

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at The Council Chamber - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 16 March 2020 at 10.15 am

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

Councillors: Graham Andrews, Phillip Howells, Mike Jones

Co-optees: Mr Sam Pratley

In attendance: Councillor Felicity Norman, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Officers: Director Children and Families; Assistant Director Education Development and Skills; Head of Learning and Achievement; Statutory Scrutiny Officer

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Andrews, Mr Burbidge, Councillor Hey and Mr James.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on 14 January are agreed as a correct record and are signed by the chairperson.

43. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 7 - 10)

A copy of the public questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 1.

44. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Pages 11 - 12)

A copy of the Member question and written answers is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 2.

45. SCHOOL EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE 2019

The committee received a report from the head of learning and achievement (HLA) concerning the examination performance from 2019. The HLA introduced the report and provided the presentation attached as appendix 1.

The principal points below were raised by the committee in the debate:

- It was requested that in future the presentation of the results in the report should be set against performance in earlier years to establish if there were any trends. *The*

director children and families (DCF) explained that this detail was available and could be circulated after the meeting.

- Performance in the primary phase was positive but there was concern over the performance in the secondary phase. *The HLA explained that it was difficult to compare the results for the secondary phase over a number of preceding years due to the change in examination methods.*
- It was queried whether the council was funding the local National leaders in education (NLEs). *The HLA confirmed that the council was helping fund the NLEs. The DCF explained that the school improvement team was a small resource and occasionally there was a need to 'buy-in' expertise.*
- The role of schools to support the mental health and wellbeing of pupils was raised and if there was concern regarding the provision of this support locally. *The HLA explained that schools had a mental health lead and could provide counselling to pupils. There was also the provision of child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) which accepted referrals from schools. A selection of secondary schools had received funding to develop mental health and wellbeing provision; if the project was successful the provision could be introduced across all secondary schools from September 2020. The DCF highlighted the launch of the children and young people plan which had included examples of how the emotional wellbeing of pupils was being supported across the primary and secondary phases. It was explained that at a recent head teacher stakeholder event there had been a discussion on the need for greater work to be undertaken to define the mental health support that was available in the primary phase.*
- There was concern regarding pressures on local CAMHS and speech language therapy (SLT) services and the length of waiting lists. These were topics of importance to the scrutiny committee and were proposed as subjects of reviews in the forthcoming municipal year.
- The performance of the multi-academy trust over the previous year was raised. *The assistant director education development and skills (ADED&S) explained that there was assurance with the primary academies but the secondary academies were still posing some concern. It was acknowledged that a recent Ofsted inspection had contained areas of positivity with respect to the secondary schools.*
- The difficulty of recruitment for schools and the impact on standards of education was raised; it was posed that such difficulty would mirror problems in other sectors, such as the recruitment of social workers and health workers. *The ADED&S explained that this was an issue for schools particularly small establishments. There was also concern with the retention of senior leadership teams and there had been a proposal to share teams across different schools.*
- It was queried how the performance of the project focusing on the progress of boys at key stage 4 would be measured. *The HLA explained that the success of the project would be measured by the GCSE results achieved by the cohort, currently in year 9. Schools were required to report progress of the project to the Herefordshire School Improvement Partnership (HSIP).*
- Details of the Herefordshire Challenge were requested. *The ADED&S explained that the project was in an early stage of development and matched funding was currently being sought. The project sought to support work with senior and middle leadership teams at schools and bring underperforming schools together in a bid to improve standards in the next 1 - 2 years.*
- The impact of the coronavirus and potential closure of schools was raised and how the impact on the summer exams could be mitigated. *The ADED&S explained that current government guidance was that schools remained opened. Further national guidance would be acted upon but schools and pupils were currently continuing to prepare for exams and risk assessments were being completed. The secondary sector was well prepared for closures, the primary sector was making preparations and it was felt that special schools might need*

to close due to some of the underlying health risks that pupils at these schools may have. The DCF explained that there were concerns over the closure of schools and the impact on exams; revision and school work was more challenging from home. Schools were considering how to mitigate the impact of closures on the exam performance of students including remote working facilities. In the event of closures there was also a need to consider community support for children in receipt of free school meals (FSM), particularly where it was likely that the only hot meal such children were likely to receive was through school.

- The numbers and nature of the group of children in receipt of FSM was queried. *The HLA explained that the number of FSM children in full year cohorts of approximately 1,800 was around 200. The ADED&S explained that there were important subgroups identifiable in those children in receipt of FSM, including those with English as an additional language, and such subgroups were identifiable through data shared by schools.*

RESOLVED: That the committee:

- **Notes the report and the good results in key stage 1 and key stage 2; and**
- **Request that in future the presentation of the results is set against performance in earlier years.**

46. REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS AGAINST THE SAFEGUARDING AND FAMILY SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2019/20

The committee received a report from the assistant director safeguarding and family support concerning progress against the safeguarding and family support improvement plan. The report which provided the outcomes from the end of quarter 3 was introduced by the DCF.

The principal points below were raised in the debate:

- There was concern regarding the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) and not in suitable accommodation. It was proposed that the topic could be address by the scrutiny committee as a task and finish group or spotlight review. *The DCF explained that currently 86% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation. The ADED&S was currently working on a project looking at NEETs and a briefing note would be circulated to the committee following the meeting.*
- It was queried whether there was a reluctance on the part of employers in the county to employ care leavers or offer training opportunities. *The cabinet member children and families explained that a 16+ member champion had been established to look into options for training and work experience for young people.*
- The continuing difficulty to recruit social workers was raised. *The DCF explained that problems around the recruitment of social workers were an underlying issue for the children and families directorate. A new assistant director would shortly be taking up a post who would focus on the social work academy and the long term objective to train and develop social workers from Herefordshire.*
- The use of providers to undertake social work activities that were not statutory or crucial was raised. *The DCF explained that business support was provided to social workers to undertake such tasks and voice recognition software had been provided to reduce the resource required for some tasks. This was kept under review and the current focus was on the prevention of the escalation of cases.*
- The issue of the frequency of supervision was raised. *The DCF explained that there were regular conversations between social workers and managers but the*

formality and recording of these meetings needed to improve. The issue was an area of focus with weekly reports on supervision and heads of service involved in supervision.

- In the previous item there was no mention of other organisations that provided services for NEETs and should they be part of discussions around key stage 5 plans. *The DCF explained that a specific response would be necessary, the further education team co-ordinated with the 16+ team to investigate training opportunities for 19 -21 year olds. It was acknowledged that there were a number of care leavers who were NEETs and were not benefitting from opportunities.*
- It was acknowledged that there were positive areas and accomplishments in performance against the improvement plan but that public perception was informed by a focus on those negative elements. It was felt that there should be attempts to accentuate and publicise those areas of progress that had been achieved. *The cabinet member children and families acknowledged that it was important to appreciate the achievements accomplishment however this should not diminish the work and improvements that were still required.*
- It was queried whether social worker agencies experienced similar trouble in the recruitment of social workers. *The DCF explained that difficulties in the recruitment of social workers was prevalent across the country with 6,000 vacancies in children's social care. There was a need to market Herefordshire to attract people and their partners to the county.*
- The visit to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in Redbridge was raised and what best practice had been observed. *The DCF explained that the Redbridge MASH had a single front door with help and guidance provided at an early stage. The handling of multi-agency referral forms by Redbridge was also raised; cases without a significant risk of harm were dealt with using an alternative response to social care activity.*
- It was requested that in future details of the changes that that the directorate was trying to accomplish should be presented in a one page briefing document. The document should include details of the intention of a project, who was responsible for it and how change would be measured.
- It was requested that a briefing note on the mind of my own (MOMO) app be shared with the committee.
- It was proposed that in future all members of the children and young people scrutiny committee be invited to the performance challenge session. Issues raised during that session would inform the report to the scrutiny committee.
- The timing of meetings of the scrutiny committee would also be reconsidered to ensure that they were scheduled four weeks after the release of the quarterly report concerning the safeguarding and family support improvement plan.
- It was felt that the committee would benefit from continued sight of the quarterly self-evaluation.
- The intention to complete the review of historic peer on peer abuse cases by the end of March and to report the outcome to the meeting of the scrutiny committee in June was raised. If there was any slippage in the timeframe it was felt this needed to be clearly publicised. *The DCF explained that it was intended that the review would be completed within the timeframe outlined however there may be an impact from the coronavirus.*
- The child exploitation bid was queried. *The DCF explained that the bid had been successful and work would now be taken forward across agencies.*

RESOLVED: That the committee:

- **requests that in future details of the changes that the directorate was trying to accomplish be presented in a one page briefing document including details of the intention of a project, who was responsible for it and how change would be measured.**

- requests a briefing note on the mind of my own (MOMO) app.
- proposes that all members of the children and young people scrutiny committee be invited to the performance challenge session.
- agrees that meetings are scheduled four weeks after the release of the quarterly report concerning the safeguarding and family support improvement plan.

47. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The committee considered its work programme 2020/21. It was explained that the police would be invited to the committee meeting that considered the youth justice plan and there would be a visit to the accommodation for care leavers once complete.

A scrutiny review concerning CAMHS and SLT would be added to the work programme.

The committee considered the recommendation tracker in the appendix to the work programme. The chairperson provided an update to explain the responses received from local MPs to letters concerning oral health in Herefordshire. The letter from the MP for North Herefordshire would be shared with the committee.

RESOLVED: That the work programme 2020/21 be approved subject to the inclusion of a review concerning CAMHS and SLT.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm

Chairperson

Appendix 1 - Questions from members of the public

| Question Number | Questioner | Question | Question to |
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| PQ 1 | Ms Steel, Hereford | There have been three high profile failures by Children's Services in the last two years - the Section 20 cases, the twins adoption scandal, and the repeated failure to safeguard child victims of sexual abuse from their abusers in schools - and Ofsted continues to have significant concerns over the leadership and management of the Children's Directorate. How is the committee going to improve its own practices and processes to ensure that its scrutiny of the Children's Directorate can be more effective and useful? | Chairperson of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee |
| <p>Response:</p> <p>The committee remains open to influence on ways in which it can continue to improve and strengthen its role to scrutinise the social care and safeguarding of all of the children in the council's care and within the county. In relation to the specific cases outlined in this question; the Children and Young People scrutiny committee has taken direct action in response to the Section 20 cases, the court judgements relating to two adoption cases and undertaken a public 'spotlight' review into all forms of peer on peer abuse, including peer on peer sexual abuse.</p> <p>In regard to the Section 20 cases a task and finish group conducted an evidence led investigation looking at section 20 orders, the processes in place to ensure their appropriate use and to conduct analysis on case samples. From their findings, the task and finish group made 8 recommendations (weblink), 1 recommendation to the children and young people scrutiny committee and 7 recommendations to the executive. All of the recommendations were accepted and actions were agreed for all of them. The executive's response can be found here (weblink).</p> <p>In the court judgements on the adoption cases a task and finish group conducted an evidence led investigation based around the rulings set out in the court judgments and the Ofsted inspection and resulting action plan. The group met on three occasions receiving expert input from officers who were intrinsically involved with the adoption. As a result of those discussions the task and finish group made 14 recommendations (weblink) in regard to the high court judgement concerning children and families. The executive responded to each of those recommendations, accepting and agreeing to action all of them. The executive's response can be found here (weblink).</p> <p>For the spotlight review concerning peer on peer abuse in schools (weblink), the committee agreed to undertake this review due to reports of increasing levels of peer on peer abuse and public concern at schools in Herefordshire. From their findings, the spotlight review made 12 recommendations, 9 were directed to the executive to respond to, 2 were directed to the scrutiny committee to respond to and 1 related to drafting a letter to the Department for Education to outline the comments of witnesses at the spotlight review concerning existing peer on peer abuse guidance for schools. The executive response is being prepared and is expected to be published in April.</p> <p>On a point of correction. The last Ofsted focused visit clearly set out areas for improvement that the service is addressing, whilst also noting some areas of strength including quality of supervision of the children with disabilities. No priority areas for action were set out in the letter following the Ofsted focused visit. There are strong areas of performance from our children and families directorate and leadership, including the work with schools and education settings to achieve a range of performance that is the best in the West Midlands and statistical neighbours, such as key stage 2 primary results. Our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities approach in Herefordshire was rated second in the country last year by IMPOWER in terms of value for money and outcomes.</p> | | | |
| <p>Supplementary question:</p> | | | |

Ms Steel's supplementary question was disallowed as it risked the identification of an individual (4.5.102 (g) Herefordshire Council constitution).

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| PQ 2 | Ms Liddle, Ledbury | It was agreed in late November 2019 that a full review of all cases of peer on peer sexual assault since October 2016 was needed to ensure that all child victims of peer on peer sexual assault had been properly safeguarded and no child was still at risk of harm. How is the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee planning to scrutinise the length of time it has taken to complete this review, the methodology and the outcomes? | Chairperson of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee |
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Response:

Following [the spotlight review concerning peer on peer abuse in schools](#) (weblink), it was recommended that the executive provides the outcome of the current review (including lessons learned) into cases of peer to peer abuse referred to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to the spotlight review and the children and young people scrutiny committee. It was agreed to review cases from Jan 2017 onwards, this review will be concluded by the end of March. As part of the children and young people's scrutiny work programme a report will be received on the review.

In addition, the spotlight review recommended that the children and young people scrutiny committee agree a further meeting of the spotlight review to consider a greater level of data to provide a more informed understanding of the scale and complexity of peer on peer abuse in Herefordshire; the outcomes of the review will support this objective. Once the review has been concluded and the outcomes are made available, an item will be added to the children and young people scrutiny committee work programme for consideration at a future committee meeting.

Of note is the response received from the Ofsted focussed visit which stated that *'The local authority has worked closely with schools to ensure that all have policies and procedures that both help to identify peer-on-peer abuse concerns and help to limit risks. The local authority has ensured that these issues have been the subject of practice reviews, including through a recent multi-agency spotlight review on peer-on-peer abuse'*.

Supplementary question:

Does the committee think it acceptable that four months will elapse, until the outcomes of the review of peer on peer abuse are available, before children at risk of harm are identified?

Response:

Cabinet member children and families: The review was being conducted in a thorough manner and would take time. A number of staff had been committed to the task and there had been the interruption of the Ofsted inspection in January. There was no reason to consider that children were currently at risk.

Director children and families: The review involved checking 550 records since 2017 that alleged sexual harm and required significant resource and time to complete. A written response to the supplementary question would be provided.

Chairperson children and young people scrutiny committee: The Ofsted inspection in January was satisfied that peer on peer abuse cases were being handled in a correct manner.

Appendix 2 - Questions from members of the Council

| Question Number | Questioner | Question | Question to |
|--|-------------------------------|---|--|
| MQ 1 | Councillor Jeremy Milln | Referring to Ofsted's letter of 21 st January following its 18 th December inspection of Herefordshire's children's services what is the leadership team doing to understand and address key shortcomings in its own management and supervision of staff? For example it would be a good idea to give an opportunity for leavers (anonymously and via 3 rd parties if need be) to feed back their experience of employment with Herefordshire Council and share their reasons for leaving. Social workers are like teachers: before applying for a job they check the Ofsted report. We cannot hope to attract and retain experienced staff to a service where leadership, support and management are seen as deficient. | Cabinet member children and families |
| <p>Response:</p> <p>Referring to Ofsted's letter of 21st January following its 18th December inspection of Herefordshire's children's services what is the leadership team doing to understand and address key shortcomings in its own management and supervision of staff?</p> <p>Response; Key performance information is available to heads of service on a weekly basis, to enable them to drill down with team managers into the performance of individual teams. Data is provided at mid-month point as to the % of social workers that have received supervision, so heads of service have oversight of how many supervisions are required in that month, and can have these conversations with team managers accordingly. To have an overview on the quality of supervision, heads of service are required to observe two supervision sessions per quarter. The Assistant Director chairs monthly performance meetings with heads of service. The Director chairs quarterly performance challenge sessions with AD and Heads of service, and from April, team managers will be attending these meetings as well.</p> <p>It would be a good idea to give an opportunity for leavers (anonymously and via 3rd parties if need be) to feed back their experience of employment with Herefordshire Council and share their reasons for leaving.</p> <p>Response; All leavers are offered an exit interview. In the last twelve months, there have been six social work employees that have left Herefordshire County Council. There have been a number of employees that have moved posts within the council; the data on this is being pulled together by HR. The confirmation of resignation letter details that staff should complete the exit survey online or if they prefer they can request a face to face exit interview. Only 1 person completed the online survey.</p> <p>We cannot hope to attract and retain experienced staff to a service where leadership, support and management are seen as deficient.</p> <p>Response; The focused visit in January 2019 evaluated one service area. There is now a new Head of Service in post in this service area who took up post the week after Ofsted had conducted their visit. They are aware of the challenges in the service area and are making every effort to address these. We are working with Essex County Council, as performance improvement partners, to learn from them and develop approaches which can drive up the quality of practice We are implementing signs of safety to help embed strengths based practice and improve our service offer to children and families.</p> | | | |

Recruitment is challenging against a national shortage of social workers, and we acknowledge adverse publicity can impact on this. However, prior to the Ofsted visit, recruitment drives and initiatives were not successful in attracting experienced social workers to work in Hereford, and we are now actively recruiting newly qualified social workers in an attempt to “grow our own” social workers for the future. We also have six people who commenced the social work apprenticeship scheme with the Open University in February 2019.