

**SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA FOR**

# **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 26 September 2023**

**2.00 pm**

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


**5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

**Pages**

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<b>Questioner:</b>	Eddy Parkinson
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	September 2023
<b>Question:</b>	
<p>Is the scrutiny committee satisfied all staff, including agency, at social services have been properly qualified and have the necessary enhanced DBS to work while in the councils employment? Have any unqualified, unvetted staff been in contact with the public?</p> <p>thank you</p>	
<b>Proposed Response:</b>	
<p>The council ensures that pre-employment checks are completed for permanent and agency staff in line with safer recruitment practices during the hiring process. These include Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for all staff working directly with children, young people and vulnerable adults and verification of Social Work England registration for social workers.</p> <p>To practice as a social worker, whether contracted through an agency or working as a council employee, social workers must be suitably qualified and this is a requirement of their registration with Social Work England. The requirement for appropriate checks is identified as part of the job description. We also perform regular audits every 6 months and the most recent audit indicated that we were fully compliant with all necessary information being in place to make sure staff have appropriate qualifications, registration and checks. The audit indicated that no unsuitable staff have been in contact with members of the public. If any questions or queries are raised about staff qualifications, registration or vetting these are escalated and risk assessed.</p> <p>Not all children’s services staff who have contact with the public are social workers and will have a broad range of qualifications and/or experience. Everyone with significant contact with children and young people has an enhanced DBS check.</p>	

<b>Questioner:</b>	Rachel Gallagher
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	September 2023
<b>Question:</b>	
<p>"There is no policy for the reunification of families. How can the service be working towards reducing the number of children in care when there's no reunification procedure to work towards?"</p>	
<b>Proposed Response:</b>	
<p>The Service does have 'Reunification Practice Guidance' which was developed and approved in April 2022 as part of the refreshed overarching Permanence Policy. The Reunification Practice Guidance is developed in accordance with the NSPCC (2015) 'Evidence-Informed Framework for Return Home Practice' which is a well-established framework used in many other local authorities. The Children's Services Permanence Panel oversees children in care with a permanence plan, and includes children who are already living at home and subject to Placement with Parent Regulations as well as those who are 'potentially suited' to a plan of reunification.</p>	
 <p>Reunification_HFD4 100v2 final.pdf</p>	

<b>Questioner:</b>	Hannah Currie
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	September 2023
<b>Question:</b>	
<p>An Independent Visitor (IV) is a volunteer who visits and befriends a child or young person living in care.</p> <p><b>What percentage of looked-after children in the care of Herefordshire Council have an Independent Visitor and in what period.</b></p> <p>When providing the answer please provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of children in care</li> <li>• Number of children in care who have an Independent Visitor</li> <li>• Percentage of children in care who have an Independent Visitor "</li> </ul>	
<b>Proposed Response:</b>	
<p>An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who befriends and visits a child or young person living in the care of the Local Authority. Independent Visitors can provide support, advice and guidance as well as positively engaging with the child or young person in activities.</p> <p>As at 18th September 23 there are 396 children in the care of the Local Authority. At the current time 24 children in care in Herefordshire have an Independent Visitor.</p> <p>Therefore, 6% of Children in Care have an Independent Visitor (although many more are offered an Independent Visitor if they wish to have one).</p>	

The Child or young person's Social Worker should seek to ensure that Children in Care are able to have access to positive relationships with a trusted adult, and to form appropriate friendships with peers. Other key sources of support for Children in Care can be family members and extended family members, the child's Foster Carer or residential worker.

The Independent Reviewing Officer should consider within the Looked After Children's Review whether a child or young person would benefit from an Independent Visitor and should seek to ensure that children and young people are able to form meaningful attachments to trusted adults.

Children in Care can be supported by a variety of other means in relation to enabling their voice to be heard and represented. This could be via a Children's Advocate, a Social Worker, Carer or another trusted adult or professional who may advocate on their behalf.

<b>Questioner:</b>	Ms Reid, Herefordshire
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	September 2023

**Public question for the 26/9/2023 CYP Scrutiny Committee meeting**

I welcome that Early Help is on the agenda of the 26 September 2023 CYPSC meeting (Item 7).

However, I am disappointed that Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are not mentioned in the Early Help report nor the three appendixes. This omission might, in part, be explained by the fact that the *Early Help and Prevention Strategy* is dated March 2023.

**Please detail how and when Family Group Conferences will an integral part of the *Early Help and Prevention Strategy*?**

Incidentally:

- The appendix *Right Help Right Time: Levels of Need* was published (by HSCP) in November 2020 with a review date of September 2022.
- The *Herefordshire Children’s Services Improvement Plan* which was updated on 7 June 2023 (including 1.3 about Early Help) is still not linked to webpage:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/social-care-support/childrens-services-improvements>

and has not replaced the older version (updated on 19 December 2022).

**Proposed Response:**

The Herefordshire Early Help and Prevention Strategy sets out our ambition to strengthen our prevention and early help offer within local communities. The strategy was completed following extensive consultation with children, young people and their families, partner agencies, the community, faith and voluntary sector. There were 1054 questionnaires completed, 14 focus groups and 18 engagement activities.

Our approach to Family Group Conferences (FGC's) is led by the Safeguarding and Family Support service. FGC's are currently being facilitated to support children who are in need, and those who are in need of protection and care.

At this time FGC's are not currently being facilitated at an early help level of need. The model used in early help is to work with the whole family, including those wider adults who play a key role in the child's life. Support through early help is agreed with the explicit consent of the family. This starts with an assessment of the whole family's strengths and needs, then an outcome focused plan of the work is drawn up and agreed with the family. The services involved form the Team around the Family (TAF) approach. The plan is regularly reviewed with the family at TAF meetings.

Some of the principles of Family Group Conferencing are used in targeted early help work including asking the family who their network of support is and if they do not have a network, part of the work will be to help the family to identify support within their community.

When the work with the family has ended the family is supported with a family wellbeing plan which celebrates the successes of the support and identifies where the family can go within their network and community if they need help in the future.

The Council has provided additional investment to grow the existing FGC resources. Two additional FTE FGC Coordinators have already been recruited and trained. There is also additional FGC capacity that has been made available through new commissioning arrangements. At the time of writing, there are 40 Family Group Conferences being co-ordinated.

The Right Help Right Time: Levels of Need document is currently under review by the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The Government has undertaken a national consultation on Working Together to Safeguard Children. It is anticipated that the results of the consultation will be published in Autumn 2023 and following this the Government is expected to publish revised guidance as Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. The revised statutory guidance will inform the revision of the Right Help Right Time: Levels of Need document.

Thank-you for alerting the Council to the matter of the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The Council will update the webpage.