

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 13 December 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Phillip Howells (chairperson)
Councillor Jennie Hewitt (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: David Summers (Substitute), Toni Fagan, David Hitchiner, Helen L'Anson, Mike Jones, John Stone, Diana Toynbee (Cabinet Member)

In attendance: Kevin Crompton, Fiona Reid, Wiktor Darron (Intermittent virtual attendance due to technical difficulties), Sam Pratley

Officers: Simon Cann, Michael Carr, John Coleman, Darryl Freeman (Director for Children and Young People), Gail Hancock, Julie Mephram, Alfie Rees-Glinos, Gladys Rhodes-White

114. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Andy James (SEND Sector Parent Governor Representative – Education Co-optee), Cllr Graham Andrews

115. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Cllr David Summers substituted for Cllr Graham Andrews.

116. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest.

117. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

118. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 13 - 16)

119. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions received from Councillors.

120. CORPORATE PARENTING

The Committee gave consideration to the report as set out on pages 17-24 of the agenda.

The report was taken as read.

The Director for Children and Young People and Head of Service for Corporate Parenting provided a brief overview of the report and invited questions from the Committee:

Re priority area 1:

“We want our corporate parents, and other key leaders to understand and act on their responsibilities – Lead Member for Children and Young People”.

The Committee pointed out that the setting up of a new Corporate Parenting Board was encouraging, but suggested that most members (and probably the public) were not aware of the current strategy, board membership and meetings - some being cancelled recently - and that the strategy was still not clear or understood by member stakeholders.

An update on the progress being made to improve communications was requested. The Committee also asked what evidence there was to show that awareness of members, leaders and partners helping to deliver the strategy was increasing, and was there any data on whether the public had confidence in the new corporate parenting strategy?

The Director for Children and Young People explained that the revised strategy hadn't been published yet, so there was no feedback, but it would go to the Corporate Parenting Board in January. Key leads in respect of the original strategy remained the same: corporate leadership team, cabinet and members. Members and stakeholders had been briefed with an early draft of strategy to ensure there was awareness of the revisions

Regarding communications a number of different channels were being used, including: children and young people in care or care experienced individuals, parents and carers, members and the Council's workforce. The LGA had provided useful comments and was right in pointing out that the old strategy needed a significant refresh.

Re priority area 2:

“We want to reach our potential in education. We want our education and training to ‘recover’ after the disruption of Covid 19 – Virtual school head teacher”

The Committee noted that it was clear from paragraphs 22-27 of the report that substantial improvements in educational outcomes for children in care were needed to achieve the Council's 'objectives' in meeting this priority. However, there were no specific aims identified as targets and the only evidence was of a deterioration in recent years, with no indication of any significant improvements. The Committee asked what specific actions were being taken to turn around educational outcomes for children in the Council's care?

The Committee also enquired as to whether the virtual School Head had any suggestions regarding possible expansions of the service to cater for the 59% who were not in education, employment or training (NEET)?

The Director for Children and Young People noted that this kind of questioning was what the corporate parenting board would be looking at and that going forward there would need to be consideration regarding the joint relationship between the corporate parenting board and scrutiny when analysing virtual schools activity. It was also clarified that NEET figures referred to 16+ children.

Re priority area 6

“We want our voice to matter – Lead Member for Children and Young People (supported by foster carer representative and Participation and Mentoring Officer)”

The Committee asked what new initiatives were being undertaken, what timescale they were expected to be delivered/operational in and how they would be measured? The Committee also asked how these initiatives would generate confidence in children and their parents that their voices really did matter? It was felt the actions being taken as described in paragraphs 33-35 were vague and unspecific and the lead member was asked for specifics about details, timescales and improving this area substantially at pace.

It was explained that currently there was a participation officer and two step workers, but there was no engagement and participation team. A participation and engagement strategy was being drawn up and would be focusing on what was needed to enable and determine how the voice of children would be heard. Work on the strategy was moving at pace and it was hoped a dedicated engagement team would be in place by the beginning of April 2023. There are already a couple of engagement groups in place to listen to what local youths would like to see in the area and one outcome of this is a new package being offered by Halo, which was very exciting in terms of providing physical activities.

Re Voice of the child

The Committee expressed its disappointment that the report stated that it was still not evident that the voice of children and young people was reflected in services. It was also a cause of upset to learn that one outstanding example of where young people could be heard 'No wrong door' had had its funding removed/it no longer exists. The lead member was asked why?

The directorate was asked about how it intended to listen to the voices of children and whether it was aware of the Lundy Model for instance, and the principles that underpin it (Space, Voice, Audience, Influence)?

The Committee suggested considering the work of Richard Rose in supporting children to work on their life stories.

The Director for Children and Young People explained that the funding for 'No wrong door' was not stopped by his directorate and that he did not know why it had been stopped. The Director told the Committee that the directorate had just appointed to the role of permanent champion. This champion would be looking at children who come into care and their journey through care. They would also be looking at life story work.

Recording Actions demonstrating progress on data (page 9 point 9)

The Committee pointed out that the LGA had recommended that minutes be kept of the corporate parenting board meetings and that they should include a key performance indicator dashboard to indicate progress towards targets. It was asked if a dashboard had been created and whether the board had clerking support? The Committee requested a copy of the minutes and dashboard from the August corporate parenting board meeting.

The Director for Children and Young People stated that the corporate parenting board did have clerking support and that it would be happy to share the minutes and the dashboard of the August meeting. The board was currently looking at how to publish the minutes on the Council website.

ACTION: Directorate to share the Corporate Parenting Board Minutes and the dashboard of the August meeting on the Council's website.

Housing/stable family and home life (page 20, paragraph 17)

The Committee noted that number of children with 3 or more placement moves had fallen to 2% in the past 6 months, but was it was not clear from what and what had driven the fall.

The directorate was asked how it reassured itself that the children in the remaining 98% were not unhappy and wished to move? Also, what actions were available to stabilise the situation when a child in care was unhappy with their foster family?

The Committee enquired as to whether the housing worker post was solely for care experienced leavers? What would be the scope of this post and would it include support for young people to manage their finances and to cope with their rental responsibilities?

The Director for Children and Young People explained that a psychologist was being brought into the fostering support team to help carers understand and deal with problematic behaviour. The directorate was currently carrying out a piece of work with foster carers on learning and development opportunities and a support network for them, as there had been gaps in this area in recent years.

The Director told the Committee that if a child was unhappy, then services would listen to the child and mediate. If things still weren't working, then alternatives would have to be considered and a psychologist would try and understand and resolve the issues of the family and the child.

The housing worker post was only for care experienced young people and they would work alongside housing providers. They would not work around finance, but would support the PAs. A 'living on your own' course, including financial advice and coping with being on your own was planned for the New Year.

The directorate saw incentivising housing associations as a potentially sensible approach and was working with the department of levelling up in relation to how they might cooperate creatively with providers in the county. The Council was already working with two providers where 16-25 housing was available.

The committee noted that if the amount spent on emergency and temporary accommodation was invested properly into quality accommodation, then this wouldn't incur any extra cost. It was felt investors have capital and would invest it if there was a clear strategy from the council

The Director confirmed there was close relationship between strategic housing and children services.

Mental Health Support (page 21, paragraph 30)

The Committee noted that other authorities fund a range of interventions for young people with mental health difficulties (art/music/drama/movement therapy) and asked if Herefordshire Council provided any of these and why would the role of psychologist be a better provision? Would it be it one or the other?

The Director for Children and Young People responded that Herefordshire Council did provide discreet services for individuals, but only as part of individual care plans - where there was funding for a range of interventions and support as described.

The committee enquired about what was being done to tackle substance abuse and why there was no mention of Turning Point?

It was explained that the service does work very closely with Turning Point and many people were referred to Turning Point and this joined up with social workers and officers.

Partnership working was seen as absolutely critical and information could be provided to demonstrate partners including Turning Point were all working together.

Physical Health (page 21, paragraph 31)

The Committee requested more detail in relation to the 'new processes' in place to improve timeliness of initial health assessments

The Director for Children and Young People stated this was the work of the corporate parenting board. Health would now attend every corporate parenting board and there were also monthly meetings with the looked after health team.

Key priority area 5

"We want to enjoy a range of play, sport, leisure and cultural opportunities - person responsible: Director of Resource"

The Committee observed that there had been a number of opportunities for young people over the holidays, but did not have an update as to the wider offer for children from the chair of the group. Who was the director of resource quoted as being responsible and how could they be contacted. Was the Council consulting with all its education facilities and parent bodies to try and understand the expertise and goodwill which we could be tapped into?

The Director for Children and Young People confirmed the Council was consulting with other bodies, but not enough. Talk community and world cafes were being used for reaching out.

Re Task and finish group (page 23)

It was pointed out by the Committee that the report states under 'risk management' that there was a Task and Finish group set up to review all children subject to higher cost provision etc. Had this been set up and who was reporting back to scrutiny for instance? It was explained that there was a weekly meeting with Rachel Gillott to discuss plans for children in high cost accommodation and the most appropriate places for those children. It was not a task and finish group, but a weekly meeting - a "high cost meeting"

Approved:

The Committee unanimously approved the report with the conclusions drawn.

121. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The report was taken as read.

The Director for Children and Young People provided a brief overview of the report and invited questions from the Committee:

The Committee broke questions into key areas identified by Ofsted.

Corporate Responsibility

Q1: What proposals can you immediately propose to facilitate parents/carers and children both in public meetings and at every point of contact - so that their voices are

heard and more importantly to avoid their having to bring their upsetting stories (at huge personal cost) into the public arena?

Have you considered trauma awareness training for officers and members?

The Director for Children and Young People explained they were considering how to introduce trauma informed practice and trauma awareness. Trauma awareness was part of the relational restorative practice approach and would be a key plank of not only changing Council practice, but signalling that the practice was changing. This would link to the different platforms approach.

In terms of different platforms, the Council needed to work with families and create a safe space where personal conversations could take place away from the public arena.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee stressed that it would like to see trauma training extended to every single officer and member with a responsibility corporately to answer parents.

Q2: This Improvement Plan ... has been prepared in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including children, young people, parents and carers, the workforce and multi-agency / cross sector partners. ... We intend to continue engaging with our stakeholders to further develop a local conversation whereby we will listen, address feedback and take appropriate action as an integral part of our improvement journey as we move forward.”

However, the list of 11 consultees does not include any birth families consultees.

Please outline the ways in which birth families have been consulted when drafting the Plan and how you will continue to engage with them?

The Director for Children and Young People explained that in terms of the consultation events the only feedback they got in terms of parent care families came through organisations such as Parent Carer Voice and Healthwatch. The Director recognised that there weren't currently enough forums for meaningful engagement and that was why they were developing the 'Listening to Families' approach, which was in the consultation process and due to be published in the New Year. This would be refreshed and updated every time Ofsted came back in the future.

Q3. There is a perception from some head teachers that once a family has accessed an intervention through early help or Venture, or something similar, then they can't access a lesser degree of service and end up getting stuck in the system. They are experiencing long waiting times for high level intervention where capacity is limited, but can't get lower level assistance at the same time. Is this perception correct and what are we doing to address that problem.

The Director for Children and Young People acknowledged Issues around capacity of universal early help and high level intervention. The Council would be looking to engage with head teachers and schools differently and better in the New Year.

ACTION: Chair suggested sharing responses on the new improvement plan from a primary school teacher with cabinet.

The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce.

Q1: There is nothing in the improvement plan that suggests anything *new or innovative* will be attempted to address the social work recruitment issue, the same is true of the shortage of foster carers. There is nothing about partner agencies being part of the pathway. For example, placements, development of role from early help into social work etc.

What will actually be different and why will the outcome be different this time?

Q2: The BRAG rating is red for fostering, and yet in-house fostering is measured as good which doesn't follow, can you explain please?

Have we seen the fostering information leaflet, which it says has been completed? Where is it available?

The Director for Children and Young People did not have recruitment data on foster care, so would have to return to the committee on that.

In terms of recruitment of social workers and career progression, the Council had too high a proportion of interim staff and wanted a higher proportion of permanent experienced social workers. Trying to recruit had been and continued to be difficult and there was a shortage of social workers nationally.

The Council would be increasing the number of social worker apprenticeships next year and also increasing the number of newly qualified social workers and social work students that it was supporting – it was trying to 'grow its own' and create a flow of staff over the medium to long term.

The directorate was speaking to the DfE and Ofsted about using people with different skills in the team, such as family support workers. How the Council moved to that position had to be carefully considered to make sure children were safe.

Committee, are we looking at what neighbouring councils have done to improve their situation and seeing if we can learn lessons and follow examples?

The Director for Children and Young People confirmed the Council was talking with other authorities about best practice.

The Committee was concerned that in BRAG fostering was red and there was a high number of seemingly delayed amber items.

The Director for Children and Young People pointed out that it would be worrying if everything in BRAG was green, because that would suggest everything was fine, which it wasn't. People are working hard to improve things and each month when progress is made it will be updated.

The Committee requested a diagram/chart to show loops as to how all the areas interlink, would be great and this would link in with the dashboard.

The Director for Children and Young People explained that storyboards were likely to feature within the improvement plan.

The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people

Q1: Many concerns could be raised in this section but the pressing need seems to be for a clear understanding and response to the issue of neglect – which as we know is one of the most harmful forms of abuse.

What work has been done to date on a strategy for this and with whom does the responsibility reside?

The Director for Children and Young People stated that an interim neglect strategy was published last month by the safeguarding partnership and was due to be evaluated in terms of its impact next spring. The next step of the neglect strategy would hopefully be published in the summer or early autumn of next year. There is a one year interim strategy in place at the moment.

The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need

Q1: Head teachers are telling us that the voice of the child needs to be heard and not only that of the parent. When social care is supporting parents sometimes children's voices are not prioritised. This remains a concern amongst heads.

What measures are in place to address this?

The Director for Children and Young People acknowledged that a lot more needed to be done in terms of voice of the child. When a local authority had been in decline for years, there was a real necessity to get structures and benchmarks in place for delivering the quality. In the New Year, the directorate would be monitoring impact through quality assurance audits. As a service, it was crucial to find ways to capture the voice of families and children. It was not just about reports and strategies, but about genuinely listening and triangulating this against what children and people tell us. The Council was trying to improve from a very low base. There had been some positive progress, but there was a long way to go.

The Committee asked the Director if the service engaged with teachers in relation to the voice of the child.

The Director confirmed that they did involve teachers and had been asking how they could include teachers to a greater degree to build a better picture.

Timely and Effective multi agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required

Q1: Do you consider that deciding on the Family Group Conference model by April 2023 is acting at pace?

The Director for Children and Young People stated he would like to have more provision now and certainly early January. The plan for the 1st April was to have the resource in place rather than make a decision about the resource. Realistically that was about as early as we would be able to get emergency resources in place.

Committee: could we change the wording from 'determine' FGC model and approach by April 2023 to 'implement'?

Director: yes we could that.

Q2: Do you consider that rolling out the Edge of Care Strategy from March 2023 is acting at pace and should it be a Measure that Matter (target).

The Director for Children and Young People explained that was as fast as they could do it, given the scope and scale of the activity. The edge of care strategy would be a long term strategy and was a multi-agency piece of work. There would be a wide range of performance indicators. The 'measures that matter' were there to give the audience a sense that things were moving in the right direction. The fact it is not a Measure of Matter doesn't mean it is a lower priority.

The Committee pointed out that the earlier you can invest in early years, the more it's possible to reduce costs of children in care further down the line. A paradigm shift has to be made.

Q3: What will the multi-agency 'edge of care' offer look like? It is intended to build on family strengths and resources so children and young people can stay with their families where appropriate. Given the pressures families are under, how soon will this service be up and running?

It was explained that the aim was to have a strategy drafted by the end of January and extended service in place by March 2023. There were good services in the ECHO team and they wanted to supplement those with the extended family group conference offer, as well forging stronger links to voluntary community and faith sector organisations.

Q4 Is the Director of Children's services minded to better resource Early Help or is the real prevention work likely to be left to the community to do for free?

The Director for Children and Young People explained it was a combination of both, we would like to see resources coming into children's services being diverted to early help, but the offer should also be provided by universal services such schools, health centres and nurseries. Currently the balance is not right. There has been fantastic input from local communities based on the Talk Community feedback. We want to implement feedback we have recovered from families and schools to implement quick win actions that will demonstrate to communities that we are listening and doing something to address the issues.

The Committee pointed out that it had heard from some family support workers that family support and early help were no longer really considered prevention, because there was so much backfilling going on in the system at the moment that they were being taken as a much higher level of service.

Monitoring and Tracking to prevent drift and delay (plo, permanence planning, PLO and unregistered children's homes)

Q1: Families who encounter difficulties that lead to PLO pre-proceedings are facing an adversarial legal system which offers them little support. What provision is being made to provide families with the right information for court proceedings in a timely manner so that they are fully aware of the process and the implications? The communication the families are getting is very poor.

There was uncertainty about current info on the Council website relating to this, but an assurance was given that it would be checked. It was explained that last year saw the

publication of the national public law working group support for families with pre-proceedings document. This needed to be linked as a source to the Council website.

RECOMMENDATION: That families are properly advised on the right information and advice and support on Public Law Outline (PLO) meetings and pre-court proceedings.

Q2. Training on HRA/EA. Does that information exist on a publicly accessible page? Can you direct me to it? Are the identified pathways through the service easily found and understood by families and do we have feedback on that?

The Director for Children and Young People stated that they were not accessible at the moment and that this would be part of the strand of work that the directorate was planning to do in the listening to families approach, and then map that with family health to produce that material.

Committee: we have to be aware of the increased sensitivity emotions that people have and for people to be trained in how to handle the impacts of their decisions in terms of the HRA/EA should be a priority. There isn't enough awareness of it among officers and members.

The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs

Q1 Statement - We are still hearing stories of people having to re-tell their stories. One family has waited over 2 years for this support (life story work) to be organised and implemented effectively. This means the child is constantly re-traumatised having to tell her story to, so far, 9 social workers. This concern has been shared at every PEP/LAC meeting we have attended since 2020.

The Director for Children and Young People pointed out that life story work don't have resources at the moment and this was dependent on the Council's ability to improve permanent social worker levels. In the short term it would be hard to make improvements, but they were training more social workers in different parts of the service. They were committed to reducing agency workers (who were very good) and needed more permanent workers.

Services to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or a Disability (SEND)

Q1. There is a lack of confidence amongst head teachers with regard to SEND. We are concerned about capacity, lack of availability of places in specialist settings and lack of flexibility within the graduated approach where a child does not fit that system. There are huge pressures on staffing at all levels within the team which means that excellent staff are overloaded and we will lose them

There is only one social inclusion officer for the whole of Herefordshire - as you reconsider the SEND strategy for Herefordshire - can you tell us how can this deficit be addressed?

The Director for Children and Young People explained that he would bring the committee a detailed progress report on this at the next scrutiny committee. On the back of the peer review we have challenged and worked with our partners in health agencies to put more capacity in. Too many children have been waiting too long and starting school without an

assessment. Extra capacity has been put into the SEND team over the last couple of months and we are listening to head teachers.

At the end of the consideration of this matter, the committee resolved that the following recommendations be made to Cabinet for inclusion in the Children's Services Improvement Plan Action Plan:

1: That trauma awareness training for all relevant persons including council staff and members be included in the Children Services Improvement Action Plan and that this be signposted to the relevant staff at the appropriate times.

2: That the targeted action to develop and launch a Family Group Conference model be targeted for implementation by April 2023, rather than "asap thereafter" as currently stated.

3: That families are properly advised on the right information (links will be provided to the Family Rights Group website and other resources) and advice and support on Public Law Outline (PLO) meetings and pre-court proceedings.

The committee also resolved:

That HRA/EA training be provided to all relevant council staff (including the Legal Team as promised to be financed in the first tranche of the transformation budget) and members as a priority and at pace, and

That the committee share with cabinet some responses from a Primary School teacher on the new Improvement Plan, as submitted by one of the committee's co-opted members.

122. HEREFORDSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (HSCP) ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

Due to time constraints and technical difficulties in communicating with the Independent Scrutineer, the Committee took the decision to defer the item until the next meeting. The Committee agreed to send the Independent Scrutineer the questions it had drawn up. The responses to the Committee's questions from the Independent Scrutineer would be returned to the Committee as a report for the next meeting.

123. PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received the report as set out on pages 125-134 of the agenda, which provided a brief summary update on issues previously considered.

It was resolved that:

- (i) The progress report on scrutiny information requests, scrutiny reports and recommendations and other matters raised by the committee be noted; and**

- (ii) Those information requests where a response has been received be agreed as completed, and any other outstanding items be requested for the next meeting.**

124. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee unanimously approved the work programme schedule contained the in the agenda.

125. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 14 February 2023, Plough Lane, 10:00am

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chairperson

RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 13 DECEMBER 2022 (Minute Item 118).

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

From: Hanna Currie

Q: Please can the Committee look at and report the range rather than the average of allocated social worker numbers broken down to show the timescale of involvement via a range and if possible to include the number of agency staff compared to permanent staff allocated per item in the range, to see how the reliance on agency staff effects the relationship with children and families?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People: appreciated the question, but explained it was for the Committee to answer.

Chair: Committee would seek out the requested information.

ACTION:

- a) **The Committee to request, look at and report the range rather than the average of allocated social worker numbers broken down to show the timescale of involvement, via a range and if possible to include the number of agency staff compared to permanent staff allocated per item in the range.**
- b) **The Committee to request clarification from the directorate on how the reliance on agency staff impacts the relationship with children and families.**

From: Hanna Currie (on behalf of Teresa Fenner)

Q: I would like to hear if other foster carers past and present can give their points of view and be consulted on what should be improved. For us it would be that the promises of support and respite be given and that reports are truthful and accurate. No point in recruitment if the service continues to make excuses for bad practices. As for early help, ask the parents what would benefit them and their families and stop haranguing them for asking for help.

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People stated there was a lot of working going on with the current foster carers and added if there were any previous foster carers that would like to speak with him, he'd be happy for them to speak with either Robina Khan (Head of Service Fostering and Placements) or himself. There was a big piece of work going on at the moment to review support in place for foster carers and the Director agreed entirely that foster carers were a valuable resource and that he wanted to recruit and support more foster carers going forward. The Director said he had recently met two former foster carers and was happy to meet others.

The Director for Children and Young People explained that the provision of early help services wasn't primarily the responsibility of children and social care services and that it

should be the responsibility of a wide range of agencies. Recent activity through the world cafes and Talk Community had aimed to develop the range of early help services that were in place for families, with the intention to extend that range and create more opportunities for families to seek that help and support directly or online, rather than children's services. The early help helpline would be opening again in January 2023. He'd had a lot of feedback from families about how this had been done and were told they appreciated the early help helpline.

Cllr J Hewitt enquired whether the impediment to close it was resource?

The Director for Children and Young People explained it was a change in process at the time, the early help resource was still in the MASH, but the helpline was stopped because of a challenge from a previous Ofsted visit. They had to get the threshold right before bringing it back. It had been a reaction to a feedback process. Clarity was provided on early help and the range of services it provided.

From: Chair (on behalf of Rachel Gallagher)

Q: How is being separated from a sibling ever in the best interest of any child? Put yourself in our shoes, would you support your own children being separated? Of the 10 placements orders made in 2021, how many were made with the consent of the parents and have all the placement orders made in 2021/22 so far been made with the consent of the parents?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People explained that placements orders were made by the courts.

From: Chair (on behalf of Fiona Reid)

Q: The response to the original question mentioned views and opinions of families expressed at recent general meetings, however I know of only one meeting, which was held on 20 October 2022, which was organised by the support group for birth families called a common bond - some councillors attended but I understand no officers were present, although at least two were invited. HCB could have been invited to collaborate on a draft improvement plan and could collaborate in future. Birth parents and children are the main service users of children's services, I hope the forum for families will mainly be represented by them, there should be representatives from parents whose children are or were involved in different ways, eg looked after children. I hope you will listen, address feedback and take 'appropriate action' and 'collaborate' with families at pace. When will the first meeting of the forum actually happen?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People agreed entirely with Ms. Reid, that there was a need to listen to families more going forward. Hopefully the draft proposal for listening to families will be available in January. Once we've had feedback on what we are proposing we'll get that group of organisations and representatives together as early as possible, certainly before Easter and hopefully by the end of February.

From: David Barratt

Q: There seems to be have hard work over the last three months to compose a plan to demonstrate change has been delivered at pace. As a parent I feel little has changed in

practice. If changes have been made as suggested by the Directorate, why, as a family, do we feel threatened by social workers and live in fear of the removal of our children? Why in your role of corporate parent do you feel it is in anyone's, let alone a minor's, best interests not to leave a hospital ward for fresh air or to visit a hospital chapel? Hospital staff were content for my daughter to get fresh air, however your frontline staff and even the CEO of Herefordshire council were not. This went against my child's basic human rights and my rights as a legal guardian. I have recently been told verbally that fostering arrangements against me and my family have been stopped, but please advise how many families have been consulted to see if any of the measures put in in the last three months have been recognised by them? If no such consultation has taken place, would you agree that it is unreasonable to suggest that changes made are effective for the families?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People explained that he was sorry that that had been Mr Barratt's experience, but he couldn't discuss individual family circumstances in a public meeting. He was, however, happy to meet Mr Barratt for a conversation about his experience. In terms of consultation, one of the things acknowledged in the process was the importance of engaging and consulting with families, which is why they're working on the listening to families approach (as mentioned elsewhere in the meeting). Methods of measurement they wanted to be used were not only what was reported in terms of performance, but also checking quality assurance audits and feedback, compliments, complaints and engagement activities from families. There hasn't been enough of this and there needed to be more.

From: Maggie Steel

Q: Parents do not believe that the external examiner is looking at any other cases and I'd just like to hear whether we are wrong? I mean actively looking.

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People explained he was not able to answer that question, as he did not know the status that the examiner had reached with individual cases. The director said he would take this question back and ask.

From: Melissa Portman-Lewis

Q: In my personal experience SEND children and young people are still poorly understood. Parents of SEND children are still missing out on vital education and their basic needs remain unmet. When I have raised the alarm many times through many mediums, the pattern is still delay, denial of need. How do you intend to achieve and measure cultural change in a timely manner and with a timescale?

Response:

The Director for Children and Young People was sorry that had been Ms. Portman-Lewis's experience. There was significant work going on, which included parent carer voice** and it was one of the key partners in developing an SEND strategy, which brings together key strategic groups and partners within health, education and care. The feedback from the peer review commissioned in October reflects some of the changes related to the SEND green

paper. It was a huge piece of work, but the Director said he would be happy to provide a full update on the SEND work stream.

****COMMENT FROM PARENT CARER VOICE**

A representative of the Common Bond at the meeting asked for a communication from Parent Carer Voice be noted as follows:

“Parent Carer Voice have no idea or recollection of what the DCS is saying and have not agreed to it”. Confirmed by Debbie Hobbs, Manager of Parent Carer Voice.

Parent Carer Voice requested that it was not mentioned again unless it had given consent and had agreed to what the DCS was saying.