

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

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Questioner:	Eddy Parkinson
Scrutiny Meeting:	September 2023
Supplementary Question:	
<p>I draw attention to the last sentence of the response.</p> <p>'Everyone with significant contact with children'.</p> <p>I ask the council to define 'significant' in relation to contact with children. Is this based on hours? Is there a policy the council uses?</p> <p>Thank you</p>	
Response: Delivered by Councillor Ivan Powell during the meeting.	
<p>Councillor Powell thanked Mr Parkinson for his original and supplementary questions and stated:</p> <p>"Significant in the context of the question refers to those members of staff who would have direct face-to-face contact with children. Many children's services colleagues do have indirect contact with families, where an enhanced DBS (disclosure and barring service) check may not be required. The numbers of hours worked is not a factor in this process and the requirement for an enhanced DBS is written into all job descriptions for members of staff who are expected to have direct face-to-face contact with children."</p>	

Questioner:	Rachel Gallagher
Scrutiny Meeting:	September 2023
Supplementary Question:	
<p>"On the 18th August 2023, CJ, an information governance officer for Herefordshire Council responded to a Freedom of Information request regarding a Reunification Policy. She confirmed that there is NO policy currently in place and no timescales for when it will be completed.</p> <p>Without a policy, procedures lack clarity and consistency. Without this policy, parents do not know what's expected of them, social workers don't know when to use the procedure and no one knows why it should be implemented and when. Therefore, children are not being returned to their parents and remain in care.</p> <p>With no policy in place to ensure this procedure is used, even when recommended by independent social workers, how are you reducing the number of children in care?"</p>	
Response: Delivered by Councillor Ivan Powell during the meeting.	
<p>Councillor Powell thanked Ms Gallagher for her original and supplementary questions and stated:</p> <p>"In response to the original question we referenced our reunification practice guidance and that forms part of the overall permanence policy for the council. The freedom of information request referred specifically to the reunification policy, we acknowledge that we should have referred specifically to that reunification practice guidance, we would like to apologise for any misunderstanding that many have been caused by that.</p> <p>Children in care have an independent review officer, who chairs children looked after reviews, where the care plan, including the plan for permanency is considered. There is an established permanence panel, which ensures that there is an appropriate permanence plan in place and this includes children who are potentially suited to a plan of reunification. There is also a permanency champion in post, who has a dedicated team of social workers, specifically focusing on the discharging of care orders and supporting children to go home to the care of their parents and or family members where this is in their best interest and is in line with their care plan."</p>	

Questioner:	Hannah Currie
Scrutiny Meeting:	September 2023
Supplementary Question:	
<p>To quote from your response to my original public question:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“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>Therefore, it is fair to assume that Independent Visitors are very beneficial to children and young people in care. Arguably, they have a safeguarding role as they are independent of foster parents etc. It is disappointing to hear that of the 396 children in care (at 18/9/23), 372 (94%) do not have an Independent Visitor.</p> <p>The council has responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.</p> <p>How will you be recruiting for more Independent Visitors and by when will all children and young people in its care who are mature enough (usually from age 5) be offered and encouraged to have an Independent Visitor?</p>	
Response: Provided 13/11/23	
<p>Dear Ms Currie</p> <p>Thank you for your supplementary question and please accept our apologies for the delay in responding.</p> <p>The Local Authority commissions NYAS to provide Independent Visitors for up to 28 children and young people. NYAS continues to actively recruit and train Independent Visitors. Consideration for an Independent Visitor is made on an individual basis in line with the child or young person’s needs.</p>	

There is the potential within the contract for a contract variation to meet need and in March 2022 the number of Independent Visitors was increased from 18 to support up to 28 children and young people.

Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers are encouraged to make referrals to the service based on individual need, and this has recently been re-iterated across the service

NYAS continues to raise the profile of the service via regular liaison with the Local Authority. The service is currently matching children and young people to Independent Visitors. There are three Independent Visitors who are currently in recruitment. As such over the next few weeks we anticipate that this will mean that 28 children and young people in total should have an Independent Visitor.

Demand for the service is reviewed on a regular basis and within quarterly contract meetings and will always seek to expand the service as need and demand increase.

Questioner:	Ms Reid, Herefordshire
Scrutiny Meeting:	September 2023
<p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>The Team around the Family (TAF) seems a positive approach and I welcome the roll out of Family Group Conferences (FGCs). I suggest you do “market research” on them fairly soon.</p> <p>Prioritising use of FGCs (eg children “in need”) is sensible.</p> <p>From the website of the council’s improvement-partner, Leeds City Council:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Referrals for FGCs are mainly made through the child or young person’s social worker or <u>Early Help</u> Lead Worker.”</p> <p>When will the council extend the use of FGCs to children (and families) supported by Early Help?</p> <p>Also from Leeds’s website:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Each FGC is coordinated by an accredited FGC coordinator, who is independent from the social work service or other services. The coordinator is neutral, with no case management or decision making responsibilities.</p> <p>I hope the council’s FGC Coordinators are truly independent?</p>	
<p>Response: Delivered by Councillor Ivan Powell during the meeting.</p> <p>Councillor Powell thanked Ms Reid for her original and supplementary questions and stated:</p> <p>“We do not yet, as a council, have a firm timeline to extend the use of family group conferences to children and families supported by early help. Our priority as we expand our service at this stage, is to focus on children and families on the edge of care and for whom reunification is a possibility. We’ve spoken to our partners in Leeds and they have explained it did take them a number of years to get to the position that they are now in and that is where family group conferences are being offered as widely as they are in Leeds. We are working closely with</p>	

them to learn from their experience and obviously to try and speed up our expansion efforts. Our family group conference coordinators are independent of the case management, as they are in Leeds, and that future service redesign - expected early next year - will further reinforce that position.”