

Supplement to the agenda for

Children and young people scrutiny committee

Monday 16 March 2020

10.15 am

**Committee Room 1 - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square,
Hereford, HR1 2HX**

	Pages
5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC	3 - 4
6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL	5 - 6

Supplement – schedule of questions received for meeting of children and young people scrutiny committee – 16 March 2020

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Steel, Hereford	There have been three high profile failures by Children’s Services in the last two years - the Section 20 cases, the twins adoption scandal, and the repeated failure to safeguard child victims of sexual abuse from their abusers in schools - and Ofsted continues to have significant concerns over the leadership and management of the Children’s Directorate. How is the committee going to improve its own practices and processes to ensure that its scrutiny of the Children’s Directorate can be more effective and useful?	Chairperson of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Response:

The committee remains open to influence on ways in which it can continue to improve and strengthen its role to scrutinise the social care and safeguarding of all of the children in the council’s care and within the county. In relation to the specific cases outlined in this question; the Children and Young People scrutiny committee has taken direct action in response to the Section 20 cases, the court judgements relating to two adoption cases and undertaken a public ‘spotlight’ review into all forms of peer on peer abuse, including peer on peer sexual abuse.

ω In regard to the Section 20 cases a task and finish group conducted an evidence led investigation looking at section 20 orders, the processes in place to ensure their appropriate use and to conduct analysis on case samples. From their findings, [the task and finish group made 8 recommendations](#) (weblink), 1 recommendation to the children and young people scrutiny committee and 7 recommendations to the executive. All of the recommendations were accepted and actions were agreed for all of them. The executive’s response can be found [here](#) (weblink).

In the court judgements on the adoption cases a task and finish group conducted an evidence led investigation based around the rulings set out in the court judgments and the Ofsted inspection and resulting action plan. The group met on three occasions receiving expert input from officers who were intrinsically involved with the adoption. As a result of those discussions [the task and finish group made 14 recommendations](#) (weblink) in regard to the high court judgement concerning children and families. The executive responded to each of those recommendations, accepting and agreeing to action all of them. The executive’s response can be found [here](#) (weblink).

For [the spotlight review concerning peer on peer abuse in schools](#) (weblink), the committee agreed to undertake this review due to reports of increasing levels of peer on peer abuse and public concern at schools in Herefordshire. From their findings, the spotlight review made 12 recommendations, 9 were directed to the executive to respond to, 2 were directed to the scrutiny committee to respond to and 1 related to drafting a letter to the Department for Education to outline the comments of witnesses at the spotlight review concerning existing peer on peer abuse guidance for schools. The executive response is being prepared and is expected to be published in April.

On a point of correction. The last Ofsted focused visit clearly set out areas for improvement that the service is addressing, whilst also noting some areas of strength including quality of supervision of the children with disabilities. No priority areas for action were set out in the letter following the Ofsted focused visit. There are strong areas of performance from our children and families directorate and leadership, including the work with schools and education settings to achieve a range of performance that is the best in the West Midlands and statistical neighbours, such as key stage 2 primary results. Our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities approach in Herefordshire was rated second in the country last year by IMPOWER in terms of value for money and outcomes.

PQ 2	Ms Liddle, Ledbury	It was agreed in late November 2019 that a full review of all cases of peer on peer sexual assault since October 2016 was needed to ensure that all child victims of peer on peer sexual assault had been properly safeguarded and no child was still at risk of harm. How is the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee planning to scrutinise the length of time it has taken to complete this review, the methodology and the outcomes?	Chairperson of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
<p>Response: Following the spotlight review concerning peer on peer abuse in schools (weblink), it was recommended that the executive provides the outcome of the current review (including lessons learned) into cases of peer to peer abuse referred to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to the spotlight review and the children and young people scrutiny committee. It was agreed to review cases from Jan 2017 onwards, this review will be concluded by the end of March. As part of the children and young people's scrutiny work programme a report will be received on the review.</p> <p>In addition, the spotlight review recommended that the children and young people scrutiny committee agree a further meeting of the spotlight review to consider a greater level of data to provide a more informed understanding of the scale and complexity of peer on peer abuse in Herefordshire; the outcomes of the review will support this objective. Once the review has been concluded and the outcomes are made available, an item will be added to the children and young people scrutiny committee work programme for consideration at a future committee meeting.</p> <p>Of note is the response received from the Ofsted focussed visit which stated that <i>'The local authority has worked closely with schools to ensure that all have policies and procedures that both help to identify peer-on-peer abuse concerns and help to limit risks. The local authority has ensured that these issues have been the subject of practice reviews, including through a recent multi-agency spotlight review on peer-on-peer abuse'</i>.</p>			

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Agenda item no. 6 - Questions from members of the Council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor Jeremy Milln, Central	Referring to Ofsted’s letter of 21 st January following its 18 th December inspection of Herefordshire’s children’s services what is the leadership team doing to understand and address key shortcomings in its own management and supervision of staff? For example it would be a good idea to give an opportunity for leavers (anonymously and via 3 rd parties if need be) to feed back their experience of employment with Herefordshire Council and share their reasons for leaving. Social workers are like teachers: before applying for a job they check the Ofsted report. We cannot hope to attract and retain experienced staff to a service where leadership, support and management are seen as deficient.	Cabinet Member Children and Families

Response:

Referring to Ofsted’s letter of 21st January following its 18th December inspection of Herefordshire’s children’s services what is the leadership team doing to understand and address key shortcomings in its own management and supervision of staff?

5

Response; Key performance information is available to heads of service on a weekly basis, to enable them to drill down with team managers into the performance of individual teams. Data is provided at mid-month point as to the % of social workers that have received supervision, so heads of service have oversight of how many supervisions are required in that month, and can have these conversations with team managers accordingly.

To have an overview on the quality of supervision, heads of service are required to observe two supervision sessions per quarter.

The Assistant Director chairs monthly performance meetings with heads of service.

The Director chairs quarterly performance challenge sessions with AD and Heads of service, and from April, team managers will be attending these meetings as well.

It would be a good idea to give an opportunity for leavers (anonymously and via 3rd parties if need be) to feed back their experience of employment with Herefordshire Council and share their reasons for leaving.

Response; All leavers are offered an exit interview. In the last twelve months, there have been six social work employees that have left Herefordshire County Council.

There have been a number of employees that have moved posts within the council; the data on this is being pulled together by HR.

The confirmation of resignation letter details that staff should complete the exit survey online or if they prefer they can request a face to face exit interview.

Only 1 person completed the online survey.

We cannot hope to attract and retain experienced staff to a service where leadership, support and management are seen as deficient.

Response; The focused visit in January 2019 evaluated one service area. There is now a new Head of Service in post in this service area who took up post the week after Ofsted had conducted their visit. They are aware of the challenges in the service area and are making every effort to address these.

We are working with Essex County Council, as performance improvement partners, to learn from them and develop approaches which can drive up the quality of practice

We are implementing signs of safety to help embed strengths based practice and improve our service offer to children and families.

Recruitment is challenging against a national shortage of social workers, and we acknowledge adverse publicity can impact on this. However, prior to the Ofsted visit, recruitment drives and initiatives were not successful in attracting experienced social workers to work in Hereford, and we are now actively recruiting newly qualified social workers in an attempt to “grow our own” social workers for the future. We also have six people who commenced the social work apprenticeship scheme with the Open University in February 2019.