

Agenda item 5 – Questions from members of the public, plus supplementary question and response

Public Question

From: Ms Reid, Hereford

The rate of children in care in Herefordshire is about twice its Statistical Neighbours' average (LAIT).

Per FOI2022/01890 the average weekly costs for each child in care were:

- Fostering: £315
- Fostering agencies: £890
- Children's homes: £5,066

The Corporate Risk Register includes an “Extreme” (red) risk of “Sufficiency Strategy” (CRR.60). If the number of children in care is reduced, sufficiency is mitigated.

My supplementary question (23/6/2023, A&G) mentioned actions to reduce the number of children in care:

- Reunification of children with families
- Early Help
- FGCs

The response included:

“we will take your comments into account”

The Corporate Risk Register report (31/7/23, A&G) recommends that:

“The committee determine any recommendations it wishes to ensure effective risk management.”

Will the committee consider on 31 July 2023 updating “Further actions required” of CRR.60 to include actions to reduce the number of children in care?

Response to Public Question

As you have recorded the committee will take your comments into account. The process is that the risk will be reviewed and considered by the directorate, and details of mitigating actions will be added as appropriate. If the risk score is 16 or greater, the update will appear on the updated Corporate Risk Register when next presented to the Committee. The Committee is very much aware of the risks to the Council in this area, as is the whole of the Council, the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee. We are all seeking to do the best for children on the County.

Supplementary Question

I consider my public question was not answered as the response does not indicate either “No” or “Yes” to whether the committee will consider updating the register.

Audit and Governance Committee, 23 June 2023

The rate of children in care in Herefordshire about twice its Statistical Neighbours' average and the costs are high (on average for each child):

- Fostering: over £16,000 pa
- Fostering agencies: over £46,000 pa
- Children's homes: over £260,000 pa

If the number of children in care is reduced (eg by reunification of children with their families), placements sufficiency (eg foster placements) is mitigated.

The committee may make recommendations to “ensure effective risk management” and the Corporate Risk Register is presented to today’s committee meeting. Therefore, please would the committee consider in this meeting updating “Further actions required” of CRR.60 (“Sufficiency strategy”) on the register include actions to reduce the number of children in care?

Response to supplementary question

CR60 relates to the Development of a Sufficiency Strategy to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation of different types for our looked after children and young people. The risk relates to the need to obtain best value from our accommodation providers. As such the actions you request do not relate to the strategy and it is unnecessary for the service area to make the change. Your point about the numbers of children in care has been noted and the service area is aware. As detailed in the Children’s Improvement Plan, work is ongoing to ensure that the right children are in our care for the right amount of time.