

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 17 September 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Toni Fagan (chairperson)
Councillor Liz Harvey (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Clare Davies, David Davies (virtual), Robert Highfield and Ben Proctor.

Co-opted Member: Jan Frances (Families Representative)

In attendance: Councillor Ivan Powell (Cabinet Member Children and Young People)

Officers: Simon Cann (Committee Clerk), Dylan Harrison (Head of Service Safeguarding and Review), Alfie Rees-Glinos (Governance Support Assistant), Tina Russell (Corporate Director Children and Young People), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Honey Woodward (Service Manager Quality, Assurance and Performance)

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Sylvia Cockroft (Archdiocese of Cardiff), Sam Pratley (Hereford Diocese).

23. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There had been no named substitutes.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People highlighted a recommendation the committee had made in its meeting of 30 July 2024 in relation to the Families' Commission Update:

"The funding available to support development of a child-friendly Herefordshire is distributed as rapidly as possible."

The cabinet member pointed out that there was no funding aligned to the development of child-friendly Herefordshire and that the conversation in the meeting had been around targeted early help interventions through the Police and Crime Commissioner and council money.

The committee agreed that the recommendation should be removed.

Resolved:

With the above amendment noted, that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

26. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A document containing questions received from members of the public and the responses provided was published as a supplement to the agenda on the Herefordshire Council website. Supplementary questions and responses given, are attached at Appendix 1 to the minutes of this meeting.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from members of the council.

28. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review introduced and gave an overview of the report.

The committee heard that quality assurance was at the heart of the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The QAF (Quality Assurance Framework) was made up of three equal and complementary components:

- Hearing the voice of children, young people and parents/carers
- Audit activity
- Key Performance Indicators.

A key part of the quality assurance work being carried out was the multi-agency activity being conducted with the police, health and voluntary sector partners through the Safeguarding Partnership.

The QAF (Quality Assurance Framework) was being updated with a view to the new framework being complete by the end of the September 2024, with a particular emphasis being given to listening to and acting on the voice of children and young people.

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. The committee asked for further details in relation to the changes being implemented in the new framework and why those changes had come about.
 - The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review stressed there was an increased emphasis on feedback from children and young people, there was a whole new stream of activity to collect feedback on a regular basis, which would be monitored on a month-by-month basis.
 - The audit template had been improved to make it more user friendly for practitioners. Going forward, the whole service - rather than individual sections - would be looked at every month.
 - Case grading would be carried out by team managers, but alongside that a peer auditor, who was not part of the operational work, would also carry out an audit (which would include engaging with the child,

family and social worker). The outcomes of these two audits would be looked at together and a third senior manager would come in to discuss any differences between the two gradings. This would act as a looped audit, which would enable for immediate learning to be provided for the manager and peer auditor.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that applying this looped audit model across the service would provide much greater opportunity to identify areas where things were being done well and where improvement might be needed.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People pointed out that one historic area of weakness had been in the high level approach the service had taken to providing feedback to the workforce, this hadn't always been meaningful for staff. The updated framework would provide detailed personal feedback that would allow people to understand when they were doing well, where improvement was needed and what impact the improvements being introduced were having.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained the greater emphasis being placed on service experience feedback from children and families in relation to: how easily they had been able to contact their social worker, had they being provided with a copy of their plan and were they given an explanation that provided them with an understanding of why they/there child was in care.
 - Experience feedback would be more distinct from and provide a more holistic perspective than the regular case specific feedback which concerned individual details of plans rather than the service user experience as a whole.
2. The committee enquired about the impact of doing the simple things well as emphasised by the improvement partners at Leeds City Council.
- The Service Manager Quality, Assurance and Performance explained that the service had been working very closely with the partners from Leeds whilst developing the renewed framework. It was doing a lot of work in a lot of different areas, but had avoided taking a scattergun approach and was ensuring things were being done well in one area before moving on to the next.
 - The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review stated that doing the simple things well involved listening to and reacting to feedback from children and families about the fundamentals of social work practice.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People pointed out that there was nothing wrong with the existing quality assurance framework, but it was being updated to reflect the new programme of activity, which would include: audit, key performance indicators and service user feedback. Only with those three things in place would it be possible to gain a real understanding of the quality of the services being provided.
3. The committee noted that the values and principles that underpinned the Quality Assurance Framework seemed very similar to the council's corporate values and

principles, and enquired whether there a more specific set of values and principles that would underpin the updated framework.

- The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review gave an assurance that the new Quality Assurance Framework was being updated with the Thrive values and the values seen within the Workforce Development Strategy, and would reflect the restorative and strength-based approach.
4. The committee stressed it was keen for the framework to be publicly available and that the values contained within it should be evident and transparent.
 5. The committee enquired how the Quality Assurance Framework would be changed and updated to take into account and react to feedback being provided by children, young people and families.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the framework would not change, but that there was a foundation around the framework that included a key performance indicator dashboard underpinning the Improvement Plan, which would be monitored on an ongoing basis.
 - The audit case file model would enable children and families to answer questions that had specifically been put in as measures within the phase 2 Improvement Plan. It would be a dynamic process, but not one that would involve 'reinventing the wheel' every few months.
 6. The committee asked how it would be possible to ascertain that the changes and improvements being introduced were having an impact on young people.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that the impact would be seen everywhere within the service and would come back through feedback from children and families explaining that they understood and had contributed to their plans. Key performance indicators would demonstrate that the service was getting plans out within timescales and that less plans were overdue. Professional audits would show that plans were being produced to a high standard.
 7. The committee noted that, historically, regular changes of appointed social workers had been a problem for many young people, and asked how the service intended to address workforce issues in order to meet the challenge of improving the quality of plans.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the workforce strategy was weaved through the work that was being carried out all the time and that there was a dedicated Workforce Board in place to implement the Workforce Strategy and ensure stability and continuity.
 - Providing individual staff and teams with positive feedback and recognition for progress that was being made was also key in ensuring that the workforce felt valued and wanted to remain in the service.

- The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review highlighted the work being carried out through the Social Care Academy, which had been successful in training and retaining newly qualified social workers.
8. A committee member raised concerns that the constant monitoring and auditing of staff and plans created an oppressive environment for social workers. It was asked if there was a system in place to capture the voice of the social workers.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the results of the recent Council Workforce Survey had allowed for a deep dive into what the workforce across the children's directorate was feeling. There had been greater engagement with the survey this time around and it had provided positive feedback about the directorate.
 - A new national approach called the 'social work health check' had just been launched, which aimed to understand how social workers felt they were being supported, challenged and guided to be the best practitioners they could be.
 - A new communication overview had been launched that would allow staff to obtain information and provide feedback on what was happening within the directorate. This was backed up by bi-monthly staff conferences and an ongoing informal approach to meeting with team managers for them to provide feedback to their teams.
9. The committee asked if there was a mechanism for staff to provide anonymous feedback about the directorate.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained there was a whistleblowing process and means for staff to send anonymous emails, but the preference would be that there was an environment where staff felt confident and comfortable about sharing any issues or concerns they had openly with their team and manager. The Workforce Survey was also anonymous.
10. A committee member raised concerns that employers never got the full story when a boss asked a junior member of staff or a team of workers what their thoughts were on workplace matters and it was suggested that consideration be given to introducing the use of quality circles - where feedback came out from a group of workers of the same level/rank, but no managers were present during the discussion and no individual was named as a contributor.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People said that the service would be willing to give consideration to such an approach.
11. The committee asked about the process for when parents requested a change of social worker in spite of the child/children involved in the case having a good relationship with them.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained it was important to listen to the voice and needs of the child rather than the parent in instances where a change of social worker was being requested. If there were clear signs that there was a healthy relationship and strong engagement between the child and the social worker then the request for a change would not necessarily be

granted. However, it was recognised that building good relations between all parties was paramount to achieving positive outcomes and where a relationship between a social worker and a family had completely broken down there were mechanisms in place for adjustments.

- The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review pointed out that feedback from families exiting the service had been very positive and nearly all families indicated that the social worker in their case had made a positive difference.

12. The committee asked if there was a mechanism within the framework to highlight positive feedback about the service and whether this could be communicated in public communications.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that positive feedback had been fed back to the individuals involved and quarterly assurance reports would contain information about both complaints and compliments. The director warned of the risks on publicly communicating bite-sized quarterly results and felt that a yearly summary would provide a clearer picture of how the service was performing.

13. The committee asked about the process involved in terms of closing the loop where specific issues had been identified around inadequate team or individual performance.

- The Service Manager Quality, Assurance and Performance explained that there was a moderation process whereby a reassessment and evaluation would be carried out by a service manager/head of service who would look back over the last 3 months to ensure improvements had been implemented and actions completed. Targeted workshops, one-to-one support and best practice briefings promoted ongoing wider learning that would address any themes emerging from audits.
- The Head of Service Safeguarding and Review pointed out that there was an escalation process in place for situations where improvements and interventions recommended by an audit did not appear to have been successfully implemented.
- It was noted the number of inadequate gradings coming through the system had dropped over the last quarter.

14. The committee asked if it was feasible to include children and young people within the auditing process and whether this was already being done.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the service was keen for input and feedback from children and young people to help shape the audit process. Newly developed participation groups might eventually be a good means of obtaining feedback once they were properly established. In the short term the plan was to see the new framework and auditing process embedded, get the participation groups established and then consider how to bring more people into the process.

15. The committee enquired as to why there had been an apparent drop in the number of audits being conducted in the previous month compared to the two preceding months.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that there had been a summer recess, with many staff taking their annual leave for holidays. In addition to that the new improvement plan and final development stages of the quality assurance framework had also had an impact on the number of audit cases being conducted. The directorate had taken a step back to leave some clear water between the old processes being concluded and the new processes being introduced in September 2024.
16. The committee raised concerns that previous promises that the voice of the child would be listened to and acted on as part of the quality assurance process had not been delivered on and sought assurance that things would be different with the updated framework.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that there were three main elements to consider when considering the voice of the child. The first came through the case work as it was being done and was recorded on file as the lived experience of the child. The second was drilling down into and analysing the input being recorded at every stage of the process and this was an area where the service had historically been quite weak, especially so in discussing and recording comments from children exiting the service.
 - There was a need for the service to be able to analyse and understand what the users experience of the overall journey through the system had been. As part of the new process children would be asked questions throughout their journey and at the point of closure when the assessment and intervention had concluded.
 - The third element of voice of the child was around participation and engagement and this was an area where work had recently been undertaken and developed with children looked after.
 - The service was constantly learning and challenging the way that it did things, and it was aware of the need to ensure all three of these areas were equally balanced.
17. The committee enquired as to where within the quality assurance framework could it be identified that culture change was being promoted and encouraged in a way that would become embedded.
- The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that they felt culture within an organisation was about people and not just training, workshops and briefings. Culture change should be led by managers and leaders with tools in place to lead a culture that wanted to listen to its children. The ways of working that were being introduced would do that. Evidence of culture change would come when staff could be seen to be promoting, encouraging and monitoring feedback from children and families.

18. The committee asked at what point did the Corporate Director Children and Young People expect to be satisfied that they were getting sufficient feedback from the children and families.

- The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained the service had carried out its stock take and challenge to itself in quarter 1 and would see changes starting to embed in quarter 2. Progress would be further challenged in quarter 3 and by the end of quarter 4 the quality assurance programme would have become business as usual.
- The Cabinet Member Children and Young People summed up by acknowledging the positive work that the directorate had carried out and was continuing to develop.
- It was important that relationship building with the child and with parents remained a key element of the process being put in place. The restorative practice model sought to - where it was safe to do so – manage the risk to children within their families and their family network, so that the service could get the best outcomes for them.

At the conclusion of the debate, the committee discussed recommendations and the following resolutions were agreed.

Resolved that:

- 1. Children’s Services should adopt their own set of values and principles, separate from the corporate council values. These should be displayed on a child- and family-friendly page on the Herefordshire Council website alongside a user-friendly guide to the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), ensuring the framework and values are publicly accessible and reinforcing the strengths-based, restorative approach to cultural change.**
- 2. The service should explore ways to involve children and young people in the analysis associated with the auditing process, ensuring their experiences and feedback contribute to service improvement.**
- 3. That the service explores Quality Circles as a means of getting staff feedback.**

29. IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Corporate Director Children and Young People introduced and gave an overview of the Improvement Plan Phase 2 report.

The Phase 2 Improvement Plan had been developed to bring focus, pace and measures to the improvement journey.

The plan set out highlights of what had been achieved in the last two years and importantly introduced a Quality Assurance Framework of measures to enable the service to monitor progress, these were: key performance indicators, service user feedback and audit.

The Children’s Improvement Board, had reviewed its terms of reference and membership and was independently chaired by the Department of Education Commissioner. Meetings were held on a six-weekly basis.

Herefordshire Council continued to have a strong commitment to improving performance in children's services. Transformation of the service was now in its third year of a three-year programme that began in October 2021. The phase 2 plan covered the period 2024/25 and would be refreshed in July 2025.

The Corporate Director Children and Young People highlighted two Ofsted recommendations listed within the plan:

- *Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.*
- *The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service.*

and described the actions and activities being undertaken as part of the plan to implement these recommendations and monitor progress.

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. The committee enquired what the director expected Ofsted's reaction to the plan to be.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that the plan had been shown to the lead Ofsted inspector, the reaction to it had been positive and the inspector had commented that it read like a more focused plan in terms of being able to demonstrate actions that had and were being taken by the service. Feedback from staff and partners had also been positive.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that the directorate was prepared for the next Ofsted visit and would be showcasing the new practice that was in place.
2. The committee enquired about an action regarding engaging with Herefordshire families to review and update the safeguarding levels of intervention, and asked how the service would move away from the risk averse response to intervention that it had been criticised for in the past.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that six engagement sessions had been booked in market towns, the sessions were being publicised by children's centres, GP surgeries, social workers and the safeguarding website. Take up for the first session had been disappointingly low and it had had to be cancelled.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People was keen to increase promotion of the events to ensure that future sessions were well attended by families and other members of the public.
 - The sessions would include the Corporate Director Children and Young People and partners from the police and health services, who would deliver a short presentation based on a real case study and then invite the public and attendees to provide input and opinion on what they thought the right and correct course of intervention would

be. This would then be followed by a discussion with the groups about what actually happened and how that compared with what the groups thought should have happened. This would hopefully open up conversations about what early help and intervention should look like.

3. The committee stressed the importance of widely promoting these sessions, possibly through social media to ensure people participated and engaged with them.
4. The committee raised concerns about children's dental health within the county and if/how the Improvement Plan would address this as issue.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People stated that they were unaware of the scale of the problem around dentistry within the county and that this would involve engaging with the Integrated Care Board to ensure the issue was addressed, especially for vulnerable children and children in care.
 - The Cabinet Member Children and Young People stated that in a recent meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board it had been reported that two new NHS dentists had been commissioned and that this was the start of a journey that might also potentially include extending provision via a mobile dentistry service for rural areas.
5. The committee considered whether dentistry was only one area where standards were not as high as would be expected and were concerned that other seemingly routine health and wellbeing checks and services might not be functioning to an acceptable standard. The question was asked as to whether there was a checklist for looked after children in terms of general physical and mental health care.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that there were two things that were recorded and collated as statutory indicators: the dental check for children in care, and health assessments for emotional and physical wellbeing. The key performance indicators on both of these were low, and there was a need to establish whether this was a capacity issue or a problem with the process in terms of carers not presenting children for the checks. The problem was being unpicked by the directorate now and was due to be looked at by the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in a forthcoming meeting.
6. The committee discussed the potential inclusion of child-friendly subsection within the impact on community section of council reports, particularly those going to Cabinet to inform executive decisions.
 - The Cabinet Member Children and Young People explained there was support for the child friendly concept, but there was a danger of creating a burden of activity that might detract from work already being done. It was suggested that child friendly activity should ideally sit alongside existing work, rather generating additional work.
7. The committee praised the update of the Improvement Plan, particularly the inclusion of monthly snapshot quality assurance data, which showed clearly how areas were improving from 2022 through to 2024. The benefits of being able to identify trends and build up a longitudinal picture of what was going on across the service were welcomed.

8. The committee enquired as to whether there were any explanations for drops in performance across certain areas over the period, citing as an example, the reduction in the number of strategy meetings taking place within 48 hours in the MASH, which had dropped from 96% to 92%.
9. The committee also asked, why, with a smaller case load in 2023 the service had completed a lower percentage of care proceedings within 26 weeks than was achieved in 2022.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained that they didn't have the background detail to hand to explain those particular dips in performance and that going back through every indicator - to establish why they had changed - would be a time intensive process for the service. The director felt that it was important to focus on where the service was currently and where it was going, but did give an assurance that they would seek out an explanation and provide a written answer regarding the two areas of dipping performance identified by the committee.
10. The committee enquired about the frequency of reporting in relation to the multi-agency Professional Differences Escalation processes.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People that the crucial element was that there were timely outcomes for escalations relating to disagreements among partners around thresholds of interventions and that these escalations were held in matter of days and not weeks. The annual report on that would detail how many time the escalation process had been needed in order to resolve a difference between professional bodies. It was not anticipated that there would be significant use of the escalation process over the course of a year.
11. The committee asked what mechanism was in place by which the progress of the delivery of the plan could be monitored and made public.
 - The Corporate Director Children and Young People explained progress was monitored by the Improvement Board, where each of the recommendations and the actions in them were reported every six weeks. Any potential risks would be identified and addressed in situations where a particular activity was being delayed.
 - The Commissioner's Report would be made public as would the outcomes of Ofsted visits.
12. The committee suggested the Corporate Director Children and Young People might consider how progress being made regarding Delivery Plan and Improvement Board activity could be communicated more openly to the public.

At the conclusion of the debate, the committee discussed potential recommendations and the following resolutions were agreed.

Resolved that:

1. **Cabinet should endorse a publicity campaign to ensure maximum feedback from children, young people, and families on the "Working Together**

Consultation" concerning Right Time, Right Place thresholds and managing risk.

- 2. That Herefordshire Council identify a means to report publicly on progress in delivering the Improvement Plan for children’s services.**

30. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee agreed to invite and include a representative from Rural Media in the discussion around the ‘including children’s voices in council policy’ item scheduled for the 26 November 2024 meeting.

Resolved:

The committee unanimously approved the work programme that had been put before it.

31. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 26 November 2024, 2pm

32. APPENDIX 1 - SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WITH RESPONSES

Supplementary Questions from members of the public – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, 17 September 2024

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mr James McGeown Weobley	<p>Correct answer!</p> <p>Social Worker Assessment (meeting with parents, seeing the child, parents consent to seek school/GP data) must happen before Strategy Discussion and determining need for S47 enquiry.</p> <p>If this due process abandoned, Judge Thornton ruled:</p> <p>That unless there is urgency,..., it is unlawful to commence a section 47 investigation without visiting the child and speaking with the parents. Seeking background checks without parental consent would be unlawful UNLESS a legitimate s47 investigation had been formally convened.</p> <p>So:</p> <p>First time Herefordshire family becomes aware of a Social Services case against them is when two Social Workers turn up at their closed gate, without any paperwork, state that a Strategy Meeting was held that morning, they had gathered background information from GP, you are under S47 investigation and we are now telling you what is</p>	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

		going to happen next to your family.	
		What is the likelihood of this sort of scenario in Herefordshire.	
		Handful, Few Dozen or Hundreds of times each year?	

Response by Cabinet Member Children and Young People

I have outlined in the response to the original question how the law and legislation is interpreted and applied.

The Children Act 89 legislation guides our practice as it sets out our duties and responsibilities.

- ***Duty to undertake an assessment of need*** where we receive information a child might be a child in need “child unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development without provision of children’s social care services” (s17)
- ***Duty to undertake enquires*** where we receive information a child is or is likely to suffer significant harm (s47)

The Act describes significant harm as follows:

“Harm” is the ***“ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of the child”*** (defined under Section 31, [Children Act 1989](#)). Without the intervention of services a child would likely not meet their expected health and or development.

“Significant” is a professional judgement – but view of parents, carers and children and young people are taken into account.

Working Together 2023 ask us to “Consider ***the severity, duration and frequency*** of any abuse, degree of threat, coercion, or cruelty, ***the significance of others in the child’s world***, including all adults and children in contact with the child (this can include those within the immediate and wider family and those in contexts beyond the family, including online), and the ***cumulative impact of adverse events***”

Working Together also sets out definitions, behind categories of harm to further guide practice and decisions making when a S47 enquiry is completed and decisions are made as to the need to continue child protection intervention through a child protection plan.

These are:

- ***Physical*** - hitting, kicking, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or suffocating, make up or cause symptoms of illness in children,
- ***Neglect*** - not providing adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or health care, inadequate supervision and protection
- ***Sexual*** - forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities - contact abuse and non-contact abuse
- ***Emotional*** – regularly and persistently humiliating, threatening, degrading, or scapegoating a child. It can include isolating or manipulating a child, not offering encouragement or accepting a child’s limitations
- ***Child criminal exploitation*** – sexual exploitation, forced labour, criminal exploitation
- ***Domestic abuse*** - controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people who are, or who have been in a relationship; Children can be directly involved in incidents of domestic abuse or they may be harmed by seeing or hearing abuse happening
- ***Influences of extremism*** which could lead to radicalisation

Guided by the legislation and statutory guidance it is ultimately the social work professional judgment to determine if a Strategy Discussion is required, and if so, the multi-agency partnership to determine if a S47 enquiry is required. Under the Children's Safeguarding Partnership procedures there is a professional escalation process should any partner agency believe interventions are not at the right level and a complaint process in place for parents if they don't agree the intervention into their family is at the right level.

You have asked a supplementary question providing a scenario in practice. This response seeks to explain how based on that scenario, decision making would take place, though I should confirm that there is no requirement to seek parental consent for a strategy discussion. This is a professionals meeting held to share information known following a referral that indicates a child may be suffering significant harm.

In the original response I set out the criteria for the types of harm this is likely to include.

One of the outcomes of a strategy discussion may be that a Section 47 enquiry should be conducted. The approach you describe - of a social worker arriving at a home address and informing a parent a Section 47 enquiry has begun as an outcome of a professional strategy discussion - will be the start of that Section 47 enquiry. During this process, parents and any subject child are given the opportunity to engage and share their views within that enquiry. This child protection enquiry will then inform the need to progress to a child protection conference if a child is deemed to be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm.

In terms of a social worker "arriving without paperwork", we do have an explanatory leaflet for parents, so these should be made available and I apologise to any parent who did not receive this as part of an Section 47 undertaken on their child. I have reinforced the need to give parents these leaflets within the service.

We are in the process of updating these leaflets and developing one for young people. Once completed we will also make these available via the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership website as well as staff taking out hard copies.

I am unable to add any further detail in my response as to do so will require case specific detail that it is inappropriate to share in a public domain

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary Question	Question to
PQ 2	Mrs Megan McGeown Weobley	<p>Your answer provides some explanation but during the same period, neighbouring Worcestershire and your best practice partner, Leeds city council (FOI requests) did not have a threefold increase in S47 enquiries. Nothing Like It, Nowhere Near.</p> <p>There is concern that Herefordshire Social Services have adopted the overreaching practice of using Section 47 enquires as a big stick to intimidate families.</p> <p>In effect, Social Workers using S47 to knock on families doors and ask to come in and snoop for some evidence of harm. Doing this without reasonable cause to suspect (or what, if you want to borrow from American cop</p>	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

		<p>shows, you might call “Probable cause”) that the child is at risk of harm in order to commence an investigation.</p> <p>This is a very real concern held by many members of “Families' Alliance for Change (Herefordshire)”. Can Herefordshire Council provide evidenced reassurance that this is not a true fact?</p>	
<p>Response by Cabinet Member Children and Young People</p> <p>I can provide my own assurance that the approach to safeguarding and working with families you describe is not the approach lead by myself or our leadership. The Restorative Practice model seeks to ensure there is engagement first and at every opportunity to support and where necessary challenge parents to care for their own children well. Following the training of staff over 23/24 in the first qtr. of 24/25 we are seeing a reduced number of cases brought before the court and a reducing number of children subject to child protection plans. Both are indicators of working earlier and at a lower level with families. However, there is more to do. We need to complete our Restorative Practice training with our agency partners, who are also part of the decision on what meets the professional judgement for a child protection intervention. We have community engagement session for reviewing “Right Service Right Time” (threshold guidance) under Working Together and we need to ensure when children step down from child protection, they live in families that sustain that change to positive safe care. All three points are part of our work under phase 2 of the service improvement plan.</p>			

The meeting ended at 17:05

Chairperson