

Supplement to the agenda for

Council

Tuesday 27 April 2021

10.00 am

Online meeting

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Pages

3 - 6

Agenda item no. 3 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Anonymous	How will social services investigate and correct other potential injustices that may have occurred over the past decade? In cases where legal aid is unobtainable families have likely been unable to question poor or unjust decisions made.	Cabinet member children and families
Response: We will be undertaking an external independent review of all open cases across children's services, including children in care, to assure ourselves that assessments and care plans are child focussed, are meeting the welfare needs of the child and that care plans are evidencing good safe care and parents are included and have a voice to the greatest extent possible. Citizen's Advice Bureau can provide free expert legal advice to anyone who feels a case has resulted in the wrong decision, which subsequently resulted in their being denied legal advice. We are committed to reviewing such cases on a case-by-case basis. And to support this, we have set up a dedicated email where you can submit 'cases of concern', the link of which is attached here: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/careconcerns or email careconcerns@herefordshire.gov.uk			
PQ 2	Anonymous	To provide some public confidence, when and how will you ensure that false records on your mosaic system, doctors, health centers, hospitals, schools, and teachers in this case are corrected and updated and reflect truthful and objective information, especially facts that have been established in court?	Cabinet member children and families
Response: The Council's Access to Information team can be contacted to request access to personal records. Information can be found here: Access to information – Herefordshire Council . If there is information that is incorrect then we as a council have a duty under UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) to ensure that the records are updated and corrected; You can challenge the accuracy of personal data held about you by an organisation and ask for it to be corrected or deleted. This is known as the 'right to rectification'. If your data is incomplete, you can ask for the organisation to complete it by adding more details.			
PQ 3	Anonymous	To provide some public confidence, when and how will all relevant professionals who have been given false information historically in this case, and who may interact with these children or Carers in the future, be made aware that false information had been given previously to them by the local authority?	Cabinet member children and families
Response: As part of our independent review of all cases, if incorrect information has been identified within records, this will be corrected in this case and others and disseminated to all professionals involved with the case to ensure their records are updated. As indicated in the previous question we as a council have a duty under GDPR to ensure that the records are updated and corrected; You can challenge the accuracy of personal data held about you by an organisation and ask for it to be corrected or deleted. This is known as the 'right to rectification'. If your data is incomplete, you can ask for the organisation to complete it by adding more details.			

PQ 4	Anonymous	It is evident from the judgment that the failure of these foster carers' acceptance of the 2013 judgement was a major factor of the long-standing failures. What specific immediate actions are you going to take with these foster carers, or any other carers, who do not follow court rulings?	Cabinet member children and families
<p>Response:</p> <p>Foster care is an incredibly difficult and challenging job, as many of these children have suffered significant trauma in their lives, which has left them with complex and challenging needs. As a council and corporate parent, we recognise and value the importance that our foster carers make every day to 'our' children's lives. The need to ensure our foster carers are supported and provided with additional resources and training as and when required is of the paramount importance.</p> <p>We have been introducing new policies and procedures to support practice development in the fostering team since the 2018 High Court Judgements. This will continue as part of the improvement plan to address learning from this case. Training for foster carers, including the current carers is continuing and future training is planned to improve the service needs. All this work has been undertaken jointly with colleagues within Legal Services, so we can assure adherence with court rulings, and the improvement work which has been undertaken will be overseen by the independent improvement board.</p> <p>In addition, in January 2021 we recruited a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (who is a qualified social worker) who is providing independent oversight of our foster carers to ensure their assessments are robust, they are provided with the right level of training and support, and that they adhere to established policy and procedures for looking after children in our care and this will include support to the current carers.</p>			
PQ 5	Anonymous	The Foster Care Providers and the independent review officer treated Court findings with contempt over many years and have harmed the children as a result, due in part of the very disturbing longstanding mindset that is evidently present at the council. Beside the direct actions to address the conduct of Social Workers and Carers, what immediate steps will you take to assure that there is a proper and independent functioning Foster Carer Review Panel and IRO department?	Cabinet member children and families
<p>Response: The appointment of a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO), will ensure adherence to court decisions, consistency and balance in decision making and the role of the Foster Carers re- parental responsibility and the wishes and feelings of children and young people in our care. The FIRO will be chairing reviews with Foster Carers and will undertake audit work on the robustness of plans for looked after children placed in foster care. The post holder commenced in January 2021.</p> <p>Concerning the IRO service, following a vacancy, a new experienced Head of Service has been appointed from a council judged by OFSTED to be 'outstanding'. They commenced their role in November 2020. Further work is underway on learning lessons from the review with a specific focus on independent support and challenge to social workers in terms of childcare planning and using the escalation policy to improve consistency of practice, and quality assuring and auditing of cases as part of the shared learning and improving practice</p>			

PQ 6	Mr J Roberts Lea Lawton	Many of the issues identified and some of the Council employees named in the High Court judgement of HH Justice Keehan were previously identified as a result of an earlier police investigation, circa 2017, which resulted in the conviction, at Worcester Crown Court, of a Social Care Manager from the same Looked After Children Team and is a matter of public record. Why was the culture in Children's Services not recognised and addressed effectively at this time when it was clearly evident?	Cabinet member children and families
<p>Response:</p> <p>Although a number of changes in procedures, including the 'Abuse of Position of Trust (Sexual Offences Act 2013) a 'conflict of interest policy' and the Council's whistleblowing policy has been revised to include an anonymous procedure. It is clear that our previous commitments to improve our social care services for children have fallen sadly short of the standards expected.</p> <p>Looking forward, our newly recruited Principal Social Worker (PSW), who has come from an outstanding authority, will hold a critical role as a voice for social workers and has in place regular meetings with practitioners and managers to gain insight into some of the management issues highlighted in this and past judgements. Where a culture of mismanagement is identified, the PSW will be raising this with senior managers and the new Interim Director to ensure these are addressed accordingly.</p>			
PQ 7	Ms T Jeyasingham Ross on Wye	Why is the children's service structured so managerial top heavy?	Cabinet member children and families
<p>Response:</p> <p>Our senior management structure consists of three Assistant Directors, who each have reporting to them three heads of services, with front line team managers reporting to them. We do not consider that this is disproportionate for our social work. Having sufficient management oversight is key to providing robust oversight and critical reflection on the quality of support we provide to children and young people as well as to practitioners working to help them. Through our new Signs of Safety practice framework, we are working to improve how we foster a culture of learning and open reflection, as well as improving how we work with children and families in a strength based and relationship approach to avoid the difficulties highlighted in the judgement in future.</p>			

