

**Supplement to the agenda for**

# **Cabinet**

**Thursday 15 December 2022**

**2.30 pm**

**Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4  
0LE**

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**PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 15 DECEMBER 2022**

**Question 1**

**From: Mr P McKay, Leominster**  
**To: Cabinet Member, Infrastructure & Transport**

Referencing questions 21-07-2022 and 27-10-2022, when the Parish Submissions that have now been digitised are added to the PROW website increasing visibility and availability, it will be seen that comparing the Parish Submissions for CRF with early Definitive Maps identifies that this led to many, well over 100, Green lanes being shown as Footpath, council officers never using non-statutory CRF when raising the definitive map, nor as RUPP as intended, and the ROWIP finding that the byway and bridleway network is very fragmented with more bridleways needed throughout the county.

With the non-statutory term CRF coming about due to Government issuing guidance to Parishes that included non-statutory terms will you ask them to acknowledge this, and with use not considered by Parish meeting to be limited to that of footpath include mention of this in your List of Anomalies?

**Response**

Thank you for your question.  
 The council's Modifying the Definitive Map process is publicised on the council's website, link below:  
<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public-rights-way/definitive-map-statement-dms/3>

If there is evidence that a route is not correctly defined and there needs to be a change to the Definitive Map, the council will review and address as to the process, this will be managed as resources become available.  
 The council will not add CRF to the list of Anomalies as we do not have the supporting evidence to justify. The council advise that any evidence and request to amend the Definitive Map should be submitted as set out in the process.

**Question 2**

**From: Ms D Conway, Leominster**  
**To: Cabinet Member, Children and Families**

In July, at Full Council, the claim was made that the incidence of Fabricated and Induced Illness (FII) in Herefordshire is 100 times the national average. In response, members and the public have been reassured by senior figures in this Council that the incidence of cases of is "not unusual when considered against other authorities".

When challenged in October to justify this claim, the public were told an audit was underway but not yet complete.

The Council committed to completing the audit by 18 November and to publishing the data "if it was ready".

Can the Council explain the delay and confirm when the data will be ready please?

**Response**

We recognise that there is considerable interest in the outcome of this request. The data is currently being validated and cross-checked and a further electronic search of case records has been requested by the Director of Children's Services to ensure that we have the most accurate

information possible before publishing this. We expect this activity to be concluded by mid-January.

### **Question 3**

**From: Hannah Currie, Hereford**  
**To: Cabinet Member, Children and Families**

The new plan, whilst commendably constructed, fails to grasp staff remain in post who are known to have toxic views. Toxic views do not just mean arrogance and the term "that's the Herefordshire way" or equivalent paraphrasing, it means deeply unsettling bullying characters and immoral view points.

An inability to recognise disabled parents traits that do not come from a malicious point is present. In turn disabled parents are pigeonholed into malicious categories unnecessarily. This is an equality/discrimination issue showing a clear lack of training.

At the full council meeting a former directorate employee has borne witness to a phrase "you hatch we snatch" being commonly used within the directorate. I cannot imagine any reasonable person agreeing that it is acceptable behaviour.

Are you going to send a clear message this behaviour will not be tolerated via public dismissals?

### **Response**

We do not recognise the former employee's assertion that this is a phrase in use in the service but if it were, we would have no hesitation whatsoever to give a clear message that it would be unacceptable and would not be tolerated in this service along with any other language or behaviour that might be considered to be bullying or discriminatory.

### **Question 4**

**From: Rachel Gallagher, Hereford**  
**To: Cabinet Member, Children and Families**

What support are you offering for the children that have lost a sibling to adoption and what are you doing to prevent it?

There has been no change, how can we trust you to not permanently separate more sibling groups especially when the adoption rates in Herefordshire are higher than the national average?

### **Response**

Whilst we will always try to keep siblings together there are occasionally times when this is not possible. Multi-agency support is offered to children and young people who have been separated from their sibling(s). This support is individually tailored to each child and circumstance.

The decision whether or not to keep siblings together where the plan is one of adoption is carefully considered and scrutinised. The Local Authority, the Guardian ad litem, and the Courts have a duty to consider the needs of each individual child which, in rare occasions, might mean that siblings are not placed together. This could include cases where the courts grants Placement and Adoption orders.

Adoption rates in Herefordshire in 2021-22 and for the current year in progress are not higher than the national average.

### **Question 5**

**From: Sarah de Rohan, High Sheriff of Herefordshire 2022-23**  
**To: Cabinet Member Commissioning, Procurement and Assets**

What plans have the Council for ensuring that the Shirehall does not deteriorate further? What budget and what action is to be implemented? When do the Council anticipate that the Nightingale (temporary court) will be up and running at Churchill House?

### **Response**

To follow

### **Question 6**

**From: Ms Reid, Hereford**  
**To: Cabinet Member, Children and Families**

The Ofsted report states:

“The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies ...”

which is effectively support to pregnant women and mothers of babies.

The draft Herefordshire Children’s Services Improvement Plan states: “Pre-birth pathway completed (September 2022)” though the implementation date is not mentioned.

When will all women needing help under the pathway receive it and will support be given to the mothers of babies under one under the pathway or separately and when will this be implemented? Should the Plan be finessed?

The rate of babies taken into care in Herefordshire increased to 6.7 per 10,000 children (2021-22) from 3.6 (2020-21). I estimate the rate for babies under one taken into care is 120 per 10,000.

### **Response**

It is really important to us that expectant mothers (and all families) are provided appropriate levels of support as soon as they need it.

The revised pre-birth pathway has already been introduced and positive results are being seen. Assessments, support and interventions are timelier. Health partners have been complimentary of the new pathway and over time we shall be gathering and evaluating the feedback from families in receipt of services. We will continue to monitor this and evaluate the impact over time.

The rate (per 10,000 children) of children under the age of one taken into care was 3.6 in 2020/21 and 6.7 in 2021/22; this equates to an additional 11 children.



**COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 15 DECEMBER 2022****Question 1**

**From: Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty ward**  
**To: Cabinet Member, Finance, Corporate Services and Planning**

I was concerned to hear last week that the Hoople ICT support team were at half strength, with staff having to do extra shifts to provide cover. ICT is crucial to all Council activities. Will the Cabinet member responsible confirm the steps that they are taking to address this issue?

**Response**

Hoople IT Services is dedicated to excellence of service delivery wherever possible.

User support is principally delivered via the 'Service Desk Team' who answer telephone calls, e-mails and website-submitted questions and the 'Desktops Team' who would fulfil most in-person support requests. The Service Desk Team consist of fifteen positions, the Desktops Team of ten positions, both teams working across all Hoople customers. Unfortunately, for a short period recently the desktops team of ten staff were reduced to five members. This was a result of the concurrent impact of three vacancies due to resignations, one annual leave request and an unexpected sickness.

If Cllr Shaw was made aware of the pressures to the Desktops Team who were at these reduced numbers then an impression of 'half strength' may have been given (although this team would typically operate with 8 or 9 members across all customers due to normal leave, sickness and training expectations). For IT Support in those same days, overall across Service Desk and Desktops Teams, seventeen people were working, around 77% of normal capacity of twenty two. Operationally, although a risk to service delivery had already been flagged with the Council's IT Client, the commitment and dedication of the remaining staff meant the vast majority of requests have been delivered successfully, with some longer-term tasks delayed to release immediate capacity.

Recent Herefordshire Council work has included a higher than normal number of office relocations under the Plough Lane workspace reorganisations and MASH team moves. This type of work is deliberately completed out-of-hours and at weekends to minimise the impact on other office staff who will subsequently use the facilities. Given the recent number of vacancies this has led to the remaining desktops team members being in high demand. Aware of the pressures, weekend and evening working has been widened to other IT Services staff in other teams, several of whom have accepted the overtime working. Within Herefordshire Council, members of the PMO have offered their assistance during the most pressured times working alongside IT staff within Plough Lane to ensure work is completed on-time and safely. Within Hoople, to address retention and encourage recruitment, a market-forces supplement has already been added to the desktops team roles; a recent recruitment drive has just completed with two offers made to applicants, which follows seven previously unsuccessful rounds of recruitment. Further measures are in active consideration if required.

By working together with other local partners through Hoople Ltd. Herefordshire Council has directly benefited from economies of scale with the IT support teams. Despite the exceptional loss of around five staff members the resilience available from the larger

team saw user support of 22 reduced to 17, allowing core services to remain delivered and key project outcomes largely unaffected.