

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of Health & Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 14 December 2015 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor PA Andrews (Chairman)
Councillor J Stone (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: ACR Chappell, PE Crockett, CA Gandy, JF Johnson, MD Lloyd-Hayes, MT McEvilly, PD Newman OBE and NE Shaw

In attendance: Councillors JG Lester (Cabinet member, young people and children's wellbeing), AJW Powers and DW Greenow

Officers: Jo Davidson (director, children's wellbeing), Geoff Hughes (director, economy, communities and corporate), Claire Ward (monitoring officer), Steve Hodges (directorate services team leader), Chris Baird (assistant director, commissioning and education), Paul Deneen (chair, Healthwatch Herefordshire)

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors DG Harlow, A Seldon and D Summers, and Mr M Samuels, director, adults and wellbeing.

43. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor CR Butler attended as a substitute member for Councillor DG Harlow, Councillor EPJ Harvey for Councillor A Seldon and Councillor JLV Kenyon for Councillor D Summers.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During the meeting, a pecuniary interest was declared by Councillor JLV Kenyon as a parent who had accessed the service.

45. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2015 be agreed as a correct record.

46. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions from the public were received.

47. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions from the public were received.

48. TASK AND FINISH GROUP: REVIEW OF PROVISION OF SHORT BREAK AND RESPITE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The monitoring officer clarified that in relation to the item for consideration today there was the threat of separate legal action but that did not affect the ability of the committee to receive the report. She reminded all present to observe confidentiality for service users and to focus on the service rather than on individuals.

The chairman thanked the vice-chairman for his work on the matter in hand.

The vice-chairman presented the report of the task and finish group, making the following introductory remarks:

- the task and finish group was set up as a direct result of concerns raised by the parents of service users about short term provision and the possibility of the closure of No. 1 Ledbury Road;
- thanks given to members and officers from the council, Wye Valley Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Group for all the work they have carried out for the task and finish group and for those, especially parents of service users, who informed the work;
- the recommendations contained in the task and finish group's report were unanimously agreed by the task and finish group;
- face to face interviews were carried out and the group visited 1 Ledbury Road, for which staff were thanked;
- the group identified a number of key questions, detailed in the report, which provided a focus for the review;
- members were asked to note that a number of sentences in the report were in italics, which emphasised their importance;
- the group had set out the statutory basis for the council and other partners to provide short breaks and respite services;
- as stated in the recommendations, corporate parenting was a responsibility for the council and for all elected members;
- a consistent feature of the work was the criticism from parents of the children who attend 1 Ledbury Road regarding the lack of information and explanation about the future plans for the facility. The task and finish group found it unacceptable that parents did not find out about the possibility of the closure of 1, Ledbury Road until July 2015 although discussions had been going on about its future for some time;
- the task and finish group acknowledged that regular meetings with all the different parties were now taking place but there was concern that the uncertainty and confusion of recent months should be ended as soon as possible;
- there should be proper provision available for all the families who currently access 1 Ledbury Road and the task and finish group was not satisfied that this was in place;
- the proposed fostering service seemed at an early stage and attention was drawn to sections 5.18 and 5.19 in particular in the report where it was noted that "The Group felt that No. 1 Ledbury Road offered security as well as peace of mind for service users and parents that a foster carer would be unable to." Foster parents would need special training to look after children with complex needs.

The vice-chairman reminded members of the meeting of the Council on 25 September 2015 and the motion that was passed as detailed in the report, with the recommendation that No. 1 Ledbury Road remained open and jointly funded whilst the redesignation process was undertaken. Noting that whilst the provision, or any alternatives, may be expensive, it was a priority of the Council's Corporate Plan to "keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life" and this needed to become a reality.

The vice-chairman's statement was supported by the members of the task and finish group.

A member made the initial comment that recommendations must not be ignored by the executive.

A request was also made for some indication of where the task and finish group felt that there might have been potential to have not considered disabled children's interests as required by the Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The vice-chairman acknowledged that there were children with complex needs and that they were identified.

Members discussed the seventeen task and finish group recommendations in turn. In summary, the main points of the discussion were:

- the task and finish group had given thorough consideration to the role of foster carers and their recruitment and training. There were a number of factors that led to high attrition rates, and which impacted on the cost of provision, such as: the special skills and understanding required to fulfil the role, the level of support needed, the impact on foster carers' homes and lives, and a necessarily rigorous selection process. The impact of the reduced network due to foster carers being dispersed across the county was also noted and more research was required on feasibility of such a provision. The number of carers identified in the report to provide a foster service was a minimum requirement and would need to account for holidays and sickness;
- the use of buddying needed to give due regard to a continuing relationship and stability;
- a redesignation of 1 Ledbury Road would need to follow due process and be registered with either or both regulatory bodies, i.e., CQC or Ofsted, as appropriate. To provide a short breaks facility for children and young people to age 18, a redesignation would have to ensure it attracted the right staff in terms of appropriate skill mix and ratios;
- current funding is from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the council. The CCG commissioned Wye Valley Trust to provide the premises and staffing, and this relationship influenced the registration through CQC. The council provided top-up funding if someone had additional needs;
- staff turnover has been affected by speculation about the future of the service and it was essential to communicate a decision on redesignation as a matter of urgency to give staff better information;
- Healthwatch Herefordshire needed to be kept informed with accurate information regarding 1 Ledbury Road and this was welcomed and acknowledged by Healthwatch at the meeting;
- Regular updates to the committee would be required in order to provide assurance that the provision was being addressed and this could be achieved through continuation of the task and finish group;
- The value of having a councillor join, or attend, the Wye Valley Trust board was noted in terms of communication between partner organisations on matters that affect the community, although the governance arrangements needed consideration. Poor communication was a common feature in scrutiny findings and it was essential to get communication right. In this particular case it was a reason for recommending links to the WVT board. There should have been far better communication from all services involved and there was key information that had not been made known to all those affected in a timely way;
- the group's recommendation to be more entrepreneurial about how services were provided was in recognition of the challenges faced by all areas of the care sector and the need to be cost effective in providing the right care to meet peoples' needs;

- due regard was needed for appropriate care and planning to manage the impact of change on individuals and their families, especially as people make the transition to adulthood, as reflected in the children and young peoples' plan;
- work programmes needed to encompass scrutiny of care across all age groups, making use of education, health and care plans and it was important for short breaks to have a proper place in that. This was opportunity to address any gaps in services to enable wider understanding of the impact of autism and challenging behaviour and how to provide appropriate support for people to cope with changes.

The Cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing thanked the vice-chairman, the task and finish group and participants. He welcomed input from members as it reminded everyone of the importance of short breaks for children and their families. He confirmed that he would give full consideration to the recommendations and a formal response would follow.

The vice-chairman summarised that the 17 recommendations identified by the task and finish group had been reviewed by the committee which made the following amendments at the meeting today:

- Recommendation 6 be amended to read:
“that the council, the CG and the WVT ensure that No. 1 Ledbury Road remains open and jointly funded whilst the redesignation process is undertaken as a matter of urgency.”
- Recommendation 9 be amended to read:
“that monthly meetings continue to be held by the council, the CCG and the WVT in order to keep the children and parents presently accessing the service, and the task and finish group appraised of future plans of the service.”
- Recommendation 10 be amended to read:
“that a lead member is identified to help improve communications and engagement between partner organisations.”
- Recommendation 11 be amended to read:
“that an action plan be agreed for the delivery of the executive's requirement from the meeting of the council on 25 September to retain options for access to professionally staffed respite care in Herefordshire and beyond.”
- A further recommendation (Recommendation 18) to be added to read:
“that the task and finish group remains in place for scrutiny as and when required.”

The task and finish group's recommendations were seconded and support was shown for the findings contained in the report. Members were unanimous in carrying the 18 recommendations to be made to Cabinet for consideration.

The vice-chairman was thanked for leading the meeting today. He reiterated his thanks to all who supported and participated in the work of the task and finish group.

RESOLVED

THAT: subject to the inclusion of the amendments to the recommendations made above -

- (a) the report of the task and finish group: review of provision of short break and respite services for children with disabilities, be considered, in particular its recommendations, and the findings be agreed for submission to the executive; and**

- (b) the executive's response to the review, including an action plan, be reported to the first available meeting of the committee after the executive has approved its response.**

The meeting ended at 3.39 pm

CHAIRMAN