

Title of report: Families Commission Update

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 30 July 2024

Report by: Corporate Director Children's and Young People

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To provide a progress update on the Families Commission report considerations.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee receive an update on the considerations that were outlined in the Families Commission report, and**
- b) **The committee determine any recommendations it wishes to make to relevant bodies to secure further improvements in safeguarding children and young people in Herefordshire**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options as the committee requested a progress update on the Families Commission report considerations.

Key considerations

2. Herefordshire Council Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 and found to be inadequate across each area of the inspection framework. The inspection report was

published on 21 September 2022 and a Statutory Notice was issued by the Department for Education.

3. As part of the statutory notice, a Children's Commissioner was appointed to review the council's capacity and capability to improve services within a reasonable timeframe. The Commissioner's report was published on 1 March 2023 and included several considerations, including the need for the council to resolve, as far as is possible, all outstanding historic complaints.
4. Whilst the review was being undertaken from September to December 2022, the Children's Commissioner became aware of a number of families with longstanding concerns about their experience of Herefordshire Children's Services, some from several years ago and some more recent. Many families had complained and also raised questions at public council meetings and families continued to feel that their views were not listened to or responded to and they felt this had consequences for their families.
5. The Families Commission was initiated by Eleanor Brazil, Herefordshire Children's Commissioner and taken forward by the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.
6. The purpose of the Commission was to give these families an opportunity to be heard by an independent panel and share their experiences to inform the learning about how Herefordshire Children's Services needs to improve.
7. The terms of reference for the Commission set its purpose as follows:
 - A. To give parents and families an opportunity to tell their story to an independent panel.
 - B. To identify any steps that the Council and partners can and should take as a result of hearing families' testimonies, either in relation to individual cases or in respect of general issues.
 - C. To learn from their experiences and to ensure that this knowledge is used to inform improvements to Children's Services.
 - D. To ensure that, as far as possible, families feel that their concerns have been heard and addressed, and that this is as much as can be done to resolve matters
8. At the conclusion of the Commission, the independent panel [report](#) posed seven questions to the council and the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership. These were:
 - A. How will the Council and its partners provide a meaningful and responsive early help service which is accessible to families, regardless of which agency they contact first for help?
 - B. How will the Council support its social workers to practise in ways that demonstrate empathy, perseverance, authority, professional confidence and capability; working with people to enable full participation in discussions and decision making?
 - C. How will the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership ensure that professionals are working together in the best interests of children and their families, to the highest standards of professional practice, informed by good quality research and evidence?
 - D. What actions will the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership take to satisfy itself that there is good understanding across all 'frontline' agencies of domestic violence and abuse and its impact on individuals and families?

- E. How will Herefordshire Children's Services support social workers to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of parents and families and enable their participation in planning to keep their children safe and promote their wellbeing?
 - F. What will the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership do to promote a Think Family approach across the partnership?
 - G. What will the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership do to ensure that the complaints procedures in every agency across the partnership are accessible to families, work well, and findings are recorded and acted on?
9. [On 26 September 2023](#), the children and young people's Scrutiny Committee discussed the [Families Commission report](#) findings and key questions for consideration and provided the following update against progress, which can be viewed on the [council's website](#).
 10. Herefordshire Children's Services have continued to undertake work around the seven considerations and the latest progress against the considerations as of the 26 June 2024 can be viewed in Appendix A.
 11. Alongside the work that has been undertaken to address the key consideration questions, there have been further follow up meetings with families who attended the Commission to further address questions that related directly to the families. For those families where additional questions were raised by the chair of the independent panel directly to the local authority, further meetings were offered to families by the Leader of the Council, The Lead Member for Children's Services, the Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council and the Corporate Director for Children and Young people.
 12. A number of families attended further meetings represented by the Service Director for Improvement, the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Children's Services. Each meeting clarified a number of issues, concerns and 'bottom lines' which were subsequently followed up to resolve relevant matters for individual families.
 13. The Phase 2 Improvement Plan has incorporated all ongoing work coming from this review. The Phase 2 Improvement Plan includes a range of opportunities for children, families and the public to continue to feedback on their experiences of Herefordshire Children's Services and to engage in the development of services, as we continue our improvement journey and remain committed to being a learning organisation. The improvement board is due to share Phase 2 Improvement Plan in September with scrutiny on the 16 September 2024 and cabinet on the 26 September 2024.
 14. The Working together to safeguard children guidance as seen in Appendix B was revised and published in December 2023. This document sets out how partners should work together and with families to protect children from harm and promote their welfare. As part of our implementation of this new version we will be seeking to engage service users, parents and our community to work with us on the development of our 'levels of need'. Understanding what they think appropriate levels of intervention are and look like as we carry out, not only our duty to protect, as outlined in the Children Act 1989. Our vision and commitment is to ensure families receive early support first and at the right time. Our work with families from early help through to child protection and care is based within a restorative practice model and is an important part of our work for the forthcoming year. Families involved with the Families Commission will be invited to join the Corporate Director of Children Services and safeguarding strategic partnership to feed into this final piece of work.

Community Impact

15. The Families Commission was set up as a result of the recommendations of the Children's Commissioner and the Statutory Improvement Notice issued by the Department for Education. Feedback from the Commission which informed improvement in Herefordshire Children's Services, which has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire
16. [The Council Plan 2024–2028](#) includes the ambition to support all children to have the best start in life. Sometimes children and families need our help. We are committed to improving Children's Services and providing support to families who need it.

Environmental Impact

17. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report

Equality duty

18. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –
 - a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
19. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Whilst this is an update to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committees and will in itself have minimal equalities impacts, consideration has been made in the consideration of Executive decisions and the Executive Responses provided by the Cabinet.

Resource implications

20. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report which is for information and discussion.

Legal implications

21. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report which is for information and discussion.

Risk management

22. There are no specific risks directly associated with activity referred to in this report. The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and Herefordshire Children's Services each maintain their own risk registers.

Consultees

23. None

Appendices

Appendix A – Families Commission Progress Report
Appendix B – Working together to safeguard Children

Background papers

[Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 26.09.2023](#)

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	John Coleman	Date 15/07/2024
Finance	Judith Tranmer	Date 15/07/2024
Legal	Tess Burgess	Date 15/07/2024
Communications	Michala Lee	Date 14/07/2024
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 15/07/2024
Procurement	N/A	Date N/A
Risk	Elizabeth Freedland	Date 09/07/2024

Approved by	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date	Click or tap to enter a date.
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Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.