

SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA FOR

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 18 July 2023

2.00 pm

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

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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Questioner:	Phillip Howells
Scrutiny Meeting:	July 2023
Question:	
<p>The answer to the public question on p3 & 4 of the published minutes (pack p11 & 12) for the CYPSC meeting held on 28th February 2023 is largely false. As committee Chair at the time, neither the response nor minutes were passed by me before publication. For example, it falsely quotes me as agreeing to certain terms and falsely claims that: '<i>... members of the Scrutiny Committee considered that: the information they had been provided with to be satisfactory ...</i>'. It has never been formally considered by the committee which was already known to have grave reservations about how the investigation was commissioned.</p> <p>We know it was prepared for the new Cabinet Member because he was not a councillor at the time.</p> <p>How did the response become to be written and authorised for publication and incorporating in the minutes?</p>	
Response:	
<p>The quoted section of the reply explaining that '<i>members of the scrutiny committee considered that: the information they had been provided with to be satisfactory</i>' is not attributed to the previous chair (Cllr Howells) of the then CYPS Committee members.</p> <p>The response is given because there were no queries received from committee members following provision to all members of the Executive Summary of the report, and the report being briefed to you in December 2022, as chair of the committee at the time.</p> <p>The response was included in the minutes of the meeting to which the question asked was originally submitted. The response was drafted based on the best information available following the May elections.</p>	

Questioner:	Fiona Reid
Scrutiny Meeting:	July 2023
Question:	

Per the Constitution (4.5.7), the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee must have seven co-optees. Two co-optees are nominated by churches. Three parent-governor co-optees are elected by the relevant sectors (eg primary school sector).

Two other co-optees are:

- “One representative from the teaching sector”
- “One representative from a family who are or have been supported by social workers”

How will the Committee ensure that the seven co-optees - especially the teaching sector co-optee and “representative from a family” co-optee who are not nominated or elected (by the relevant sector) - are appointed and able to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 26 September 2023? Please give details, for example, dates, where the positions will be advertised (eg Hoople’s website and/or the council’s Facebook) and so on.

Response:

A scrutiny committee may co-opt non-voting people as and when required, for example for a particular meeting or to join a scrutiny group. Any such co-optees will be agreed by the committee having reference to the agreed workplan and/or scrutiny group membership.

This is the first meeting of CYPSC since the elections. The work programme is being considered at their first meeting on 18 July.

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Questioner:	Hannah Currie
Scrutiny Meeting:	July 2023
Question:	<p>Given the recent comment in the shared OFSTED Monitoring letter: "<i>Leaders know they need to improve the recording system, which does not support staff to record well</i>" and a need to '<i>Think Family</i>' identified by the independent Commission into families experiences'.</p> <p>When will the committee engage with families that have reported missing/outdated or deleted information to confirm what support is being offered to these families to ensure any system works for the families as well. Consideration in the response is needed particularly for those where the decisions included life-changing (for children, [birth] parents and [birth] family), irreversible and unjust decisions (such as adoption)</p>

using information in this inadequate reporting system, combined with the confirmed abuses of power highlighted in the recent families' commission rather than it just being poor practice.

Response:

The Cabinet Member for children and young people is clear in his commitment that the ongoing work to endeavour to reach resolution for families has to occur in tandem with the improvement journey and the need to deliver the latter at pace.

In this regard, members will be aware that the Independent Commission to 'Consider Families Experience of Children's Services in Herefordshire' conducted its work in March and April 2023 - the report was published in June 2023. The terms of reference for the commission set out its purpose as follows:

- To give parents and families an opportunity to tell their story to an independent panel.
- 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.
- To learn from their experiences and to ensure that this knowledge is used to inform improvements to Children's Services.
- 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.

During the commission, matters raised by some families (eleven of the twenty who made representations) were reported by the panel to the local authority for consideration and response. This work was conducted and the relevant families received a personalised letter from the Service Director for Improvement on 2nd June 2023.

Following the cabinet meeting on 22nd June 2023 the cabinet member for children and young people met with three parents at their request.

The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services are in the process of writing personally to all families who contributed to the commission thanking them for their contribution and extending the offer for Councillor Powell to meet with them again, should they so wish to do.

It is acknowledged that there are other families who, for their own reasons, did not wish to contribute to the families' commission but do have similar and related concerns about their experience of children's services in Herefordshire. Where these approach the organisation they will similarly be afforded the opportunity of a meeting with a view to resolving any outstanding matters – including matters relating to the recording of data.

The Committee will continue to ask the Cabinet Member and the Corporate Director for assurance that families' concerns are being addressed.

Questioner:	Eddy Parkinson
Scrutiny Meeting:	July 2023
Question: <p>Ms Reid submitted a public question (PQ) to the 28/2/2023 CYPSC meeting about PQs not being satisfactorily answered. Ironically, this and three other PQs were not answered. Also, Ms Currie and Ms Reid asked supplementary questions (PQ). The response to the latter is <u>not</u> in the minutes or the supplement.</p> <p>The families' Commission report states that it "experienced delays and poor-quality communication when following up issues directly with children's services", which "suggests that the issues are significant and systemic" and calls for "major cultural change" at the council. The former chairs of the CYPSC highlighted the council's "deep-seated corporate dysfunction" and "toxic organisational culture". A link to their report can be found in the profile section on Twitter @ungaggedin2023.</p> <p>When will the council's culture change so that questions are satisfactorily answered and in the timeframe required by the Constitution?</p>	
Response: <p>Although this has been the minority there has been a delay in the answering of some questions due to human error. An apology was shared for this at the time. We are confident that all questions should be answered within the required timeframe.</p>	

Questioner:	Maggie Steel
Scrutiny Meeting:	July 2023
Question: <p>In July 2022, it was alleged at Full Council that the rate of allegations against parents for fabricating or inducing illness in their own children (Fabricated or Induced Illness or FII) was 100 times the national average.</p>	

In September 2022, also at Full Council, a statement was made by the Deputy Leader that FII rates were not believed to be above average. At a subsequent meeting, a public question asked the Council to publish its data on FII. The Council couldn't produce data to back up its public reassurances and explained that their audit was not complete. Data was promised by November, then by January. It still hasn't been published.

The public continues to experience an epidemic of FII allegations. Will the new Cabinet member ensure that data is published swiftly for allegations up to September 2022 and also since?

Response:

I am happy to make a commitment to ensure that data is published and is in a format that cannot lead to individuals being identified, particularly where numbers reported might be small. An earlier audit provided evidence of only a small number of cases where FII was alleged and was as such inconclusive. External commentators have asserted that rates in Herefordshire were very high but have provided no evidence for this.

It is not possible to easily determine either a number or a rate, as FII is not recorded on our case management system as a discrete and reportable event or subject but I have asked officers to complete the exercise again, this time including data since 2022. I do not however accept the assertion that the 'public continues to experience an epidemic of FII allegations' without evidence supporting this.

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Questioner:	Jennie Hewitt
Scrutiny Meeting:	July 2023
Question:	
<p>The 24% adoption rate for Herefordshire quoted on p13 of the Herefordshire Childrens Safeguarding Partnership annual report (p57 of report pack) is over twice the national rate (quoted as 10%) and is labelled as good.</p> <p>In response to CYPSC questioning the good rag rating the independent commissioner simply stated ... <i>The service may provide further information in response to this question</i></p> <p>Why are the adoption figures in Herefordshire so high?</p>	

Response:

The figure of 24% refers to the proportion of those children who ceased to be in our care in 2021-22 who left our care with a permanence plan of adoption and does not reflect the rate of adoptions more generally or as a proportion of the population. It was not presented well or clearly in the report and for this we apologise if it was misleading.

In the previous year (2020-21) the proportion of children who left our care and were adopted was 11% and the interim outturn figure for the year just ended (2022-23) was 9.9%.

The most recently published England and Statistical neighbour averages (2021-22) for the proportion of children who left care as a result of an adoption were 10% with the West Midlands average that same year being 14%. In the year reported, we did therefore have a higher proportion but in the year before, and in the past year, the proportion is entirely in line with expected figures. The proportion in any given year can be influenced by fluctuating numbers of the cohort of children leaving our care; sibling groups who might have been adopted; and/or changes in the numbers of other permanence outcomes such as SGO (Special Guardianship Order) affecting the overall number and proportion.