

**Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at The Council Chamber -
The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on
Thursday 18 October 2018 at 10.00 am**

Present: **Councillor JG Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairman)**
 Councillor NE Shaw, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairman)

 Councillors H Bramer, BA Durkin, PD Price and EJ Swinglehurst

Cabinet support Councillors JA Hyde, AW Johnson and RJ Phillips
members in attendance

Group leaders in Councillors RI Matthews and A Seldon
attendance

Scrutiny chairpersons in Councillors CA Gandy and J Stone
attendance

Other councillors in Councillors EPJ Harvey and D Summers
attendance:

Officers in attendance: Alistair Neill, Richard Ball, Chris Baird, Claire Ward and Andrew Lovegrove

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Harlow and Rone.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

17. MINUTES

Resolved: **That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2018 be
approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

18. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

19. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No questions were received.

**20. RECOMMISSIONING OF DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT SERVICE FOR
HEREFORDSHIRE**

The cabinet member children and families introduced the item and highlighted the key points of the service and strategy. It was noted that:

- there would be a focus on prevention, partnership working and pursuing perpetrators;
- the cost to society of domestic abuse included the financial costs relating to criminal justice, policing, housing and social care;
- the human cost was immeasurable and had particular impact on children, whose lives could be permanently blighted without appropriate support.

In discussion of the report it was stated that:

- national estimates of the costs of domestic abuse included a broad sweep of costs across the system, only a very small proportion of which would fall to the council;
- cost estimates were derived from available information but did not include all elements associated with the impact of domestic abuse, due to under-reporting the actual costs were likely to be higher than stated;
- the inclusion of services for male victims was welcomed;
- the poor quality of data was frustrating but reflected the national pattern and the fact that victims often did not want to disclose personal details, especially in crisis situations;
- the procurement process would typically be 4 – 6 weeks, providers offering the services the council was looking to procure were used to responding to such tenders but there might be some adjustment to the timetable in the report;
- the maximum value of the service to be commissioned was based on local data and evidence of demand on an annual basis and then multiplied over the intended period of the contract, costs had been scrutinised but any further opportunities to achieve savings would be taken;
- in the event that additional funds were required for the service above the maximum value agreed, specific additional approval would be needed.

Group leaders were invited to give the views of their group. The strategy was broadly welcomed and it was stated that:

- the quality of data could be improved to provide better cost estimates;
- expenditure should be monitored carefully;
- the service should not operate in a silo, it should be integrated with work across the children's and adults directorates and the community safety partnership.

Resolved that:

- a) the proposed outline Joint Strategy for Domestic Abuse at appendix C be approved for the purposes of informing commissioning intentions;**
- b) a domestic abuse support service be commissioned for a period of up to five years from 1 April 2019 at a maximum value of £1.3m; and**
- c) the Director for Adults and Communities be authorised finalise the service specification and award contracts for domestic abuse support services within the agreed budget.**

21. OUTCOME OF CHILDREN'S OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS) INSPECTION AND ACTION PLAN

The cabinet member children and families introduce the report, supported by the assistant director safeguarding and family support. It was highlighted that:

- an inspection of children's services took place in June 2018 under the new Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework;
- the previous inspection in 2014 found services to be requiring improvement overall;
- the new framework had greater focus on the experiences and outcomes for children, and more time during the inspection was spent taking to front line social work staff and reviewing case files;
- the 2018 inspection judged Herefordshire as requiring improvement overall;
- a number of areas of strength were identified, no children seen during the inspection were found to be at risk of immediate harm and children in need of immediate help or protection had their needs met;
- the impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families was judged to be inadequate and insufficient progress had been made in a number of areas since the previous inspection;

- additional funding to increase capacity of social workers, social work managers, family support and business support had been agreed prior to the inspection in recognition of the need to invest;
- the impact of the newly appointed director and the passion of the staff was recognised but it was too early to see improvements;
- links had been formed with other councils to help the service develop;
- the improvement plan focussed on the next three month period, after which it would be reviewed and updated as completed actions were closed off and others added;
- some areas were already seeing improvement, other changes would not be quick fixes and sustained change would require constant focus;
- regular performance challenge sessions would monitor progress.

In discussion of the item it was noted that:

- changes had been made to the council policy on hard to recruit roles, recognising that the market for skilled social work staff was very competitive and that other councils were also seeking to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of qualified staff;
- Herefordshire had been one of the first councils to be inspected under the new framework where there was no formal interview process for senior leaders, only a review of cases and interviews with front line staff;
- the greater emphasis on practice and outcomes for children in the new framework was welcomed;
- the inspection findings mirrored those in the council's self-assessment;
- councillors had a role to play in challenging performance, particularly on areas where progress was not being made as swiftly as it should, and in holding officers to account, the regular performance challenge sessions were effective and it was important for councillors to continue to ask questions;
- the council's partners such as the police and NHS were aware of their responsibilities in keeping children and young people safe;
- recruiting sufficient skilled social work staff was a national issue;
- the additional funding made available prior to the inspection was being used to improve a numbers of areas, for example increasing capacity in legal services to support legal processes around children's social care;
- the financial position of the council was acknowledged and it was recognised that additional resources for children's services meant that those resources could not be used elsewhere.

The chair of the children and young people scrutiny committee summarised the response of the committee to the report and action plan. She noted that:

- the action plan went a long way to providing what was required in order to deliver a good service;
- the new focus in inspections on the outcomes for the child rather than the process was welcomed;
- the good work in a large number of areas should not be lost sight of;
- referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) from the police were very high and over 70% required no further action, this needed to change as social worker time was tied up checking information;
- the scrutiny committee would consider the action plan on a quarterly basis and also consider an item on assessing referrals from the police.

Group leaders were invited to present the views of their group. It was noted that:

- partnership working was important;
- judgements on inadequate leadership had been made before and needed to be addressed;
- a cultural shift was required which would not be delivered simply by throwing money at the problems;

- it was a challenge to make Herefordshire an attractive plan for social work staff to work including keeping caseloads down and providing the right working environment.

Resolved that:

- a) cabinet determine any additional actions it wished to be taken to strengthen the draft action plan attached at appendix 2; and**
- b) subject to any revisions, the action plan be approved for submission to Ofsted by 25 October 2018.**

22. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL UPDATE

The cabinet member children and families introduced the report, supported by the head of looked after children. It was highlighted that:

- this was an annual review of progress of the corporate parenting strategy;
- the Children and Social work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on councils to have regard to corporate parenting principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people;
- it was important to give looked after children the same opportunities as other children;
- all decision reports are now required to consider the impact of proposed actions on looked after children as part of the corporate parenting responsibilities;
- the number of placement moves had been kept low giving stability for looked after children;
- looked after children in Herefordshire were achieving better than the national average, six care leavers were studying at university;
- 15 units of accommodation were available in the Supported Housing for Young People Project (SHYPP);
- the numbers of looked after children continued to be a challenge;
- placement disruptions lead to some children having to move schools;
- too often foster carers had not had authority to make day to day decisions delegated to them;
- turnover of staff in some teams remained high leading to some children having several changes in their social worker.

In discussion of the report it was noted that:

- opportunities for LAC to undertake work experience and apprenticeships was important and all councillors should seek to make use of their contacts or own businesses to promote these opportunities;
- there was concern about the continuing increase in numbers of LAC;
- the wider community had a part to play in supporting children and families, resilient communities could help to ensure that children did not needlessly end up in care by preventing families from reaching crisis;
- a recent visit from the government's chief advisor on supporting care leavers had been worthwhile;
- a recent decision to exempt care leavers from council tax would be reflected in the progress report for 2018/19 and should be included in priority 8;
- work had been done to ensure that authority to make day to day decisions was routinely delegated to foster carers and cases were audited monthly to make sure this was happening.

The chair of the children and young people scrutiny committee summarised the feedback from the committee. She noted that:

- not everyone at the council recognised their responsibilities as corporate parents;

- only around half of councillors had attended the voluntary training course on corporate parenting, this training would be made mandatory for all councillors in future;
- there was a need to improve awareness of career pathways and opportunities among looked after children, many such children when asked express a desire to work in the care system partly because they want to give back but also because it is what they know.

The vice-chair of the adults and wellbeing scrutiny committee welcomed the news that six care leavers were studying at university and the overall improvement in results achieved in schools. He queried the support provided to SHYPP as it did very valuable work supporting care leavers. It was agreed that the head of strategic housing and wellbeing commissioning would provide some additional information on this matter.

Group leaders were invited to give the views of their group. It was stated that:

- more could be done at parish level to support looked after children and young people;
- the attendance of councillors at training events needed to be improved;
- consistency of contact was important.

The leader of the It's Our County asked that the wording of priority 8 in the strategy recognise both physical and mental health needs. The leader requested that the cabinet member children and families take this forward in conjunction with the head of looked after children.

Resolved that:

- a) the progress of the corporate parenting strategy as outlined at appendix 1 to this report be considered and cabinet set out any further actions to improve the delivery of the strategy;**
- b) the executive's response to the recommendation of the children and young peoples' scrutiny committee at appendix 2 be approved.**

23. AUTISM STRATEGY FOR HEREFORDSHIRE 2019-2022

The cabinet member children and families introduced the item, supported by the senior commissioning officer and head of additional needs. It was noted that:

- the strategy was overarching across both children and adults services;
- the strategy had been conceived in 2014 and was not a statutory requirement but was an important document that supported activities to improve outcomes for those living with autism;
- the strategy would be embedded in the children and young people's plan but was an all age strategy with a focus on consistency, continuity and a seamless transition into adult life;
- an important part of the strategy was to raise awareness and improvements had been noted in many areas;
- early diagnosis remained important and could improve outcomes with earlier intervention and support;
- partner organisations such as the CCG were also committed to the strategy and looking to embed its objectives and pathways in normal business practice;
- much of the initial work would be aspirational, there were many community groups who were very positive about engaging with the strategy but required guidance on how to deliver it, this would be part of the next stage of implementation.

The chair of the children and young people scrutiny committee gave feedback from the consideration of the strategy at a meeting of the scrutiny committee in April 2018. The

committee had recommended, among other things, that new public buildings and revisions to existing public buildings should take into account good practice in design, lighting and colour schemes to be sympathetic to the needs of those with autism. Changes to layout could be disorientating and partners such as libraries should be made aware.

A cabinet member spoke of personal experience with a family member and the importance of an early diagnosis and support in school in enabling them to thrive.

Group leaders were invited to present the views of their groups. It was stated that:

- keeping people safe was an important priority, there had been a rise in the number of hate crimes reported in Hereford which was concerning and many people with autism did not feel safe or confident in public;
- links between primary and secondary education were important to make sure information was shared as pupils transferred;
- it was noted that a programme of awareness training for schools was being rolled out.

Resolved that:

- a) the Herefordshire Autism Strategy 2019-2022 be approved; and**
- b) the executive's response to the recommendations of the children and young people scrutiny committee at appendix 4 be approved.**

The meeting ended at 11.38 am

Chairman