

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Committee Room 1 - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 16 September 2019 at 10.15 am

Present: Councillor Carole Gandy (chairperson)
Councillor Diana Toynbee (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Paul Andrews, John Hardwick, Kath Hey, Phillip Howells,
Mike Jones

Co-optees: Pat Burbidge and Nicola Kinson

In attendance: Ewen Archibald, Chris Baird, Keith Barham, John Coleman, Gill Cox, Liz Elgar, Matthew Evans, Alison Naylor, DCI Jon Roberts, Amy Whiles

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Andy James and Sian Lines.

13. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor John Hardwick acted as the substitute for the Herefordshire Independent vacancy on the committee.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting on 15 July were agreed as a correct record.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The questions received from members of the public are attached at the appendix. There were no supplementary questions at the meeting.

17. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from members of the council.

18. ACCOMMODATION BASED SUPPORT SERVICE FOR CARE LEAVERS

The committee considered a report from the Senior Commissioning Officer (SCO) concerning pre decision scrutiny of an accommodation based support service for care leavers. The report was presented by the SCO who explained that the proposal represented a new type of service for care leavers with complex needs. It consisted of two sites, one which offered 24 hour care to care leavers with complex needs and a

second which offered a lighter touch approach for care leavers with a greater degree of independence. The age of the care leavers would range from 18 to 25 years however it was likely that the service would provide for care leavers between the ages of 19 – 22 and in some circumstances it was recognised that care leavers as young as 16 may need to access the service. The focus of the service was to move care leavers towards a greater level of independent living by supporting their wellbeing whilst providing skills to live independently. Partnership working was an important element of the new service and work would be undertaken to ensure that employment and educational opportunities were available to care leavers of the service. It was explained that during commissioning young people would be engaged who may benefit from service....

The committee made the principal points below in the debate that followed:

- The location of the accommodation was queried and whether it was situated in a residential area. *The Head of Strategic Housing and Wellbeing Commissioning (HSHWC) explained that it was located in a city centre location and was not in a predominantly residential area.*
- The number of care leavers currently placed outside of the county was queried and how the council ensured the suitability of accommodation. *The Head of Looked After Children (HLAC) explained that she would provide a response to query concerning the numbers of children out of county following the meeting. It was explained that the council sourced placements for care leavers through a regional framework; providers included on this framework were required to meet standards to ensure that accommodation was suitable. The council also undertook visits to out of county accommodation.*
- It was queried what visitors care leavers at the facility would be able to receive. *The HLAC explained that the house rules would be determined when the service had been commissioned but it was unlikely that overnight guests would be permitted. It was likely that the care leavers would be able to stay at locations away from the service on some nights.*
- More information was requested regarding the innovative approach of the new service and the positive responses it had received. *The SCO explained that 10 responses had been received from a soft market test from providers who were excited by the prospect of a new form of service. The HSHWC explained that there was a diverse market with a number of providers including charitable and voluntary organisations together with private operators. The commissioning would focus on providers' approaches to and management of risk. Providers would need to engender confidence that they were able to manage to potential risks posed by the service.*
- It was queried how challenging behaviour of care leavers would be addressed. *The HLAC explained that the behaviours of the care leavers would be dealt with on an individual basis and work would be undertaken with the young people to understand their issues and provide skills to manage their behaviours. The mix of care leavers in the facility would be monitored to attempt to reduce the likelihood of conflict. The HSHWC emphasised the need to appoint the right provider that should be equipped to manage potential issues in the service.*
- It was noted that the service would provide for a small number of care leavers with complex needs and it was queried what alternative arrangements also existed for this cohort. *The HLAC explained that in some cases the young people would remain with foster carers or access supported accommodation such as the supported housing for young people project (SHYPP). The HSHWC explained that work would be undertaken to develop the market including a possible local framework and dynamic purchasing system.*
- It was queried if the model could be replicated elsewhere if it was successful. *The Director of Children's Services (DCS) explained that the cabinet had asked children's services to develop the proposal in response to the high cost of out of county placements. The effectiveness of the service would be monitored.*

- It was queried whether there would be a back log or waiting list of care leavers to access the service due to the two year period that care leavers would be resident. *The HSHWC explained that the provider would be required to design a pathway to enable care leavers to pass through the service and become independent in two years. It was acknowledged that young people would not always spend two years in the service but the period was a 'ceiling' which providers would be required to meet. The HLAC explained that the need for facilities for care leavers was assessed by the 16+ team to ensure that there was suitable accommodation available. The 'light touch' flats would be available soon for young people to occupy*
- The reference in the report to flexibility in the resourcing of the service was queried. *The SCO explained that the provider would need to be responsive to the level of need of the care leavers in the service; the level of need would fluctuate. The HSHWC explained that the contract with the selected provider would need to incorporate a device to allow for such flexibility.*
- The role of partners in respect of the service was queried in particular the involvement of the health sector. *The HSHWC explained that it was important that the healthcare sector provided therapeutic services it was responsible for, to meet the needs of the care leavers in the service. To request that the provider undertook all health services would increase the costs of the service. The HLAC explained that the head of the child and adolescent mental health service would sit on the tender evaluation panel.*
- The committee asked when it would be able to undertake a site visit of the facility after it was completed but before occupation by care leavers. *The HSHWC explained that it would be completed by March 2020 when the committee would be to visit.*
- The proposal was viewed as an exciting project, which if successful could be replicated in the future.

The Cabinet Member Children and Families spoke on the proposal and explained that the service offered an opportunity for care leavers with complex needs to be accommodated locally and was a positive and exciting project.

RESOLVED: That the committee:

- **supports the introduction of the accommodation based support service for care leavers;**
- **supports an ongoing review of the service to determine its effectiveness and possible replication in future; and**
- **requests that a site visit to the facility is arranged once completed.**

19. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2019 - 2020

The committee considered a report by the Cabinet Member Children and Families concerning the youth justice plan 2018/19. The Head of Service (HoS), West Mercia Youth Offending Service introduced the report and explained that there had been a decrease in the number of first time entrants in 2018/19, custody was only used once during 2018 and there had been a reduction in the reoffending cohort. The HoS was joined by DCI Jon Roberts who assisted in answering questions relating to youth justice on behalf of West Mercia Police.

The committee raised those comments below in the debate that followed:

- The reoffending rate had improved but it was still high in Herefordshire compared to West Mercia. There was some contradiction in the service user feedback which stated that 92% of individuals made better decisions. *The HoS explained that the rate in Herefordshire was better than the national average of 40% however it was recognised that within West Mercia the county's reoffending rate was higher than other areas. DCI Roberts explained that the joint review panel had been effective in identifying child at risk of criminality and diverting them from offending.*
- The first time entrants rate was raised and it was queried why Herefordshire as a rural county was not significantly outperforming urban areas in West Mercia. *The HoS explained that Herefordshire used to have the highest first time entrants rate in the West Mercia region but was now lower than the region as a whole.*
- It was requested that in future the plan contain an addendum with the latest statistics available for the measures.
- It was queried how the youth justice service worked with CAMHS. *The HoS explained that support was provided from psychologists from CAMHS who worked with staff in the team to provide advice on the handling of complex cases.*
- The success of the initiative to increase multi-agency assurance reporting as queried and whether there were any partners in particular that were difficult to engage. *The HoS explained that the assurance reporting had not been undertaken before the current year. It was confirmed that engagement in the high risk panels had improved.*
- The issue of delays to the processing of young people through the justice system was raised. *The HoS and DCI Roberts explained that there was a delay in those cases where young people had been released under investigation. This was a delay in the criminal justice process but this did not cause a delay in the youth justice process and consideration by the panel.*
- It was queried how the youth justice team was working with the early help at the council to prevent young people becoming involved in crime. *The HoS explained that work between the youth justice team and the early help team consisted of developing a pathway for young people whose siblings were involved in criminality. The timescale for the completion of this piece of work would be provided after the meeting. In addition the early help team sat on the youth justice panel and took referrals. DCI Roberts explained that diversionary activity was in place, such as the boxing club, which local agencies referred into.*
- The committee queried the prevalence of county lines activity in Herefordshire and the impact of the pre-court decision making arrangements on its incidence. *The HoS explained that the pre-court decision making arrangement sought to avoid the criminalisation of young people on the edge of county lines activity. DCI Roberts explained the multi-agency work that was in progress concerning child exploitation and outlined intelligence that was known regarding county lines activity in Herefordshire. It was confirmed that the police and crime commissioner was looking at resourcing work to counter county lines activity.*
- The resourcing of county lines activity was raised as a potential topic for general scrutiny to consider as part of its work programme.

The Cabinet Member Children and Families spoke on the youth justice plan and commented that the number of reduced first time entrants was positive. The intervention work undertaken to divert young people from criminality was encouraging and it was recognised that the campaign against county lines was challenging.

RESOLVED:

That the committee:

- **Endorses the Youth Justice Plan for presentation to full Council; and**

- **Asks that an addendum is added to the report, in forthcoming years, providing up-to-date statistics.**

20. WORK PROGRAMME 2019 - 2020

The committee considered a report containing its work programme 2019/20, the executive responses to task and finish groups conducted in the previous council term and terms of reference for task and finish groups proposed in 2019/20.

It was noted that the report concerning a review of performance and progress against the safeguarding and family support improvement plan 2019/20 was not presented to the current meeting and it was agreed that it would be brought to the next meeting of the committee on 25 November.

It was requested that a correction to the work programme was undertaken to change the title of the spotlight review to peer on peer abuse in schools and that a further spotlight review was added to the work programme concerning speech and language therapy.

The committee reviewed the executive responses to the task and finish groups conducted in the previous council term.

The committee considered and agreed the terms of reference for the peer on peer abuse in schools spotlight review. It was agreed that Councillor Carole Gandy would act as chairperson of the review and the membership would include: the members of the committee; Councillor Peter Jinman and in accordance with the terms of reference any other member expressing an interest. As part of the review it was requested that an anonymous case study was presented concerning a case of peer on peer abuse that resulted in a successful prosecution. The committee also considered whether a victim of peer on peer abuse should be invited to the spotlight review to give evidence. This was not supported by the committee which had concerns regarding the potential trauma caused to such a witness appearing at a meeting in public to provide evidence and the potential implications on any current or future criminal proceedings.

The committee considered and agreed the terms of reference for the child exploitation task and finish group. It was agreed that Councillor Diana Toynbee would act as the chairperson of the group and the membership would include Councillors: Paul Andrews; Peter Jinman; Mike Jones; and David Summers. In accordance with the scoping document co-optees from voluntary/charitable organisations and a member from the general scrutiny committee would be sought.

RESOLVED: That the committee agrees:

- **the 2019/20 work programme subject to the correction and reallocation of the report above and notes the executive responses to the tasks and finish groups concerning SEND Provision, PRU Referrals and Court Judgements;**
- **the terms of reference for the peer on peer abuse in schools spotlight review, the appointment of a chairperson and its membership as outlined above; and**
- **the terms of reference for the child exploitation task and finish group, the appointment of a chairperson and its membership as outlined above.**

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm

Chairperson