

Supplement to the agenda for

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 22 July 2025

2.00 pm

**Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane
Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

9. EARLY HELP TASK AND FINISH GROUP

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Title of report: Early help task and finish group terms of reference

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 22 July 2024

Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

All wards

Purpose

To determine whether to form a task and finish group conduct an appreciative inquiry into early help provision in Herefordshire.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The committee agree to form a task and finish group according to the terms of reference attached as appendix 1.**

Alternative options

1. The committee could make changes to the terms of reference before agreeing to form the task and finish group.
2. It could also decide not to form the task and finish group.

Key considerations

3. As part of the development of its work programme, the committee met in June 2025 to discuss how it scrutinises early help provision in Herefordshire. It was felt that such a broad topic warranted a task and finish group that could focus on the wide range of services available in Herefordshire.

4. The proposed task and finish group would focus on two streams of work:
 - a. **Community and Universal Offer**
Mapping and showcasing local Early Help initiatives.
Exploring partnerships with Talk Community hubs, voluntary groups, parish and town councils.
Engagement around youth activities, access barriers (transport), and local innovation.
 - b. **Targeted Early Help and Families First**
Understanding the Families First implementation.
Exploring the role of Lead Practitioners.
Clarifying the role of schools and multi-agency collaboration.
5. Building on the work from the recent review of the scrutiny function at Herefordshire Council, the committee chair proposes a constructive and collaborative space to:
 - Recognise strengths in current Early Help provision.
 - Identify good practice across different communities.
 - Highlight gaps or inconsistencies in provision and the work in place to address them.
6. The detailed draft terms of reference for the task and finish group are attached as appendix 1.

Community impact

7. The scrutiny function supports community development through robust scrutiny of the council's policy framework, including the Local Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, County Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
8. Scrutiny also supports community issues more directly through the work of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee.
9. The function also helps to ensure that the council discharges its corporate parent duties effectively, through scrutiny of the corporate parenting board and the council's broader work to support its looked after children and their families.

Environmental impact

10. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
11. All reports to scrutiny committees, as with all council committees, include appraisals of the impact of the report content on climate change. Scrutiny committee work programmes directly link to the County Plan priorities, including the key priority to "Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live.
12. Climate change and carbon reduction related issues are directly identified in the remit and therefore focus of the Environment and Sustainability scrutiny committee.

13. Whilst this is a decision on back office functions and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy. Examples include:
 - a. Online meetings, eliminating the need to travel to Hereford for a single meeting.
 - b. Paper-free briefings and informal meetings, eliminating the need for printed paper.

Equality duty

14. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
15. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this report is primarily for information, we do not believe that accepting (or rejecting) this report will have an impact on our equality duty.

Resource implications

16. Effective scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations. These can be informed by learning from best practice and an understanding of 'what works' at other similar local authorities, as well as developing a robust picture of what the situation is locally based on data, intelligence and insights. Where adopted recommendations can help with the efficiency and effectiveness of services that can be delivered differently, as well as informing the development of current and new policies.
17. As this report is primarily for information, there are no direct resource implications arising from this report. However the group may require some funding in order to carry out its work effectively. Requirements may include purchasing training or expert advice. However it is anticipated that much of the training and development required during the year can be met using existing council resources.

Risk management

18. Effective scrutiny is a feature of the council's governance arrangements, where the council is operating executive arrangements. There are a range of factors that could result in risks to the council of not doing scrutiny effectively. These include the failure to:
 - a. challenge and hold decision makers to account
 - b. link scrutiny work to the delivery of the council's priorities and risk management
 - c. carry out thorough and appropriate research to make evidence-based recommendations
 - d. engage partners and providers

- e. ensure that structures and models of operation are fit for purpose and match ambition and available resources
- f. ensure that scrutiny can operate as the voice of communities and
- g. draw on member knowledge and experience to inform policy development.

19. To mitigate these risks, enablers for effective scrutiny include:

- a. operating in an apolitical manner
- b. clarity of vision and purpose
- c. scrutiny support availability, capability and capacity
- d. effective engagement and commitment by members and officers at all levels, including cabinet, opposition leaders, scrutiny chairs and senior officers who play a central role in setting the tone and direction
- e. robust work programming and prioritisation of topics with clear objectives and expected impacts
- f. ensuring that scrutiny work will add value to the council and communities e.g. through strong links between work programme topics and the integrated strategic plans that set out the actions and timescales to deliver the priorities in the County Plan
- g. access to and availability of robust data and intelligence and
- h. good relationships with partners and providers.

Consultees

20. None

Appendices

Appendix 1: Proposed early help task and finish group terms of reference

Background papers

None



Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Early help task and finish group

Draft Terms of reference

Background

Herefordshire's Early Help offer includes both universal and targeted services aimed at supporting children, young people, and families before statutory intervention is required. The offer includes:

- **Universal services:** Provided largely through Talk Community, voluntary and community organisations, schools, health, and public health-funded initiatives.
- **Targeted early help:** Led by the Early Help team within Children's Services, working directly with families who require structured support.

Key developments in this area in recent years include:

- Integration of Early Help into wider Children's Services through locality models.
- Introduction of Families First and Lead Practitioner roles.
- Recruitment of two new children's-focused community development workers within Talk Community.
- Partnership commissioning (such as with the PCC) to support local early intervention initiatives.

To build on these developments, work is underway to identify and address weaknesses in current practice, including:

- Persistent confusion around distinctions between universal and targeted Early Help.
- Limited public visibility of the Early Help offer and recent developments.
- Variability in provision and access across different localities.
- Pressure on schools to deliver Early Help without sufficient funding or infrastructure.
- Need for improved coordination between statutory and non-statutory partners.

Purpose

The group therefore aims to provide a constructive and collaborative space to:

- Recognise strengths in current Early Help provision.
- Identify good practice across different communities.
- Highlight gaps or inconsistencies in provision and the work in place to address them.

Scope of Inquiry:

In recognition of the broad and varied nature of early help available in Herefordshire, the group intends to carry out two distinct but closely interdependent streams of work:

Community and Universal Offer

- Mapping and showcasing local Early Help initiatives.

- Exploring partnerships with Talk Community hubs, voluntary groups, parish and town councils.
- Engagement around youth activities, access barriers (transport), and local innovation.

Targeted Early Help and Families First

- Understanding the Families First implementation.
- Exploring the role of lead practitioners.
- Clarifying the role of schools and multi-agency collaboration.

Work Programme

The group will determine its programme of work to meet the above objectives. This programme is likely to include:

- Local Appreciative Inquiry events in Hereford City and each of the five key market towns (Ross, Ledbury, Kington, Leominster, Bromyard), Supported by Talk Community and Children's Services.
- Case studies
- Meeting with families and professionals, individually and in focus groups

Proposed Timeline

- Summer 2025: Agree task and finish group, establish membership, agree programme of work
- Autumn 2025 to Spring 2026: Community engagement events, interviews, focus groups.
- Spring/Summer 2026: Reflection and analysis.
- Summer 2026: Presentation of findings and recommendations to Children and Young People Scrutiny.

6. Next Steps

- Democratic Services to arrange internal briefing on Early Help progress and Families First from officers in the Children and Young people directorate
- The Children and Young People Scrutiny committee to agree the terms of reference and build a work programme to deliver its objectives.
- Democratic Services to advertise the task and group and collect expressions of interest from councillors.
- Democratic Services to coordinate with Talk Community to develop logistics and stakeholder engagement.