthermore, some gaps in systems/practice identified by families in 2019 when they met the Director of Children's Services and Cllr Norman have not been plugged; two years on there is still no model guidance for schools, no guidance on the rights of victims under the HRA1998 and EA2010 and no written guidance for schools educating a sex offender. The families are distressed by empty promises and critical gaps in guidance which leave children at risk. How are the Committee feeling?	Chairperson of Children's Scrutiny
<u>Response from Assistant Director Education, Development and Skills</u>			

The draft model guidance for schools was completed in the autumn term and was shared with the University of Bedford, the national lead institution for peer on peer abuse in the UK. The guidance was returned by the University of Bedford in the New Year with a number of recommendations for making what they described as a very good document even better. This work has necessitated officers to gain further input from a wide range of agencies which has been time consuming. I am aware of the frustration this will cause and I apologise for that but we were keen that the process was completed with diligence and full process. The guidance has been out for consultation with education providers and once that process is complete it will be shared with families who have been involved as agreed by scrutiny previously. The final guidance will be officially launched by Herefordshire Council starting next month with a number of training events for education and multi agencies providers led by officers and the University of Bedford.

Response from the Chairperson of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Officers have provided above an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the peer on peer abuse review. I appreciate that there has now been some time since the scrutiny committee considered the outcomes of the peer on peer abuse review in September 2020 and I like you am concerned that despite our recommendations there appears to have been little progress in their implementation. When the work programme is considered, later on in this agenda, I will propose that the committee receives a full update on progress made, to be scheduled at the next meeting on 1 June.