



Title of report: Early Help Task and Finish Group - final report

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 22 October 2026

Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To provide Cabinet with the final report of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee's Early Help Task and Finish Group.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet note the report; and**
- b) Respond to the recommendations contained in the report.**

Alternative options

- 1. Cabinet could choose not to consider this report. This is not recommended. Scrutiny is an integral part of the council's democratic function, that serves in part to strengthen the council's decision-making processes.
- 2. Cabinet can also choose how to respond to the recommendations contained in the report, which are also listed in paragraph 5 of this covering report.

Key considerations

- 3. On 22 July 2025, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee agreed a terms of reference for a task and finish group to:

- a. recognise strengths in Herefordshire's current Early Help provision,
 - b. identify good practice across different communities, and
 - c. highlight gaps or inconsistencies in Herefordshire's provision and the work taking place to address them.
4. The task and finish group concluded its work earlier this year. Its report summarising its work, alongside recommendations to support the council and wider partnership's early help for children, young people and families, is appended to this report.
 5. The task and finish group made four recommendations:
 - a. **Develop a Long-Term Sustainability Plan for Family Hubs Beyond 2029**
Family Hubs represent a major opportunity to rebuild universal early years support, improve Good Level of Development outcomes and strengthen integrated pathways from conception to age 19 (or 25 for SEND). However, funding is time-limited. Herefordshire should develop a sustainability plan that embeds successful interventions into core budgets, strengthens rural outreach models, expands coproduction with families and aligns Family Hubs with Families First, Talk Community and the Youth Strategy. This recommendation mitigates the most significant strategic risk identified in the report: the long-term viability of the universal early help infrastructure.
 - b. **Increase the availability of safe youth spaces**
As part of the Youth Strategy work the partnership should ensure there is a workable plan to increase the availability and range of spaces young people can access which are safe, free to access and welcome young people. These may include youth clubs but should go wider to public open spaces, libraries, and informal hang out spaces. This is to emphasise within the Youth Strategy work the need for this very specific type of youth provision.
 - c. **Request the council's Scrutiny Management Board (SMB) reviews the council's support for the voluntary and community sector**
This review highlighted the key role played by the voluntary and community sector in a range of aspects of early help and the significant pressures on the sector and individual organisations. As the group was not in a position to make recommendations to the executive about ways in which the sector might be strengthened, it recommends that SMB consider this issue in the overall scrutiny work programme.
 - d. **Share the good practice**
The task and finish group identified a range of long-established good practices in early help that deliver good outcomes to families. The principles of good practice here should be shared across the authority and across the system (beyond Children's Services) for other services to consider when addressing their challenges. Herefordshire Council and its partners should identify, share and embed the wide range of good practice demonstrated across the early help network. This includes using the service user feedback framework, coproduced assessments, relational practice, locality working and other community development models. Partners should share these strengths through simple tools such as a good practice pack, short case studies and locality learning sessions. Sharing the full Early Help Task and Finish Group report widely will also help services see what is working well in early help provision.

Community impact

6. The report demonstrates how coordinated early help strengthens communities by making support easier to access, more consistent, and more responsive to real family needs. By improving collaboration between schools, health services, midwifery, voluntary organisations

and locality teams, families receive help earlier and closer to home. This reduces isolation in rural areas, builds resilience, and prevents problems from escalating.

7. As the document notes, partners “demonstrated commitment, creativity and a shared ambition to strengthen early intervention,” which helps create safer, more connected and more confident communities. Overall, early help fosters a culture where children, families and communities thrive together.

Environmental impact

8. As this is a decision on a democratic function of Herefordshire Council, it will have minimal environmental impacts. Nonetheless, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the council’s environmental policies.

Equality duty

9. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
10. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this project and it has been found to have low impact for equality.
11. Due to the potential impact of this project/decision/activity being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be considered when making a decision about this activity/project:
 - a. The impact on services for children and young people.

Resource implications

12. There are no direct resources implications arising from this report. The report however makes recommendations which, if implemented, could have an impact on council resources. These should be considered in any future report to Cabinet or Council recommending any new services or expansion or extension of existing services.

Legal implications

13. The role of the scrutiny committees is to help develop policy, to carry out reviews of council and other local services, and to hold decision makers to account for their actions and decisions. The Constitution includes a mechanism where recommendations from scrutiny committees must be considered by Cabinet.

Risk management

14. There are no direct risks arising from consideration of this report.

Consultees

15. This report has been approved by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, who commissioned the task and finish group that produced the report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Early help in Herefordshire – Herefordshire Council Children And Young People Scrutiny Committee Early Help Task And Finish Group final report

Background papers

None identified.