



## Agenda

### Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Tuesday 28 February 2023**

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Time: **2.30 pm**

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Place: **Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

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Notes: Please note the time, date and venue of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

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If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format, please call Simon Cann, Democratic Services Officer on 01432 260667 or e-mail [simon.cann@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:simon.cann@herefordshire.gov.uk) in advance of the meeting.

## Agenda for the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

### Membership

**Chairperson**            **Councillor Phillip Howells**  
**Vice-**                    **Councillor Jennie Hewitt**  
**chairperson**

**Councillor Graham Andrews**  
**Councillor Toni Fagan**  
**Councillor Helen l'Anson**  
**Councillor Mike Jones**  
**Councillor John Stone**

Wiktor Daron

Representative of the Archdiocese of  
Cardiff

Andy James

Parent governor representative for the  
special school sector

Sam Pratley

Representative of the Diocese of Hereford

Fiona Reid

Representative of Families

## Agenda

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive apologies for absence.

### 2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

To receive details of members nominated to attend the meeting in place of a member of the committee.

### 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of interests in respect of Schedule 1, Schedule 2 or Other Interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.

### 4. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2022.

#### HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS

The deadline for the submission of questions for this meeting is 9:30am on Thursday 23 February 2023.

Questions must be submitted to [councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk). Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted.

Accepted questions and the responses will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved)

### 5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

To receive any written questions from members of the public.

### 6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

To receive any written questions from members of the council.

### 7. DEVELOPING SEND SERVICES - PROGRESS REPORT

To provide an update on progress and impact of activity undertaken within and across the multi-agency partnership in response to the recommendations made following the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer review carried out in October 2022.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the activity and progress thus far in responding to the recommendations of the Peer Review conducted in October 2022; and

Pages

11 - 26

27 - 52

- b) The committee indicate any specific areas of practice, performance, or development that it would like to consider in the future work plan.

**8. SEND PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK**

53 - 60

To share the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer review of services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) in Herefordshire carried out in October 2022.

**Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) **The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee receive this report, and alongside a separate report on the activity commenced since the peer review indicate any areas of practice or performance that it would like to look at further in the year ahead.**

**9. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2021/2022**

61 - 82

The purpose of this report is to present the committee with the annual Independent Reviewing Officer report (2021/22).

**Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) the contents of this report are noted by the scrutiny committee, and The committee offer any further constructive challenge, define any further action or recommendations to inform and support the Independent Reviewing Officers

**10. CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN TRANSFORMATION FUNDING**

83 - 88

To review the use of £11.49m from the Financial Resilience Reserve which was made available to support resourcing the transformation stage of children's services.

**Recommendation**

**That:**

- a) **That the contents of this report are noted by the Children and Young People scrutiny committee**

**11. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN – IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UPDATE**

89 - 148

The purpose of this report is to present an update to the committee in respect of the progress and implementation of the Children's Improvement Plan.

**Recommendation(s)**

That:

- a) That the contents of this report are noted by the Children and Young People scrutiny committee

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

An update on responses to questions put to the Independent Scrutineer in relation to the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021-22

**13. OFSTED UPDATE**

An update in relation to the forthcoming Ofsted paper.

**14. PROGRESS REPORT**

This report provides a brief summary update on issues previously considered by the committee.

149 - 150

**15. WORK PROGRAMME**

To consider the work programme for the committee.

151 - 158

**16. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

TBC



## The public's rights to information and attendance at meetings

In view of the continued prevalence of Covid, we have introduced changes to our usual procedures for accessing public meetings. These will help to keep our councillors, staff and members of the public safe.

Please take time to read the latest guidance on the council website by following the link at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/meetings) and support us in promoting a safe environment for everyone. If you have any queries please contact the governance support team on 01432 261699 or at [governancesupportteam@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:governancesupportteam@herefordshire.gov.uk)

We will review and update this guidance in line with Government advice and restrictions.

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- Inspect minutes of the council and all committees and sub-committees and written statements of decisions taken by the cabinet or individual cabinet members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting (a list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report). A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
- Access to a public register stating the names, addresses and wards of all councillors with details of the membership of cabinet and of all committees and sub-committees. Information about councillors is available at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/councillors)
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title. The council's constitution is available at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution)
- Access to this summary of your rights as members of the public to attend meetings of the council, cabinet, committees and sub-committees and to inspect documents.

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## **Public transport links**

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The location of the office and details of city bus services can be viewed at:  
[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1597/hereford-city-bus-map-local-services-](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1597/hereford-city-bus-map-local-services-)



## **The seven principles of public life**

### **(Nolan Principles)**

#### **1. Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

#### **2. Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

#### **3. Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

#### **4. Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

#### **5. Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

#### **6. Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

#### **7. Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.



**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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.



# Title of report: Developing SEND services - progress report

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 14 February 2023**

**Report by: Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning, Corporate Director - Children & Young People, Project Lead**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To provide an update on progress and impact of activity undertaken within and across the multi-agency partnership in response to the recommendations made following the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer review carried out in October 2022.

## **Recommendation(s)**

That:

- a) **The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the activity and progress thus far in responding to the recommendations of the Peer Review conducted in October 2022; and**
- b) **The committee indicate any specific areas of practice, performance, or development that it would like to consider in the future work plan.**

## **Alternative options**

1. There are no alternatives to the recommendations.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Liz Farr, Darryl Freeman, Bart Popelier Tel: 01432 260897, , Tel: 01432 261772 email:  
liz.farr@herefordshire.gov.uk, darryl.freeman@herefordshire.gov.uk, Bart.Popelier@herefordshire.gov.uk

## Key considerations

2. The Local Government Association (LGA) were commissioned by the Corporate Director for Children and Young People to undertake a peer review of local services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or a Disability (SEND) that was conducted over the 3 – 6 October 2022. The key findings of the review are reported separately.
3. Following the peer review we have moved openly and swiftly to acknowledge the key areas for improvement and taken immediate action to bring together key partners (including Parent Carer Voice) to agree the short and medium term priorities and actions.
4. The SEND Partnership group meets approximately every six weeks. Since the LGA review, the group have used time wisely to take stock and reevaluate improvement priorities. A self-evaluation document, SEND strategy and SEND action plan are in place and moving towards final approval.
5. We have strengthened governance arrangements by establishing a SEND strategic board. This group is independently chaired by Deborah Glassbrook, our lead SEND improvement advisor. The group have met once, agreeing terms of reference and reviewing the strategy and self-evaluation documents. The strategy board plan to meet monthly.
6. Children and young people of Herefordshire, who are accepted for assessment for an education, health and care (EHC) plan, should receive their final plan within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks. Nationally, in 2021, 59.9% of new EHC plans were issued within 20 weeks. This was an increase when compared to 2020 but lower than the 60.4% issued in 2019. In Herefordshire, this year we are completing approximately 71% of new EHC plans within statutory deadlines, so are performing above the rate seen nationally. The final issue of plans in Herefordshire has also accelerated, increasing from 67% in the summer months when the service was impeded by staff absence.
7. Children and young people who are transferring schools should have their EHC plan review in time for admissions deadlines. Last year, Herefordshire missed these important deadlines for many families. This aspect has improved significantly and we are on track to ensure that the vast majority of children have their plan reviewed and are therefore more likely to secure a place in their chosen school.
8. Parents and carers have in the past told us that the local offer pages are difficult to navigate. A focus group that includes parent and carers, school representatives, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS), health and council colleagues meet regularly. We are in the process of migrating and updating content so that it sits within one place, namely the Herefordshire Council pages. Families tell us that this will make things easier to find when they need to. At the same time, we are reviewing and updating content to reflect the changes that are taking place.
9. Our self-evaluation document is in draft. It is aligned well to the recommendations of the LGA peer review and those of the current Ofsted Local Authority SEND framework (published in January 2023). We have identified core key priorities that underpin our action plan including making sure that we agree a plan to reduce the wait times for children and their families to access community paediatrician and therapy services.
10. The draft SEND strategy is written to, and for, children and young people with SEND in Herefordshire. It strongly reflects what children and young people have told us needs to improve. The strategy is currently out for comment.

11. We have welcomed support from external partners. The Service Director is meeting fortnightly with LGA SEND improvement partner. In these day-long sessions, we work alongside a variety of colleagues to consider agreed improvement actions. This allows the LGA to provide feedback aimed to further strengthen our work. Recent areas of consideration have included: the strengthening of our quality assurance process and audit work; the development of an engagement and participation strategy; and, listening to feedback from our Parent Carer Voice representatives. The Service Director also meets on a fortnightly basis to update and discuss progress with our SEND improvement lead from the Department for Education. Both the LGA and DFE have provided input into the development of our SEND strategy, self-evaluation and action plan.

## **Community impact**

12. The activity to develop and improve our SEND services will have a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
13. Keeping children safe and responding to their assessed needs are among the most important things this council does and the details in this report support whatever action is required to ensure children and families receive the services they deserve.
14. The County Plan 2020-24 includes the ambition to 'strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together', specifically the Council aims to:
  - Ensure all children are healthy, safe and inspired to achieve;
  - Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices; and
  - Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people.

## **Environmental Impact**

15. Whilst this activity will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's environmental policy

## **Equality duty**

16. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

17. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Whilst this is an update on the work of the partnership and in itself has minimal equalities impacts, consideration will be made in the future where changes to services are being considered.

**Resource implications**

18. Currently there are none that cannot be managed within existing budgets.

**Legal implications**

19. There are no explicit legal implications in respect of this report.

**Risk management**

20. There are no direct risks associated with this report.

**Consultees**

21. None.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Draft SEND Strategy (currently circulated for comment)

**Background papers**

None identified.

**Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:**

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Sarah Buffrey, Democratic Services Officer	Date 03/02/2023
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Communications	Luenne featherstone	Date 02/02/2023
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 03/02/2023
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by

Darryl Freeman

Date 02/02/2023





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# Herefordshire Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy 2023-26

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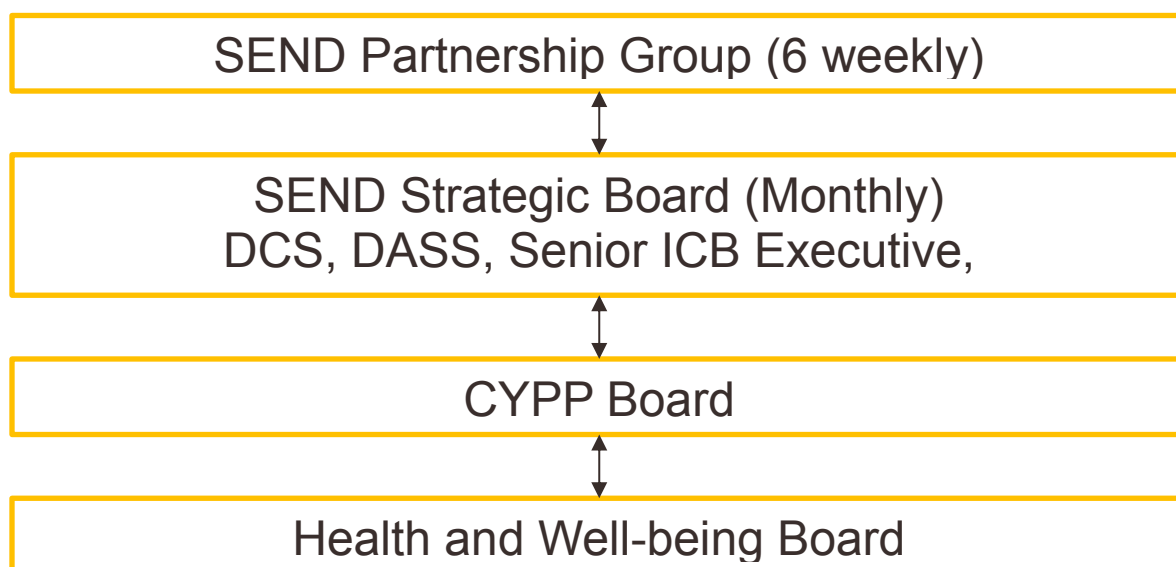
# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 We, the Herefordshire SEND Partnership, are proud to present our new strategy for you. When we refer to you in this document, we mean children and young people aged 0-25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Herefordshire. It tells you where we want to be, what is happening now, and how we will get to where we want to be.
- 1.2 In Herefordshire we have the highest aspirations for all of you. We are committed to working in partnership to meet the Children and Families Act's requirements in an ambitious, inclusive and realistic in a challenging financial context. Our vision is to ensure that: 'All children and young people in Herefordshire feel safe, loved, and valued, and grow up with the confidence and skills to be the best they can be.'
- 1.3 When we refer to 'we' in this strategy document, we mean the Herefordshire SEND Partnership<sup>1</sup>. At the heart of our partnership is a group of people who are working to make things better for you in Herefordshire. They also want to make things better for you and your family. We recognise, and our self-evaluation confirms, that while there are many examples of good practice, there is work to be done to reach the aspirations we have for all of you.
- 1.4 In 2022, we conducted an internal review of our SEND services with the Local Government Association (LGA). This strategy has been developed alongside what they told us. Progress has been made towards addressing the issues highlighted by the review and some of this work is detailed in Section 6.
- 1.5 When Ofsted and CQC (Care Quality Commission) inspected Herefordshire SEND services in 2016, they highlighted some aspects that need improvement. For example, they found that some of you had to wait too long for some community therapies. The LGA also found that some of you have been waiting for up to a year to be seen by the speech and language therapy services. This means that sometimes your needs are not assessed promptly enough, and you do not receive the timely support that you need. Although many individuals, organisations and providers do their best, your needs are sometimes identified later than we would want. Both Ofsted and the LGA made other recommendations. The partnership are working hard to improve, and more detailed priorities are included in our delivery plan. This document sets out how we will continue to improve your experiences into the future.
- 1.6 Herefordshire Council's Children's Services was found to be inadequate following a ILACs Ofsted inspection in July 2022 and a Children's Commissioner was appointed. The way that we meet your needs is included as part of the Children's Commissioner's areas for consideration. As a result, our improvement plan incorporates a priority (no.10) linked to the development of services for you.
- 1.7 This strategy has been developed by the Herefordshire SEND Partnership using a wide variety of shared information and experience. As part of this, we must also look at what we have to do because the law says we have to. We also make sure that we work collaboratively and are held to account.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see appendix 1 for who belongs to our partnership

## SEND Governance and Accountability



1.8 We have particularly listened to you and your families. What you have told us is explained in section 2 of this document.

1.9 We have also considered:

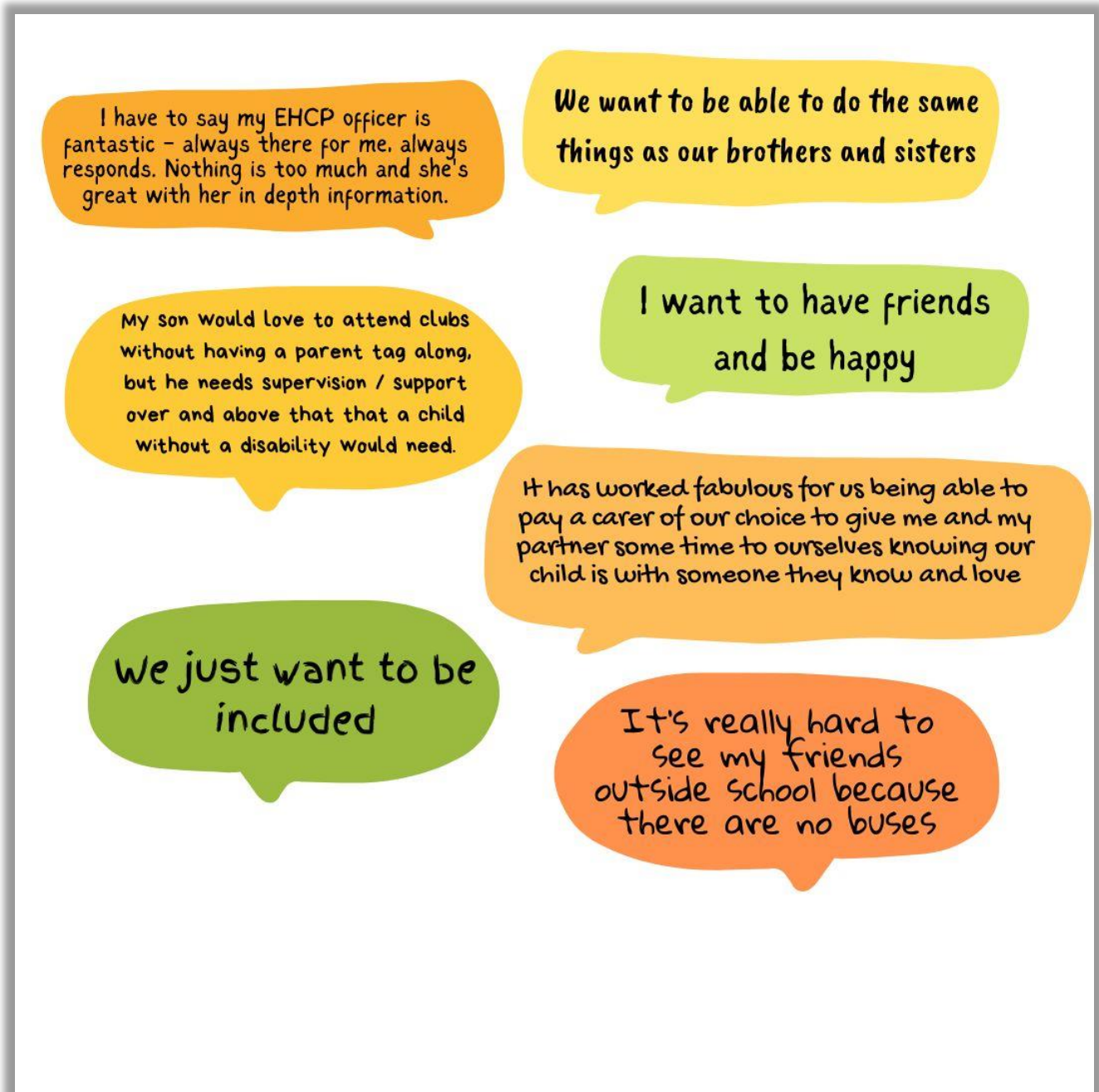
- The experience and knowledge of practitioners working with you;
- Information from the children and young people's section of Understanding Herefordshire. This is our [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#). This work gathers information about what it is like to be you in Herefordshire;
- Knowing what did and did not work from our previous plans to improve things after our last [SEND inspection in 2016](#);
- Up-to-date information on how well our services for education, health and care are doing;
- Reviews of ourselves using audit tools from Council for Disabled Children and Contact as well as using the Ofsted/CQC inspection framework;
- Other people's views about the services in Herefordshire such as Local Councillors on the Herefordshire Council Scrutiny Committee and the Local Government Association;
- New requirements e.g. NHS 10-year plan and the SEND Green Paper<sup>2</sup>; and,
- Our learning from working closely with similar local areas.

<sup>2</sup> The green paper sets out our proposals for a system that offers children and young people the opportunity to thrive, with access to the right support, in the right place, and at the right time, so they can fulfil their potential and lead happy, healthy and productive adult lives.



## 2. What You Have Told Us

2.1 Our strategy has been developed by the Herefordshire SEND Partnership using a wide variety of shared information and people's experiences. We have particularly listened to what you told us.



2.2 We have also considered:

- The things that parents and carers tell us are going well and those that are not going well. Parent Carer Voice Herefordshire, SENDIASS and Healthwatch all give us feedback. This includes an [annual co-produced parent/carers survey](#).

The main things that your parents and carers want are:

- to only have to tell their story once;

- to feel that their views on their child's needs are listened to as much as the views of 'experts'; and,
- that there are no 'blockers' for parents and carers in SEND processes, e.g. in the EHC plan process.

2.3 We have used all of this information to decide on our priorities for action. These are the main areas we want to improve between 2023 and 2026. We want to make sure that:

- your needs are identified and assessed in a timely and effective way;
- you and your family's voices are heard, and this makes a difference;
- you receive the right help at the right time;
- you are well prepared for your next steps in life; and,
- you feel valued, visible, and included.

2.4 We are committed to working in co-production with families in all areas of our work. Herefordshire's [Co-Production Charter](#), was created in partnership with Parent Carer Voice Herefordshire, Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Integrated Care System (ICS), Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Trust, Wye Valley NHS Trust and SENDIASS<sup>3</sup> and is available for download on the Herefordshire Local Offer. Our Charter is about the way we will all work together to create a culture where we will all:

- Be Open and Honest
- Actively Listen
- Value the Lived Experience
- Do What Matters
- Be Accountable and Responsive
- Work Together
- Be Respectful

2.5 You have told us that you want the same opportunities and experiences in life that other children and young people have. We want that too. One of our key pieces of work is to gather your views more often than we have done in the past and listen to what you are telling us. That is why we have created a new Herefordshire Engagement and Participation Strategy which sets out how we will work with all of you to prioritise your involvement in making decisions that impact your lives and the services you receive.

2.6 Our SEND Engagement and Market Development Officer is responsible for co-production with you and your family. Our Engagement Officer's priorities include developing:

- the voice of your parents and carers in shaping and co-producing our services ;
- capturing and listening to your views and opinions in our decision-making;

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<sup>3</sup> SENDIASS is the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service covering Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

- our joint commissioning priorities; and,
- Our Local Offer<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> A local offer gives you and your family information to help you find the right help and support in your area.

## 3. Our Vision

3.1 Our overarching vision is for all of you to have:

**‘...a great start in life and grow up healthy, happy and safe within supportive family environments.’**

[Herefordshire Children and Young People’s Partnership Plan](#)

3.2 This strategy will support the inclusion of all children and young people in Herefordshire. Schools and education settings are key partners in delivering this through a graduated approach<sup>5</sup>.

3.3 In order to deliver our vision and get to where you want us to be, we will make sure that:

- your needs are identified and assessed in a timely and effective way;
- you and your family’s voices are heard, and this makes a difference;
- you receive the right help at the right time;
- you are well prepared for your next steps in life; and,
- you feel valued, visible and included.

3.4 To make this strategy come to life, it needs the whole community to be part of making it happen. We would like you and your families to join us on this journey. This is why we are sharing this document with as many people as possible and listening to what they have to tell us.

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<sup>5</sup> Schools and colleges use as ‘assess, plan, do, review’ process to support you, also known as the graduated approach.



## 4. The Legislative Context

### 4.1 Children and Families Act 2014 (CFA)

The Children and Families Act (2014) included changes to the way in which we work with you. Some of the key aims of the Act are to help you achieve well, find jobs; lead happy lives and have choice over your support.

The CFA introduced Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans to replace statements of SEN. It said that help should be offered as early in your life as possible, with your parents or carers fully involved in any decisions about your support.

This means that we must:

- work in partnership with families
- ensure you are able to access the right support and provision to meet your needs
- adopt an integrated approach to meeting your needs
- meet the needs of those of you with the most complex needs through a single plan known as an Education, Health and Care Plan
- involve you and your parents or carers in decision making
- involve you and your parents or carers in shaping our services.
- publish a local offer which details the support, services and provision available within Herefordshire
- jointly plan and commission services that could be helpful to you
- provide information, advice and support to you and your family, young people and their parents/carers in line with the requirements of the Act and Code of Practice<sup>6</sup>.

4.2 **The Equality Act 2010** and Part 3 of the **Children and Families Act 2014** interact in a number of important ways. They share a common focus on removing barriers to learning.

### 4.3 Care Act 2014

The Care Act<sup>7</sup> puts together all the previous pieces of law about social care for people over the age of 18. Under the Care Act, local authorities have a duty to make sure that: people who live in their area receive services that stop their care needs from becoming more serious; can get the information they need to make good decisions; and, have high quality, services to choose from.

### 4.4 NHS Long-Term Plan

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<sup>6</sup> The [SEND Code of Practice](#) provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures for children and young people with special educational needs and/ or disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> More information about The Care Act: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-2014-part-1-factsheets/care-act-factsheets>

In 2019, the National Health Service published its new [plan](#) for the next ten years. The plan highlights that the NHS will do more so that all people with a learning disability, autism, or both can live happier, healthier, longer lives.

Herefordshire and Worcestershire has an Integrated Care System (ICS) that covers both health and social care.

4.5 At the time of writing, the SEND green paper [SEND Review - right support, right place, right time](#) was published. It is anticipated that this will introduce changes as it comes into legislation.

### **Relevant legislation**

- Children and Families Act 2014
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2014
- Education Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- Care Act 2014 Children Act 1989/ 2004
- Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Breaks for carers of disabled children regulations 2011

## **5. The Local Context**

5.1. In Herefordshire we have seen an increase in the number of school-aged children and young people identified with SEND. Over the past two years there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children who have an Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan.

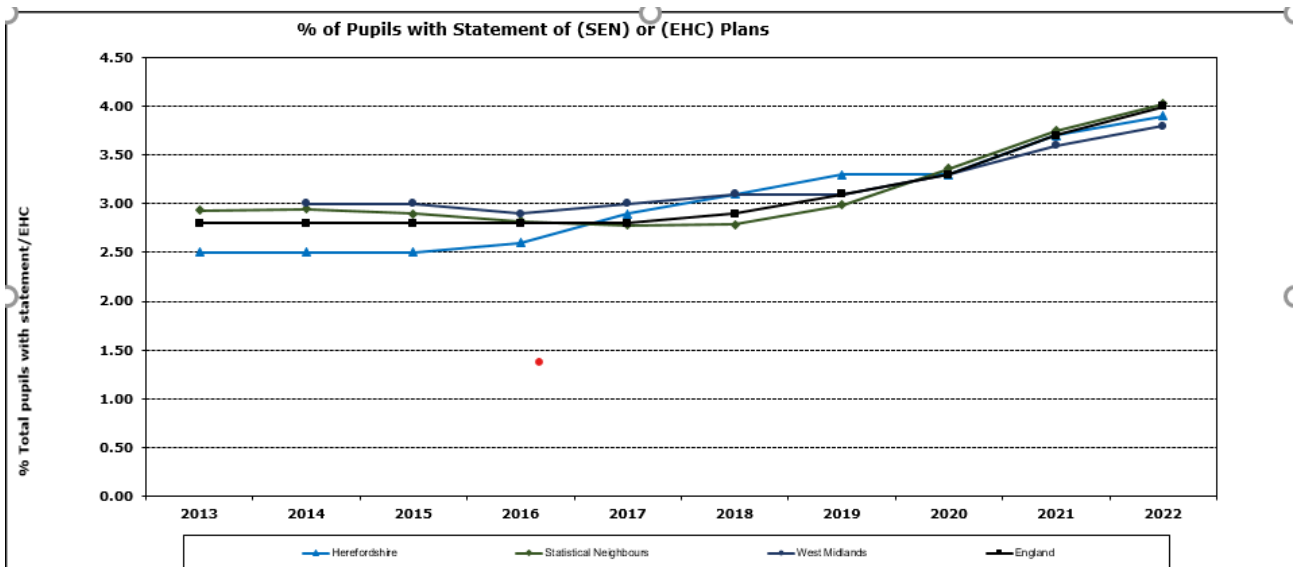
5.2 The table below shows that there are currently just under 4.427 of you who attend one of our schools in Herefordshire.

School Aged Children and Young People with SEND in Herefordshire						
	Children on roll in maintained schools in Herefordshire <sup>1</sup>	Children on roll in maintained schools in Herefordshire with SEND <sup>2</sup>	Children on roll in maintained schools in Herefordshire receiving SEND Support <sup>2</sup>	Children on roll in maintained schools in England receiving SEND Support <sup>2</sup>	Children on roll in maintained schools in Herefordshire with an EHC Plan <sup>2</sup>	Children on roll in maintained schools in England with an EHC Plan <sup>2</sup>
2022/2023*	23,666	4,427	3,526		901	
		18.7%	14.9%		3.8%	
2021/2022	23,585	4,451	3,543		908	
		18.9%	15.0%	12.4%	3.9%	3.9%
2020/2021	23,574	4,255	3,418		837	
		18.1%	14.5%	12.0%	3.6%	3.6%

- Autumn 2022 school census
- 1. Schools, pupils and their characteristics: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>
- 2. Special Educational Needs in England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2022> excludes independent and non-maintained special schools

5.3. If you have an EHC plan in Herefordshire, you are more likely to be educated in a mainstream school than would be expected nationally. Some of you attend one of our special schools, and a significant proportion of you attend an ‘out of county’ special schools. Herefordshire currently has three special schools in the 2-16 age range catering for Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple difficulties (PMLD) and one for social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. We have also recently opened a college for 16-19 year olds for SLD/PMLD and autism. In addition, the county has two resourced provision bases for autism in mainstream schools (one primary and one secondary). Our SEND Capital Investment Strategy highlights that we need increase our provision for pupils with autism and learning difficulties.

5.4 Over the last two years, the increase in the proportion of EHC plans issued in Herefordshire mirrors that seen nationally (3.9% compared to 4% nationally). There has been a steep increase.



5.5 We are seeing an increasing proportion of plans issued for pre-school children. Our data tells us there is an increasing demand on services and support networks within Early Years, such as Portage (tailored support for pre-school children with SEND).

## 6. Progress and Forward Plans

6.1 The development of this strategy has taken place at a time of great change. Resource and effort have been focused on the delivery of the actions identified this academic year, in part as a result of the LGA review. It has also been a time of change because a new Service Director for Education, Learning and Skills took up post in September 2022. Additionally, the local authority has been working with greater intensity alongside the Children's Commissioner and the DFE Improvement Advisor as a result of the ILACs inspection.

6.2 Much of what we have already done has been co-produced. Details of how parent carer voice has influenced services can be found in the ['You Said, We Did' report](#).

6.3 The sections under the headings '*What else do you want us to change?*' for each outcome shown below will be taken forward with a detailed annual action plan. We know that we have a lot of things to improve and this will take several years. By 2026, we know that we will have made a difference.

6.4 To check on the difference we are making, we have identified ways in which we will measure our impact. We have co-produced a SEND data dashboard that helps us all keep track of our progress towards our ambition.

6.5 Immediately following the LGA review we set about making sustainable change. So far, we have:

- Made plans to prioritise receiving your views by developing our participation and engagement strategy. This is so we make sure we listen and respond to what you are telling us. We have timetabled a variety of regular activities to regularly engage with you and gather your views.
- We have committed to publishing regular newsletters with updates on our improvement work. We have started to use social media to advertise events and to share information.
- We have refined and strengthened our quality assurance process for EHC plans so to improve the quality and consistency of plans across the county. We have completed some audits already this year so we can learn how to improve our work further.
- We have made sure that if you are in a transition year, your EHC plan annual review takes place on time so that you are able to secure the right next step for you.
- We have increased the proportion of new EHC plans that are issued on time. We remain above the rates seen nationally. We are proud of this.
- We are working more closely with our schools to expand our specialist intervention and support. The number of places available should increase in September 2023.
- We have welcomed support to help us move improvement at pace. For example, we are working with our partners in Bedford to look at how we can develop inclusive practice within our schools.
- We have strengthened our IT systems and are developing a multi-disciplinary dashboard. This will help those who hold us to account ask the right questions at the right time.

6.6 We have also made progress against our **core aims** but we want to do even better for you. We have outlined how we will improve and how we will measure how well we are doing.

## **Outcome 1. Your needs are identified and assessed in a timely and effective way**

### **What we have done so far:**

- ✓ Restructured the family conversation form and delivered training to SENCOs on how to engage families with this part of the EHC plan process
- ✓ SENCOs, parent carers and Educational Psychology team worked together to co-produce a new EHC Plan format
- ✓ Changed process for the children with disabilities social care team to make an assessment for a short break
- ✓ Made an agreement between the council and health partners making it easier to share appropriate information to meet our legal duties
- ✓ Put in place a social care screening process so that all EHC referrals have an active early help assessment as part of the EHC assessment

### **What else are we going to change:**

- ✓ Reduce portage waiting times by expanding our team so that you and your family receive home-based, early intervention and support.
- ✓ Work together so that we make sure your EHC plan is issued on time. We will make sure that professionals who contribute advice to your EHC plan submit it on time.
- ✓ Co-produce clear pathways for autism and ADHD
- ✓ Reduce waiting times for children's therapies and community paediatrics so that it is easier to access a service when you need it.
- ✓ Extend speech and language therapy so that this service is available to you if you attend a secondary school.

### **We will measure how well we are doing by:**

- ✓ EHCP issue timeliness
- ✓ We will reduce waiting times for children's therapies to within national expectations (18 weeks) by continuing to work with teams in the health service as part of the 'balanced approach'
- ✓ We will reduce portage waiting times (by expanding our team) and ensure that all children and families receive home-based, early intervention and support.
- ✓ Proportion of EHC Plans written within the national timescales
- ✓ (For each health service) the proportion of CYP seen within 18 weeks
- ✓ Reduce waiting lists for portage services

## **Outcome 2: You and your family's voices are heard and this makes a difference**

### **What we have done so far:**

- ✓ Met regularly to review the success of co-production in Herefordshire based on:-
  - Do we welcome and show care?
  - Do we value and include everyone?
  - Do we communicate respectfully?
  - How well do we work in partnership?
- ✓ Co-produced the third annual parent carer survey and received more than 100 responses
- ✓ Co-produced the most recent SEND Summits where parent carers and professionals meet as equal partners
- ✓ Added to the membership of the SEND Partnership Group to make it more inclusive and reflective of your lived experience

### **What else are we going to change:**

- ✓ Gather your views, and those of your family in a wide range of ways on matters that are important to you. We will find different ways to listen to the voices of all children and young people so we can hear what you have to say; we will make sure there are chances for you to be involved in the way you want to be. About the things that matter to you and at a time and place that works for you.
- ✓ We will co-produce a participation and engagement strategy that tells everyone what we will be doing and when. This is so you, and your parent carers, can be involved as much, or as little, as you want to. Helping us plan what we need to do and seeing if this has made a difference.
- ✓ Grow our partnership work with you and your family so that feel that your views are listened to as much as the views of 'experts'
- ✓ We will make sure that all the work we do, the plans we make and the services we review includes you and your parent carers from the start.
- ✓ Make sure you only have to tell your story once.

### **We will measure how well we are doing by:**

- ✓ Proportion of CYP with SEND who report that the people who look after them care about their opinion
- ✓ Proportion of EHC plans that were reviewed by the child and their parent/carer, or the young person
- ✓ Proportion of CYP with SEND and their families who report that they received feedback on how their views have been used

### **Outcome 3: You receive the right help at the right time**

#### **What we have done so far:**

- ✓ Changed the criteria for a service from the children with disabilities team so that it does not exclude particular types of need such as autism
- ✓ Published a SEND Capital Investment Strategy in 2021 setting out ambitious plans for improving all of the buildings used for specialist SEND work
- ✓ Beacon College was opened for students with severe learning difficulty and/or autism in September 2021 following a successful bid to the Department for Education
- ✓ The Local Offer of SEND information is steadily improving and a Facebook page was published in October 2022. You are now able to find local events, activities and services are promoted through the platform
- ✓ The continence service have introduced greater flexibility into their product offer following feedback from parent carers

#### **What else are we going to change:**

- ✓ Redesign our graduated response approach to make it easier for parents and carers to understand what a school should be offering; and easier for our schools to use
- ✓ Further improve the methods for predicting how many specialist educational places are needed so that the number and type of specialist educational places is sufficient and mitigates having to travel long distances
- ✓ Extend the content and improve the usability of the Local Offer
- ✓ Improve the EHC plan process including the timeliness of annual reviews, simplify the application process and improve the quality of plans
- ✓ Improve your access to health services and reduce waiting times including for therapies and community paediatrician appointments
- ✓ Agree what we want to do with families and how we will work together in the future to change things. We will help other people supporting you to know how to get the help you need;

#### **We will measure how well we are doing by:**

- ✓ Proportion of CYP with SEND who report that they have the support they need to cope when life feels hard
- ✓ Proportion of CYP who give a high rating to the support they have received
- ✓ Proportion CYP who report that they know where to go to get help and support about their (physical or mental) health needs or disabilities
- ✓ Proportion of parent carers who stated that they know who to contact to get the support they need for their child
- ✓ Proportion of Parent Carers who report that the professionals who care for their child safely meet their health needs (e.g. epilepsy, allergy, safely moving etc.)



## **Outcome 4: You are well prepared for your next steps in life and achieve well**

### **What we have done so far:**

- ✓ Made sure that the correct steps are taken when you are getting ready for adulthood so that you have something positive to move on to
- ✓ Organised monthly tracking meetings for professionals to make sure that all of you have a positive transition to adulthood
- ✓ Arranged a careers fair for you
- ✓ Provided independent travel training for those of you who would benefit whatever your age

### **What else you want us to do:**

- ✓ Respond promptly so that you do not feel ignored.
- ✓ Make sure your annual EHC plan annual review takes place on time and that we let you know how we will change the plan soon after the review, especially if you are about to change schools.
- ✓ Provide information so people supporting you (including in schools and colleges and your family) can start to talk to you about your future and what could be possible. We will improve the range of training and job opportunities including offering supported internships with job coaches to help you.
- ✓ Change the way in which activities are offered to young people to allow more opportunity for a social life.

### **What else are we going to change:**

- ✓ Proportion CYP with SEND who report that most of the time, they enjoy life
- ✓ Proportion of young people with SEND (18-25) in employment
- ✓ Proportion of young people with SEND (16-25) undertaking a supported internship or apprenticeship
- ✓ Proportion of CYP with SEND who are able to safely and confidently access public transport
- ✓ Proportion of children of children and young people with SEND report that they are involved in a club, group or hobby they enjoy

## **Outcome 5: For you to feel valued, visible and included**

### **What we have done so far:**

- ✓ Agreed a 'Co-production Charter' where which all of us have signed up to core values that promote a culture of working together.
- ✓ Employed a SEND Engagement and Market Development Officer to prioritise closer working relationships. We write to you regularly with our SEND newsletter so that we share what we are doing, what is support is available to you and to help you and your family know how to get involved
- ✓ Looked at school websites to make sure they are welcoming and cover all the required information
- ✓ Introduced an allowance to give a wide range of you a short break without a social work assessment
- ✓ Adapted the 'quality of life' survey designed for all children and used this to gather your views if you attend one of our special schools

### **What else you want us to do:**

- ✓ We will make sure that partnership working groups meet more regularly and always adhere to the culture of co-production which includes you and your parent and carers from the start
- ✓ We will build on the work of the Engagement Officer to improve communication across all partners and hear from you more regularly. We value what you want to tell us.
- ✓ We will develop better ways of challenging practice that is not inclusive wherever we find it
- ✓ We will increase the number of activities available to give you and your family a short break especially those with other children

### **We will measure how well we are doing by:**

- ✓ Proportion of CYP with EHC plans who said they are accessing short break activities
- ✓ Proportion of CYP with SEND who report that they feel safe and they belong in their local community
- ✓ Proportion of CYP with SEND who report that they feel safe and like they belong in their education setting

It is our intention to build on this progress. A detailed action plan will be developed as part of this strategy. The strategy will be regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate in response to changes in local needs and issues.

## 7. Appendix

A full list of people involved in the Herefordshire SEND Partnership Group can be found here. At the heart of our partnership is a group of people who are working to make things better for you in Herefordshire. They also want to make things better for your families.

The Herefordshire SEND Partnership Group includes the following roles:-

### Herefordshire Council

- Service Director for Education, Development & Skills
- Head of Additional Needs & SEND
- Head of the Virtual School
- Post 16 Senior Advisor
- SEN Team Manager
- Children with Disabilities Manager
- Senior All Ages Commissioning Officer
- Children's Commissioning
- Engagement Officer
- Public Health Officer
- Early Years SEND Manager
- Manager for SENDIASS

### Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System

- Lead Commissioner Children, Young People & Maternity
- Senior Manager for SEND
- Designated Clinical Officer

### Education

Special School Head Teacher Representative

### Wye Valley Health Trust

- General Manager - Acute and countywide services, Integrated Care Division
- Children's Community Nursing
- Consultant Community Paediatrician & Medical Adviser for A&F, Community Paediatrics
- Clinical Manager, Therapy Services
- Clinical Manager Specialist Community Services

### Youth Offending Service

### Voluntary and Community Services

- Co-chairs Parent Carer Voice Herefordshire
- Healthwatch representative
- Manager for the services at Wye Valley Trust and ... CAMHS trust
- Managers from NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire (Integrated Care System) responsible for deciding what is needed and paying for the right health services for children.
- National Autistic Society Herefordshire



# Title of report: SEND Peer Review feedback

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 14 February 2023**

**Report by: Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning, Corporate  
Director - Children & Young People**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To share the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer review of services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) in Herefordshire carried out in October 2022.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) **The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee receive this report, and alongside a separate report on the activity commenced since the peer review indicate any areas of practice or performance that would like to look at further in the year ahead.**

## **Alternative options**

1. There is no alternative to the recommendation.

## Key considerations

2. During the spring of 2022, and in the relative absence at that time of reliable partnership information and data, the Corporate Director for Children and Young People commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a peer review of services for children with special educational needs and/or a disability in Herefordshire, ahead of any specific SEND inspection (expected in 2023).
3. The peer review was carried out during the period 3-6 October 2022 and the peer review team was led by Deborah Glassbrook, an experienced former Director of Children's Services.
4. The agreed key lines of enquiry were as follows:
  - a. Are children and young people's needs identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way? As part of this we are also interested in the effectiveness of the systems (human/IT/etc.) supporting the SEN assessment and annual review functions.
  - b. Are children, young people and their families appropriately and consistently supported and enabled participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support?
  - c. Do children and young people receive the right help at the right time (including a view on whether the Herefordshire Graduated Response guidance is embedded in practice across the full age-range)?
  - d. Are children and young people well prepared for their next steps, and achieve strong outcomes? (including transitions to adulthood and support for primary to secondary school, and early years to primary transfer)
5. At the time of the peer team's visit Herefordshire Council Children's Services had been found to be inadequate following the Ofsted inspection in July 2022 and a children's commissioner had been appointed. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is included as part of the commissioner's areas for consideration.
6. The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information, in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it was facing. The team spent four days onsite during which time they:
  - a. Heard from 75 people, including children, young people, parents, lead members, chief executive, senior leadership tea, front-line practitioners and managers and partners.
  - b. Observed partnership meetings
  - c. Visited local teams
  - d. Read background documentation
  - e. Undertook visits to settings; observing, learning, and talking to professionals.
7. By its nature, a peer challenge is a snapshot in time. From the evidence gathered by the peer team it was clear though that action was required at pace from all partners to make the changes that are required to support improved outcomes for children with SEND and their families in Herefordshire.
8. The peer team found that at the time of the review there was no clear governance framework for SEND with an overarching partnership strategy or performance and quality assurance framework. This meant that the accountability for SEND and where this sits was not clear and

there was little line of sight from strategic leaders to frontline practice and the impact this has on children, young people and their families.

9. The teams main findings are outlined in paragraphs 11 – 39 of this report and the activity to progress these is to be co-ordinated by the work of the new SEND Strategy Group and monitored by the children’s Improvement Board. In order to ensure that the work is not seen in isolation from the broader children’s services transformation plan, the activity has been included in the Improvement Plan endorsed by Cabinet in December 2022.
10. The review team made four key recommendations, as follows:
  1. Produce a multi-agency strategy with short, medium and long-term priorities: There needs to be one, jointly agreed strategy involving all key stakeholders across the whole system to support children with SEND. From this a partnership scorecard should be developed with targets and impact data identified, so that all those involved can clearly see what is to be achieved, by when and what the impact has been.
  2. Establish the partnership governance and scrutiny arrangements at pace: To ensure the resources, service delivery and systems happen in a timely and coherent manner, you need to agree at a strategic level the organisations and representative individuals who will hold each other to account. Parent and carer representatives should be an integral part of the design, setting and oversight of the support arrangements for children with SEND. A strategic SEND Board would provide the necessary structure.
  3. Review the effectiveness of resources, service delivery and systems to meet the child’s needs: and potential to meet the requirements of the SEND Green Paper. With partners, identify what it is that you, as a whole system, need to deliver to support children with SEND. Identify what resources the local area has to deliver this. Identify gaps and over-laps and jointly agree how these will be addressed through a clearly articulated joint commissioning plan
  4. Develop a robust performance and quality assurance framework for the local area with an immediate focus on all children with an EHCP open to Social Care and others with particular vulnerabilities: Set clear requirements for both quantitative and qualitative data gathering across the local area Conduct internal single-agency, multi-disciplinary and independent external audit and hold people accountable to ensure quality is being maintained.

## **Main Findings:**

### **Needs identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way**

11. The peer team visited early years settings and saw evidence that staff there have provided opportunities to identify children’s needs and that they have supported the process for families to get these needs met, both within the setting and outside of it.
12. The peer team heard that the multi-disciplinary triage and assessment at the Child Development Centre was having an impact on getting the child’s needs identified at an early stage in their development. This approach has been brought in as a way of managing waiting list times.
13. From the evidence seen by the peer team, it is clear that the model of delivery and the current capacity of the community paediatricians is leading to increased waiting times for assessment. The consequence of this is that for some children they are now receiving their assessment and diagnosis only three months before they start school.

14. Referral paperwork and processes are complex and extensive.
15. There are outdated service specifications for therapy services, including physiotherapy, audiology, dietetics and speech and language. This is leading to limitations on capacity and availability and lack of clarity about the way the services are working.
16. The team reviewed a small number of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) and found limited inputs from health and from social care and challenged the partnership to introduce a robust process of challenge so that quality can be maintained and organisations held to account.
17. The annual review process for (EHCPs) was found to be not working as well as it needs to.
18. The peer team noted that there are two Graduated Response Guidance documents; one for early years – which is well used and understood – and one covering primary and secondary school age children – which was considered to be over-long and complex.

**Children and Young People and their families supported and enabled to participate in decision making**

19. The peer team saw no clear evidence of an inclusion and participation strategy and, in their view, there is a weak culture of including children, young people and their families. They did see pockets of practice but these do not constitute a cohesive approach across all those engaged in supporting children with SEND. They heard from parents and carers and their representatives that families are increasingly contributing to strategy and developments in the offer available to them. A parent carer charter has been created and representatives attend the SEND strategy group.
20. The recent appointment of an Engagement Officer was seen as a strength.
21. Families and young people are usually involved in their transition planning in preparation for adulthood. There was evidence that transition workers are helping families and young people consider their wider options and not to be constrained by historical preconceptions. The team also found that information to support preparation for adulthood across education, health and care could be improved.
22. The peer team heard from some parents that they feel misunderstood and at worst blamed for their children's behaviours.
23. The service was told that the early help and prevention offer needs to be more explicitly inclusive of SEND. Early help workers should have a greater understanding of what more targeted practical advice parents may require.

**The right help at the right time, including Herefordshire's Graduated Response**

24. The peer team saw no system-wide agreement on strategic priorities and saw this as an historical lack of ownership and oversight at the strategic leadership level across the partnership.
25. The majority of schools are Good or Outstanding in Herefordshire and the peer team recognised that 45% of children with an EHCP are in a mainstream school, which is reasonably close to the national figure of 50%. This provides a strong base from which to drive further improvements in an inclusive approach to ensuring children get the support they need in the settings that they are in and for improving attainment.



26. The pathway for hearing impaired children is strong with resources targeted at early identification, assessment and provision to meet children's needs. This was seen as an example of earlier intervention having a positive outcome.
27. The recent triaging of portage referrals had had a positive impact on waiting lists. This had been reduced to 17 and was ensuring that more parents and their children are getting the right support in a timely manner.
28. There is limited evidence of local area data sharing, analysis and application of the findings from the interrogation of data. This applies to ascertaining and monitoring impact on children, young people and their families. It also applies to identifying where improvements need to be made and to highlighting, celebrating and replicating good practice.
29. It is clear to the peer team that there are capacity issues in a number of service areas that limits what is on offer to meet the needs of children and their families and leads to increased waiting times. Other parts of the local area system do appear to have capacity and, in some cases, additional resource that is not required. The system as a whole needs to be reviewed so that collective decisions are made on what needs to be enhanced and where activities can be scaled down or stopped.
30. The peer team heard that short breaks provision is insufficient and that there is currently no over-night provision (for children with SEND) available locally.
31. From the visits undertaken, it was clear to the review team that the practitioners knew their children well and there was evidence of some good social work practice, including the Life Story book that was personalised to the child.

**Children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes**

32. There was evidence that early years managers work with their children until end of Reception. This approach helps the transition from early years into the primary setting and provides support to children and their families.
33. There was evidence that in mainstream settings and schools there is good planning and discussions for transition. This is both for children moving from year 6 to 7 and when they move to college and beyond.

**Cross-cutting issues**

34. The peer team observed learners who appeared happy and engaged at school. This is important feedback and provided evidence of the passion and commitment that was seen not just in schools but across all agencies with whom the peer team had contact. The clear message was, "I'm in the job to make people's lives better". This forms the basis from which change and improvement can be driven, and local area senior leaders said that they want to see change and improvement happen at pace for children, young people and their families.
35. The team identified health differences in terms of statutory duties that are not being met, for example children who are looked after. Similarly, Public Health professionals identified wellbeing inequalities for children and young people with SEND, in that they were significantly more likely to feel/be bullied.
36. At the time of the peer challenge there was no identified Designated Clinical Officer.

37. There are training and development efforts being undertaken in the different organisations across the SEND support system. It is now timely to bring these together so that there is a consistent and planned approach to professionals' learning and development.
38. The peer team heard on numerous occasions that the IT systems were not fit for purpose and that there are systems that do not talk to each other, so data cannot be easily shared or compared. However, there may be parts of the existing systems that are not used to their full functionality. Ahead of any considered up-grade, or systems change, the existing systems should be reviewed to ensure that existing functionality is used to its full. Fundamentally, aligning data sets and considering what that tells you about the outcomes being achieved locally would help inform understanding and strategic oversight.
39. There are too many individual organisational strategies without clear implementation plans, and too many individual plans without clear links to an accompanying strategy. There needs to be one overarching strategy for SEND, with clear lines of governance, reporting and accountability.

### **Community impact**

40. The Ofsted inspection judgement of 'Inadequate' has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
41. The County Plan 2020–2024 includes the ambition to 'strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together' and more specifically, the council aims to:
  - a) Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve;
  - b) Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices;

### **Environmental Impact**

42. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report..

### **Equality duty**

43. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

44. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine protected characteristics: Age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. In particular, the council must have due regard to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.

### Resource implications

45. There are significant revenue resource implications identified at this time for the improvement work required. There are no expected capital resource implications.

### Legal implications

46. There are no explicit legal implications in respect of this report.

### Risk management

47. The SEND Strategic Board will consider risks and opportunities and manage these through relevant partnership governance structures.

### Consultees

48. There has been no public consultation in respect of the content of this report.

### Appendices

None.

### Background papers

None.

### Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
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Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Elizabeth Freedland	Date 02/02/2023

Approved by	Darryl Freeman	Date 02/02/2023
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# Title of report: Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021/2022

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 14 February 2023**

**Report by: Dylan Harrison, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present the committee with the annual Independent Reviewing Officer report (2020/21).

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) the contents of this report are noted by the scrutiny committee, and**
- b) The committee offer any further constructive challenge, define any further action or recommendations to inform and support the Independent Reviewing Officers**

## **Alternative options**

1. Scrutiny Committee could choose not to review information contained in this report; this is not recommended as the council needs to ensure that it carries out its functions as set out in the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Handbook and the Care Planning Regulations and Guidance.

## Key considerations

2. The council must provide and allocate an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to each child in care. The responsibility of the IRO is to chair “children looked after reviews”, regular monitoring the progression of the case and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement in the quality of care planning for children in our care.
3. The roles and responsibilities of the IRO are set out in the updated [IRO Handbook](#) which links to the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations](#). This includes identifying good practice and escalate where the council is not fulfilling its duties to children in care.
4. The IRO service produces an annual report. The annual report is attached and covers the period April 2021 to March 2022 and was authored by the (then) Head of Service for Safeguarding, Professionals Standards and Principal Social Worker. The report was written prior to the most recent [Ofsted inspection](#) which took place in July 2022.
5. The importance of having a strong, independent and effective IRO service is vital within Herefordshire given the need to drive to improve the quality of social work practice and the experience of children and families receiving the Council’s children’s services.
6. To a degree the report is transactional and the impact of the Independent Reviewing Officers is not always overt in the report attached (Appendix 1). This is acknowledged by the current Head of Service for this area and work has been taking place more recently to better evidence the impact of IROs, through the introduction of a revised escalation process and tracker, and this will be incorporated into the next IRO Annual report (2022/23).
7. During 2021/22, 972 children looked after reviews were held and chaired by IROs. These reviews consist of the child (if s/he wants to attend), the IRO, the social worker, the foster carer or placement and other professionals involved with the child. During the review the IRO will consider how the care plan for the child meets the needs and whether the placement continues to be appropriate.
8. In addition to the children looked after reviews, IROs recorded 3,531 IRO oversights to ensure that the care plan for the child is progressing appropriately. This was a significant increase compared with the year prior. Dip-sampling revealed that these oversights were focussed although the approaches by individual IROs were not consistent and were not always effective at arresting drift.
9. An IRO oversight template has since been introduced to improve consistency and ensure that there is a more uniform approach to IRO oversights.
10. The report makes reference to the increase in the number of children who became looked after during 2021/22. This combined with a less stable workforce of social workers and managers during the year has resulted in a smaller proportion of first children looked after reviews being held within timescales (78% versus 95% during 2020/21).
11. During the current year we have seen interim social workers being increasingly loyal to Herefordshire and staying for longer which has stabilised the workforce. This will be further aided by the current recruitment campaign to attract permanent staff (including social workers and IROs).
12. In response to service demand, an additional IRO was recruited to on an interim basis and this ensured the independence or capacity of the IRO Service was not compromised. The increased IRO capacity and stability of social workers has also assisted with the timeliness of care plans and reports being prepared which was, as highlighted in the report, a challenge in 2021/22.
13. During 2021/22, 351 children and young people attended their children looked after review meeting(s); a further 428 contributed to their reviews in other ways (though an advocate/carers etc).

This equates to 94% of those over the age of 4 who contributed to their children looked after review; an increase of 6% compared with 2021/22.

14. For 99.7% of children looked after reviews the IRO consulted with the young person prior to the review meeting in 2021/22; this was an increase of 3.7% compared with the year prior.
15. On occasions, children and young people benefit from an advocate; this can be their parent or carer or through the “Hear Me” advocacy service (provided by the internal Children’s Rights & Advocacy Team). Initially a small number of advocates was available but following a business case this was expanded to increase capacity. During 2021/22 there have been a total of 79 children in care who have been supported by an advocate.
16. Some children looked after benefit from an Independent Visitor. An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who visits and befriends the child. Independent Visitors are not family and do not work for the council but can empower some young people by building a trusting, positive relationship.
17. The provision of Independent Visitors was adversely impacted as a result of the pandemic during 2021/22 and an increase in demand for the service was evident. Funding was agreed to increase service provision this year to meet this rise in demand. During 2021/22, 29 children were referred for an Independent Visitor.
18. When an IRO chairs a children looked after review this needs to be recorded. Rather than producing a set of minutes, Independent Reviewing Officers record the children looked after reviews in the format of a letter to the child. This is recognised good practice nationally and makes it easier for the child to engage in the process and to understand their care plan. Independent auditors have commented favourably on the format of these letters.
19. Where an IRO notes drift and delay or other concerns about the child’s care plan a ‘Dispute’ can be raised by the IRO. During 2021/22 there was a significant increase in both informal (132, an increase of 45%) and formal disputes (132, an increase of 165%).
20. The majority of disputes were in respect of drift and delay (24% of informal and 62% of formal disputes). It is encouraging to see this increase in IRO activity and shows that IROs are increasingly able to highlight those areas of practice in need of improvement.
21. Whilst Disputes were raised appropriately, these were not always consistently followed up and progressed. To improve this and to increase the impact on the child the Dispute Resolution Protocol has since been reviewed and refreshed in 2022/23. All IROs are currently following the revised Dispute Resolution Protocol.
22. A Dispute Resolution tracker has also been put in place to ensure a more robust mechanism. The number of outstanding Disputes is also reported to the Performance Meeting. This is a weekly meeting chaired by the Service Director for Safeguarding and Family Support.
23. Independent Reviewing Officers can access independent legal advice if required. This was accessed twice during 2021/22 following concerns about the court appointed Guardian and to provide guidance about the audio and video recording of a review meeting by parents. Both matters were resolved following the provision of independent legal advice.
24. Statutory guidance enables IROs to make a referral to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) should they feel appropriate to do. During 2021/22, IROs did not consider this was required and no referrals to CAFCASS were made.
25. No formal complaints were made during 2021/22 in respect of the IROs and the report includes a number of compliments (pages 9 and 10)

26. During 2021/22 a number of initiatives were taken to improve the oversight and effectiveness of the IRO Service. This included the appointment of a Fostering IRO to independently chair “Home Reviews” for the Fostering Service. In addition to this, IROs now also take on a role in respect the quality assurance of Special Guardianship and Fostering Assessments undertaken by an independent assessor.
27. Reflection and training has taken place during 2021/22 to place emphasis on the role of the IROs and strengthen their impact. This has included training, a number of feedback mechanisms to ensure IROs continue to have up-to-date knowledge of legislative frameworks and effective chairing skills.
28. Remuneration was evaluated and a new pay structure for IROs was agreed making the role more attractive and this should assist in the recruitment of permanent staff across the IRO service.
29. In the current financial year, 2022/23 (the year following the year which this report is dedicated to) we have been able to recruit to a number of permanent positions, including the IRO Service Manager and the Head of Service after the previous Head of Service left the Local Authority.
30. As noted, the Dispute Resolution Policy has been reviewed and is now subject to more robust tracking. Reporting in respect of this, mid-point review meeting and the timeliness of children looked after reviews takes place weekly at Performance Meetings.
31. The relationships with social workers has improved due to IROs attending regular meetings, panels and being involved in the auditing of children’s files. This has been further assisted by a more stable workforce both in terms of social workers and managers as well as IROs.
32. The improved relationships between IROs and the service as well as the development work undertaken will ensure care plans are improving and drift and delay is arrested and challenged by IROs where needed.

## **Community impact**

33. The activities of Independent Reviewing Officers have a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
34. The County Plan 2020–2024 includes the ambition to ‘strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together’. Specifically, the council aims to:
  - a. Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve;
  - b. Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices; and
  - c. Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people. Set out any considerations relating to community impact including contribution made to corporate plan / health and wellbeing strategy or other local or national strategies or policies.

## **Environmental Impact**

35. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.



## Equality duty

36. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

There needs to be a sentence/para here explaining what equality considerations are taken into account. Any diversity monitoring of the service, what the service does to support children with particular needs, that sort of thing.

## Resource implications

37. There has been significant investment to gain additional capacity to support Childrens Services, but due to recruitment challenges not all roles have been filled, including some IRO posts. A recruitment campaign has been launched.

## Legal implications

38. There are no explicit legal implications in respect of this report.

## Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Increased demands on IROs could result in a lesser quality service provided by them.	There is an ongoing recruitment campaign and additional interim capacity has been provided.

## Consultees

39. There has been no public consultation on this paper

## Appendices

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021/2022

## Background papers

None identified

## Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

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Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 30/01/2023
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Approved by	Darryl Freeman	Date 31/01/2023

# **Herefordshire Council - Children's Wellbeing**

## **Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)**

### **Annual Report**

**2021/2022**

**Author: Salwa Farid, Head of Service for Safeguarding, Professional Standards, PSW**

**Date: May 2022**

**The IRO Annual Report 2021/22 will be presented to; Council's Children's Scrutiny Panel, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Herefordshire Children and Young People Safeguarding Partnership**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The purpose of the service and its legal context

**1.1.1** The Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) service regulations are set within the framework of the updated [IRO Handbook](#) and linked to revised [Care Planning Regulations and Guidance](#). The responsibility of the IRO has changed from purely the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case, including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement in the quality of care planning for children Looked After and for challenging drift and delay.

**1.1.2** The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research '[The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England](#)' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

*"The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing."*

**1.1.3** The NCB research highlights where IROs identify barriers to their ability to fulfil their role, or systemic failures in the service to children looked after, they must raise this formally with senior managers. These challenges and the response should be included in the Annual Report.

**1.1.4** The local authority must provide for the children who are in its care; an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer within five days of them becoming Looked After, a first Child Looked After Review within twenty eight days and a second review within twelve weeks of the first review. Following this each child must have a review chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer no less than every six months and the IRO should have oversight of the effective implementation of the child's care plan in between these reviews. This presents the IRO service with an independent view of not only each child but the performance of the local authority in its provision of care for Children Looked After.

**1.1.5** This provides the Independent Reviewing Service with the opportunity to identify where care plans are not being implemented to meet the child's needs or where proposed care plans might conflict with the best interests of the child and escalate this to ensure the child's needs are met. It also provides the chance to identify good practice.

**1.1.6** In addition to the review of individual children, the IRO Service is also in a position to identify and escalate systemic issues which result in the local authority not fulfilling its duties to children Looked After.

## **2.0 Report summary**

### **2.1 IRO perspective on the performance of Herefordshire local authority related to its care of Looked After Children in 2021/22.**

**2.1.1** The IRO Service undertook 972 Child Looked After Reviews (an average of more than 2 a year per child) and recorded more than 3531 'IRO Oversight' in between these reviews during 2021/22. The IRO will monitor the child's record in between statutory reviews to ensure that actions are being progressed at a timely pace. As a result of this activity, 216 'informal' and 'formal' disputes have been raised recording concerns about unacceptable drift and delay in completing actions or disagreement about the best interests of children when social work teams proposed changes to care plans.

**2.1.2** By far the largest area of escalation has been around addressing drift and delay to care planning with this accounting for 45% of the 216 escalations 2021/ 2022. Another significant area of escalation was no care plan being presented for the Independent Reviewing Officer to review. This accounted for 23% of all disputes. The lack of no written care plan to review means the IRO cannot undertake their role and the local authority is failing to meet its regulatory duties.

**2.1.3** The main themes coming from disputes demonstrate delays in assessment and care planning which directly impact children's right to permanency and right to family life in a timely manner. This demonstrates that the LA is not progressing permanency for children at pace. Although challenged by IRO's through the Dispute Resolution process, this has been hampered by changes of Social Workers in the Local Authority and inadequate management oversight and monitoring to ensure timely progression. Given the current significant pressures on the Local Authority, in some cases, IRO's have not used the escalation process robustly knowing that the shortage of resources would not allow the desired outcome. Improvements were identified in this area to ensure robust challenge from the IRO service via informal and formal dispute resolution process which is followed through and escalated further at the necessary intervals to ensure children's care plans are progressing effectively and within the right timeframe for them. To this end Dispute Resolution process has been reviewed. Weekly Dispute Resolutions meetings have been scheduled between the IRO and Children in Care Service Managers with a plan to involve Team Managers and IRO's within discussion to monitor, progress and resolve disputes within the 20 working day timescales. More recently the escalation process has been used more effectively and a large portion of formal disputes that had not been concluded in a timely manner have now been resolved.

**2.1.4** Accessing CAMHS or other therapeutic support and counselling continues to be a significant issue for children and young people needing these services. The provision of these services have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, however other difficulties such as capacity within CAMHS and therapeutic services, and referral criteria in terms of service provision continue to be an issue. Whilst IROs continue to ensure that referrals are appropriately made by social workers, the non-acceptance of referrals by health services does not then result in exploration of other pathways to meet these needs or use of the multi-agency professional disagreement process to challenge such barriers. More recently the Local Authority has been exploring solutions that could ensure children in care receive the right support for them. To this end agreement has recently been

given for a clinical psychologist to sit within the Fostering service and provide support to foster carers as well as supporting children whose needs are not considered significant enough to meet CAMHS criteria.

## **2.2 IRO Service Performance**

### **Quantative performance targets achieved, practice quality requires improvement.**

**2.2.1** The data received for this annual report records continuing progress in completing work in timescales, a significant increase in the frequency of recording IRO oversights recorded and an all-round picture of a service moving towards a quantative performance culture.

**2.2.2** During 2021/ 2022 the monthly average of Children Looked After in Herefordshire was around 346. IRO's raised 217 formal and informal disputes related to looked after children's care plans.

**2.2.3** Since the implementation of Signs of Safety in February 2021, IRO's have worked hard to embed the language of signs of safety within their work. Although not consistent, there is evidence that some IRO's use the model in their letters to children following their Reviews, as well as in their monitoring throughout IRO oversights. More recently the IRO's have worked together to develop a midpoint review form that incorporates the signs of success element of the model as well as language that cares. Midpoint review forms are written as if to the child and this approach has been taken to ensure that IRO's refrain from using acronyms and keep language simple. During the autumn of last year the IRO's undertook specific developmental sessions to enhance their skills in quality assuring, monitoring and review.

## **3.0 Report**

### **3.1 A review of IROs' core activities and additional tasks. There is a need to establish whether IROs' additional activities compromise independence or capacity.**

**3.1.1** During 2021/ 2022 there has been a significant increase of children coming into Local Authority care. This has meant that IRO's have seen a significant increase in their caseloads with the average caseload across 5.5 IRO's currently being 69. The IRO Handbook states that a caseload of 50 to 70 children in care for a full time equivalent IRO represents good practice in the delivery of a quality service including the full range of the IRO's functions. The IRO service is made up of 3 full-time members of staff and 3 part-time which has meant that they are all currently either at or over capacity. This has had an impact on their ability to develop in areas of interest and expertise. It has also had an impact on their ability to drive improved performance within the Local Authority. In March 2022, agreement was given for the IRO service to recruit an additional full time IRO under a temporary contract to ease the pressures within the service and reduce IRO's caseloads.

	Monthly average of Children Looked After
2020/21	333
2021/21	346

**3.1.2** The IRO Handbook requires the IRO Annual Report to consider if additional activities of IROs compromise either their independence or their capacity to function as IROs. It is unfortunate that the significant increase in IRO's caseloads of children in care during 2021/22 has meant additional activities have had to be postponed so as not to compromise independence or capacity during this year.

**3.1.3** Core activities of the IROs include; preparing for and chairing Child Looked After Reviews, undertaking and recording oversight of cases between reviews with social workers and their team managers, reviewing case files, visits to children in placement, additional consultations with children, parents, carers and other agencies, quality assurance of assessments and plans which contribute to changes in care planning for the child, liaison with CAFCASS Guardians in court proceedings and clarification of legal advice, as well as the escalation of informal and formal disputes to address drift and challenge where there is disagreement in promoting the child's best interests.

Covid-19 impacted on the capacity of IROs to undertake physical visits to children in placements, with guidance being that physical visits, as not for safeguarding purposes, were not to be undertaken. However, IROs continued to meet virtually with looked after children to get their wishes and feelings. Since the lifting of all restrictions in the UK, IRO's have been undertaking a mixture of virtual and face to face visits and meetings. They have prioritised face to face consultations with children under the age of 4, those with disabilities or those who have requested to see them. The increased caseload for all IROs, the anxiety of some IROs, and the personal choice of children in care, impacted on the IROs' ability to complete all children's consultations in person.

## **3.2 Child Looked After Reviews**

**3.2.1** There were a total of 972 **CLA Reviews** undertaken in 2021/22 by 5.5 IROs. The breakdown of this activity is as follows;-

1st Child Looked After Review	140
2nd Child Looked After Review	124
Subsequent Looked After Review	708

**3.2.2** The data for this year provides a mixed picture in areas of process compliance related to Children Looked After Reviews. There has been a significant decline in the percentage of first CLA Reviews being completed within timescales from 95% the year previous to 78% this year. With the continuous movement of staff and the rise in children coming in to Local Authority care, the IRO service has not consistently been notified when a child has come into care in a timely manner. This has led to these reviews not being held within timescales. Senior Managers have been monitoring this and have set up a manual system to try and resolve this issue. In addition, due to considerable capacity issues within the Business Support Service there has been a slight decline in the percentage of CLA Review minutes being distributed within 20 working days. It is hoped that these issues will

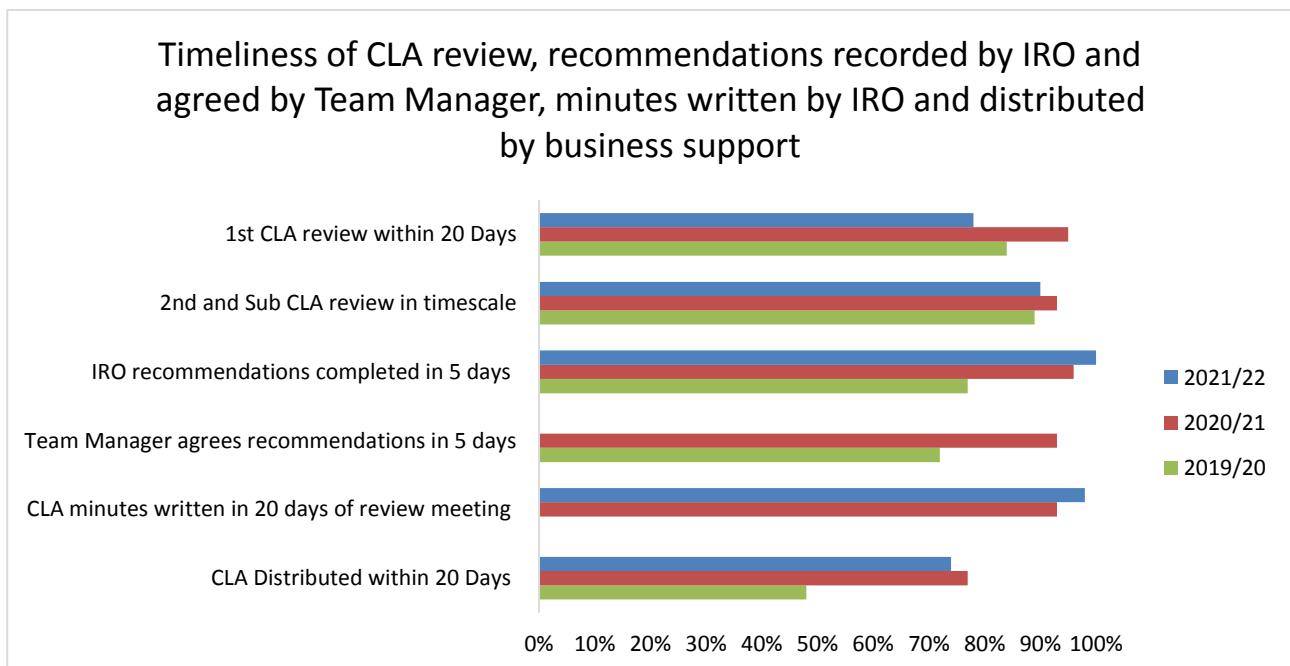


be somewhat resolved with the Local Authority’s revised recruitment strategy and Service Improvement Plan.

**3.2.3** During the year of 2021 and 2022 the Local Authority took an undertaking for all of its children’s files to be audited by an external audit group. The audits undertaken did not highlight any specific concerns about the IRO service although it is noted that drift and delay was flagged up in a number of audits. Auditors were complimentary about the style of CLA Review minutes which are written in the form of a letter to the child. Internal audits by the Head of Service found minutes to be child focused, well written and appropriate for children’s ages and levels of understanding. In addition minutes were found to address most aspects of children and young people’s lives.

**3.2.4** Total IRO oversights in 2021/22 for Children Looked After as at 31.03.22 = **3531** this is a significant increase on the year prior. Dip sampling on the quality of IRO oversights demonstrates that in the majority oversights are focussed on what is working well for the children. Where there was drift or not all needs were addressed, IRO oversight was less consistent. Whilst some IRO oversight resulted in drift being arrested; at other times drift was not effectively prevented.

**3.2.5** The midpoint review template was created by the IRO’s to make monitoring more consistent across the service. This was launched on 1.4.22 therefore it is too early to measure whether this is resulting in IROs picking up issues with drift and delay and working with Social Workers and Team Managers to progress care planning. It is anticipated that the midpoint review template will ensure that the quality of IRO monitoring is consistent, purposeful, and will have more impact on children’s in terms of outcomes reducing drift in care planning.



	CLA Distributed within 20 Days	CLA minutes written in 20 days of review meeting	IRO recommendations completed in 5 days	2nd and Sub CLA review in timescale	1st CLA review within 20 Days
■ 2021/22	74%	98%	100%	90%	78%
■ 2020/21	77%	93%	96%	93%	95%
■ 2019/20	48%	n/a	77%	89%	84%

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Child has minimum 2 or more IRO oversights	84%	100%	98%
Child has minimum 4 or more IRO oversights	Not counted	96%	86%

### 3.3 Raising concerns and disputes

There has been a significant increase in the number of informal and formal disputes raised in 2021/22 from the year previous. This evidences that more challenge is being undertaken by IRO's through the Dispute Resolution process. The resolving of disputes within timescales has been challenging and has been hampered by changes of Social Workers and less robust management oversight. In addition to this IROs have not always been consistent in progressing and following up disputes and this. A review of the dispute process will be undertaken to address this. There are currently significant pressures on the Local Authority in terms of staff retention across all services, including the IRO service, as well as a significant increase in the number of children coming into care. These systemic issues have impacted on the IRO's ability to use the escalation process robustly.

The Formal Dispute process has a maximum period of twenty working days for the Service Managers / Heads of Service to respond and resolve the matter from the date of notification, with a formal dispute meeting taking place by day 15 if the matter appears intransigent or there is no response received. Within this twenty days, depending upon the urgency of the matter, the IRO can set shorter deadlines and can undertake external escalation at any point. The IRO Handbook regulations set out the duty of the IRO to make external escalation if necessary by referral to CAF/CASS.

There have been real challenges in ensuring that formal disputes are resolved within the set timeframes. During the last 3 months weekly Dispute Resolutions meetings, where every dispute is discussed and a plan to progress specific tasks is agreed, have proved effective in resolving them. A large portion of formal disputes that had not been concluded in a timely manner have now been resolved and every effort is being made to ensure incoming formal disputes are resolved within 15 to 20 working days.

#### 3.3.1 Escalated to CAF/CASS

In 2021/22 no children's cases were externally escalated to CAF/CASS Legal by their IRO.

### 3.3.2 Informal disputes

There has been an increase in the raising of 'Informal disputes' in the year of 2021/22 from 91 the year previous to 132. The majority of the informal disputes have been raised due to the following issues:

- Drift and delay in progressing the child's care plan (32)
- Incomplete care plans or pathway plans presented to CLA Review (30)
- Professional differences between IRO and the Local Authority regarding care planning (18)
- No allocated Social Worker/ Personal Advisor (9)
- Outstanding recommendations from previous CLA Review (9)

The remaining informal disputes centre on specific issues for the child.

### 3.3.3 Formal Disputes

There have been 77 Formal Disputes recorded in the year of 2021/22, which is a significant increase from the year previous (29). The majority of these formal disputes have been raised due to the following issues:

- Drift and delay due to issues with care planning (48)
- No care plan/ pathway plan presented for CLA Review (20)

The remaining formal disputes centre on specific issues for the child.

## 3.4 Independent Legal Advice

**3.4.1** Independent legal advice was sought on two occasions by separate IROs during 2021/22. One was an IRO who was seeking advice in relation to a provision of independent legal representation for a young person who was seeking revocation of their care order and who did not feel confident that the court appointed guardian was representing their wishes and feelings. The other was to provide legal advice on what an IRO's position should be with regards to the recording (by microphone & video during virtual Microsoft Teams forum) of Child Looked After Reviews by parents. The IRO was seeking this advice due to this happening during a review of children subject to care proceedings, she had adjourned the meeting given the issue of no consent being sought from attendees.

## 3.5 Compliments and complaints related to Independent Reviewing Officers

**3.5.1** There have been no formal complaints made against IRO's during 2021/22.

**3.5.2** There were sixteen compliments for the Independent Reviewing Officers during 2021/22 that were formally recorded by Social Work Academy and Head of Service for Safeguarding and Review through shout outs, as well as from direct feedback from social workers, parents, carers and schools. Below is a small selection of comments:

- *"I would like to say a big thank you to the IRO team for being the only ones who really supported me through my LAC journey, every IRO which has taken my case has been outstanding. A very good team in which the council should recognise and be so extremely supportive and proud of!!"* **Feedback from a young person**

- *“XX is a tremendous asset to the Hereford IRO team, after taking over from another IRO she had big boots to fill which she certainly did. I’m very thankful to have someone as supportive as XX.” **Feedback from a young person***
- *“There is evidence of regular, meaningful IRO oversight and appropriate challenge where actions have not been completed. Given parents generally cannot attend reviews due to their work commitments, the IRO makes contact prior to and post LAC reviews to obtain their views and feedback On 13.7.2021 there is evidence of tracking actions and driving forward contact arrangements. The IRO consults with xx in advance of his reviews – this has been via telephone, perhaps due to the pandemic – going forward it would be nice to see the IRO visiting xx in person. In addition to this, the IRO ensures midpoint reviews take place and outstanding actions are revisited – with new timescales where there is evidence of drift. LAC reviews take place in timescales, voice of the child is reflected in the meetings – he is comfortable to attend his reviews. Evidence the minutes are sent out within 15 days as per IRO handbook.” **Feedback from an Auditor***
- *“I have just been to a Looked After Child review for xx that was chaired by XX. I cannot praise XX highly enough for her professionalism, honesty, openness and kindness. XX has upheld the council PEOPLE VALUES to the letter. Not only that she has gone above and beyond those values in an effort to help look after the Best Interests of xx, his Mum xx and myself as Mum's supporter. Can you please ensure XX is not only THANKED but she is officially recognised by the local authority for her good practice and for going above and beyond her duty and what is required of her. I have left a LAC review feeling happy and content for the first time in a long time and that is something I never thought I would say. My very best regards and thanks” **Feedback from a parent***
- *“IRO had been brilliant with helping resolve issues quickly and is always available if we need her.” **Feedback from a young person***
- *“IRO is amazing at recognising what the children need and although sometimes it's hard to sort things out she always tries to make things happen. I find her so approachable and helpful and trust her with their care and good decisions for their lives. Thank you.” **Feedback from a Foster Carer***
- *“IRO is nice, helpful caring and funny.” **Feedback from a young person***

### **3.6 Consultations, participation in reviews, advocacy and Independent Visitors**

#### **3.6.1 Consultations with Children**

Consultations with children record when the child or young person has met with their IRO prior to the review meeting. The data also includes when a child or young person has been contacted and invited to meet with their IRO but has declined. As such, the figures includes all children who had direct consultation with their IRO and those children who were given the opportunity to meet with them but it was the child's choice not to meet with their IRO.

972 reviews were held during the year period 2021/22 and 779 children and young people contributed within these meetings. 351 children and young people attended their meeting in person and 428 did not attend but conveyed their wishes and feelings through either their advocate, carers or the IRO. 144 children were under the age of 4 at the time of their review and 48 children and young people did not contribute to their review in any way. This demonstrates an increase in participation from the year period 2020/21. During the pandemic all reviews and consultations were held virtually, however since the lifting of restrictions the IRO's have been making a concerted effort to meet children and young people face to face and more reviews are being held in person.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Consultation with child before their review	84%	96%	99.7%
Participation - Child attends or wishes conveyed by other person / medium	90%	89%	94%

### 3.6.2 Advocacy

Herefordshire children social care has a 30 hours per week contract with the Advocacy service that is managed by the Complaints department. IROs continue to check at each Child Looked After Review if there are any issues which the child or young person would like the help of an advocate to raise for them on their behalf. Some examples of the support provided by the advocates to young people during the year period of 2021/22 are where one young person sought help from his advocate with finding a suitable placement when his placement with parents arrangement with his mother broke down. Another young person sought support from his advocate to make a complaint about the Local Authority. There has been a request for more advocacy support for children and young people in the Local Authority's care as currently this is being provided by a very small number of advocates. As such, a business case has been submitted to expand the Childrens Rights and Advocacy service to the management board as a pressure for Childrens services. This has been accepted and put through as a budget pressure for next financial year. During the year of 2021/22 there have been a total of 79 children in care who have been supported by an advocate.

### 3.6.3 Independent Visitors

IROs continue to raise the question at reviews as to whether an Independent Visitor is appropriate for children. The remit of Independent Visitors has recently changed and they are now working with any child or young person in care who wishes to receive this service. Prior to this they would visit children and young people who had little or no contact with their family members or lived in residential environments where continuity through independent visiting could be more constant than social workers or IROs. The role of the Independent Visitor is explained and if the child / young person wants to have an Independent Visitor then the referral is made by the social worker. The provision of this service was invariably affected by the periods of lockdown and restrictions on visiting arising from the pandemic in 2020/21. However during the year period 2021/22 the demand for Independent Visitors has risen, with 29 children being referred for a service. Funding was agreed to increase service provision this year to meet this rise in demand. The IRO's will continually promote the Independent Visitor service during 2022/23 as this ensures children have positive adult connections and monitoring of demand against capacity will continue.

### **3.7 Communication with parents**

**3.7.1** IROs clarify prior to each review if parents have been included on **the invitations** on the convening document and if not, why not. This has been significantly hampered during the year period of 2021/22 due to a high volume of changes in Social Workers as well as capacity issues within the Business Support service. With new Social Workers joining the service and not understanding how the convening system works there has been a rise in situations where parents, along with other attendees have not been informed or invited to the child's review. This has meant that IRO's have had to undertake follow up phone calls or a second meetings to ensure parents' wishes and feelings are captured. It is clear that there appears to be a need for proper induction and training for new Social Workers joining the service to ensure meetings are appropriately convened. At the time of reporting the current training and induction program for new starters is being reviewed and it is hoped that this will help to reduce incidents where parents are not invited to their children's reviews.

**3.7.2** There are processes to improve parental **participation** within the review yet these were impeded by social workers not undertaking designated processes. A problem particularly evident when there is a high turnover of staff and when more children are becoming Looked After at the point of involvement with MASH and Assessment Teams rather than the CP and Court Teams who have more experience of the 1<sup>st</sup> CLA processes. In 2021-22 the parental consultation form was sent out to parents' addresses on the convening forms, but again this required the convening forms to be completed in timescale. Business Support send two reminders to the social worker but if they do not receive the convening form more than 10 days before the review, they do not convene and the social worker has to arrange the meeting.

## **4. Wider issues**

### **4.1 Court judgements and external audits**

**4.1.1** The court judgement of Justice Keehan in March 2021, following on from previous judgements by the same High Court judge, continues to have a profound impact on Children's Services within Herefordshire. Since the publication of the judgement there has been significant turnover of staff service wide. Alongside this there has been a significant rise in the number of children coming into Local Authority care. With these issues combined there have been significant pressures placed on all services within Children's Social Care.

**4.1.2** The role of the Fostering IRO was recruited to in April 2021, with a remit to chair annual 'home reviews' independent from the Fostering Service. This role is line managed within the Safeguarding and Review Service to ensure independence. This has allowed for scrutiny of the quality of care provided by in house fosters carers and whether they are meeting the [National Minimum Standards for fostering](#).

**4.1.3.** Following the judgement service structure within the Fostering Service was reviewed and separated into 4 teams; the Fostering Assessment Team, Fostering Support Team, Fostering Permanence Team and the Fostering Recruitment Team. SGO assessments are now undertaken by

the Assessment Team, however due to a combination of staff shortages as well as the increase in volume of such assessments, independent assessors have had to be commissioned to undertake them. The IRO's are given all completed assessments to consider when ratifying children's care plans and as such have been able to raise any issues in terms of the information held within assessments being completed by independent assessors.

**4.2 Where IROs identify barriers to their ability to fulfil their role, or systemic failures in the service to looked after children, they must raise this formally with senior managers. These challenges and the response should be included in the Annual Report.**

**4.2.1** Barriers to fulfilling the role of the IRO include Care plans and Pathway Plans frequently not being written for the IRO, children and their families, carers and other agencies to consider before the review meeting or sometimes even at the review meeting. This issue continues to be the subject of multiple Formal Disputes throughout this year. The matter has again been raised with senior managers in 2021/22 but it is anticipated that until there is staff stability this will continue to be a problem. The IROs have circulated a bottom lines and expectations document to all teams within each area service to try and tackle this issue on the ground. IROs also provide one to one consultation to social workers as and when needed to make the role of IROs and expectations clear.

**4.2.2** IROs continue to spend too much time re-scheduling or having two or more separate meetings. The additional meetings are not those arising out of reviews where separate consultations with children and parents are necessary but because assessments are not presented or completed to inform changes of care plan. The continuous turnover of staff is a significant contributing factor to this issue.

## **5. Progress as to plans for 2020 – 2021**

**5.1 Development plan for Independent Reviewing Officers.** IROs undertook a six part training programme covering the areas of the independent role of the IRO, positive challenge, rights and participation of children, legislative framework and effective chairing skills. This was delivered by external colleagues from the Independent Audit Group and included local authority solicitors for the legislative framework session. **Program completed in November 2021**

**5.2 A 360 degree feedback loop on how the IRO Service is experienced.** This is now in place and IROs have been distributing short feedback forms after meetings to all attendees of Children Looked After Reviews, to gain the perspective of children and young people, parents, carers, social workers and attendees from other agencies such as education and health. These are returned to the IRO Service Manager with responders choosing whether their feedback remains anonymous or not. The information collated from the feedback loop is collated by the IRO Service Manager and used to improve practices within the service. **Completed March 2021**

**5.3 IRO Service Manager to attend panels.** The IRO Service Manager has been attending these panels to ensure oversight of court proceedings, permanence plans (for adoption, matching long term foster placements, progression to special guardianship and reunification with parents), step-

downs from residential care and the provision of complex services for complex needs which are subject to additional tracking and scrutiny. **Completed and ongoing**

**5.4 Ensure that the payment for Independent Reviewing Officers is competitive to attract the right experienced practitioners to the role.** The regulations require IROs to have at least five years' qualified Social Work experience and be an authoritative professional with at least equivalent status to an experienced Children's Social Work Team Manager. This is not the case in Herefordshire and has not been the case for at least the last five years. IROs are employed at a pay grade below Team Managers, despite this having been raised repeatedly with Directors of Children's Services since 2016 as being contrary to regulations. This was raised again with the Director of Children's Services and following a review of roles and pay structures this was agreed. **Completed January 2022**

**5.5 Improving the quality of Children Looked After Review Minutes.** The feedback received from independent audits and also thematic audits completed in service continue to find that the quality of the IRO letters to children following their reviews is good and child friendly. This will continue to be monitored to ensure consistency in practice. **Completed, and ongoing.**

**5.6 Review the way the Safeguarding and Review Service manages its workload.** Although the service was split in February 2021, there have been significant capacity issues within the IRO service due to the significant rise in children coming into Local Authority care. This meant the IRO's case load had gone beyond 70. A request was made for extra capacity within the service and this was agreed on a temporary basis in April 2022. A full time agency IRO is agreed and should start in May 2022. **Completed and Ongoing.**

## **6. Moving forward**

### **6.1 Structure and profile of the IRO Service**

**6.1.1** Throughout much of 2021/22, the IRO Service was made up of 3 permanent full time employees and 3 permanent part time employees. This stability has enabled consistent peer support during this challenging year. An agency employee will join the service in May 2022 due to the continued rise in the number of children coming in to care. The IRO Service Manager has direct management oversight of IROs in line with manageable supervising responsibilities of these staff members. Agreement has been given for an additional IRO to join the service under a year's fixed term contract. The advertisement for this position is due to go out in May 22.

**6.1.2** A joint Service Away day was held in March 2022 with the CP Chairs to explore the current challenges within Herefordshire Children's Social Care and the impact it has had on our service. This was a meeting in person, held at the council offices.

**6.1.3** Following the departure of the Principal IRO in September 2021, line Management of the IRO Service in 2021/22 has been undertaken by a Service Manager who has been acting up in to the role since December 2021. The permanent position of IRO Service Manager will be advertised in May 2022.



## **7.0 Next step for the IRO Service 2022-2023**

**7.1** The IRO Service Manager will continue to observe the practice of IROs at review meetings and audit the quality of Children Looked after Review Reports, minutes and midpoint reviews. There will continue to be monthly dip sampling of the quality of IRO Oversights to ensure they are focused and purposeful, set out the views of the IROs on the progression of the care plan and where required identify issues in practice. **IRO Service Manager, Ongoing**

**7.2** Weekly meetings with the Children in Care and CP/ Courts Services will continue to take place to review all open formal disputes to ensure that drift and delay identified by the IROs services are dealt with in a timely manner. **IRO Service Manager, Ongoing**

**7.3** IROs will continue to contribute to their own and service development through monthly development sessions in which they will be encouraged to share learning and reflect on case studies. These are additional to the monthly Team Meetings. **All IRO's and IRO Service Manager, Ongoing**

**7.4** IROs will continue to monitor children's permanency plans, and refer children to permanence panel for oversight where there is an identified drift or delay. A new scorecard point to be developed to monitor IROs' performance in term of monitoring the progress of children's permanence plan by the second CLA review and escalate any drift or delay. **All IRO's, IRO Service Manager in conjunction with Mosaic Performance Team Aug 2022**

**7.5** IRO's will continue to build better working relationships within their link services. With each IRO being linked to a service area as a critical friend, it is hoped that generic issues affecting practice can be resolved. **All IRO's, Ongoing**

**7.6** Confirm the permanent establishment for the IRO service. **Head of Service and IRO Service Manager in conjunction with Flexible Futures Service, March 2022**

**7.7** Review the current Dispute resolution policy to ensure additional tier of service management is reflected within escalation timeframe. **Head of Service and IRO Service Manager, July 2022**

**7.8** The annual Service Away day will be planned to explore issues and themes impacting on the service. **IRO Service Manager, March 2023**

**7.9** All IROs to follow the SofS mapping when they conduct the CLA review. The SofS lead will be invited to the Team development sessions to support IRO in fully impeding the model. **All IRO's and IRO Service Manager, Aug 2022**



# Title of report: Children's Improvement Plan Transformation Funding

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 14 February 2023**

**Report by: Darryl Freeman, Corporate Director - Children & Young People**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To review the use of £11.49m from the Financial Resilience Reserve which was made available to support resourcing the transformation stage of children's services.

## **Recommendation**

**That:**

- a) **That the contents of this report are noted by the Children and Young People scrutiny committee**

## **Alternative options**

1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee could choose not to review information contained in this report; this is not recommended as the Children's Improvement Plan is one of the council's priorities.

## **Key considerations**

2. On 31 March 2022, [Cabinet approved](#) £11.49m Resilience Reserve funding to assist the improvement of Children's Services.

3. The recommendation was for funding to be allocated in two tranches, the first tranche of £5m and a further tranche of £6.49m have subsequently been released.
4. At the time funding was agreed it was noted that core transformation of the service is expected to take a number of years before a level of sustained and sustainable improvement is achieved and that this aimed at:
  - a. Improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.
  - b. Making working in Herefordshire an attractive and rewarding career choice.
  - c. Embedding systemic partnership approaches and exploring alternative models of delivery.

All underpinned and driven by improvement across the system of practice, management, and leadership.

5. A Resource Board has been established, chaired by the Director of Resources and Assurance, to track and scrutinise spending.
6. Both the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet have received progress reports in respect of the Improvement Plan and the funding as requested since April 2022.
7. A current progress report of the Improvement Plan is tabled as a separate agenda item at this Scrutiny Committee.
8. Scrutiny and Cabinet was previously advised that the investment will be used to increase staffing resources; both interim and permanent.
9. In respect of interim recruitment, the investment has allowed interim staff to be deployed across a number of areas:
  - a. Additional social work teams to manage the increase in demand during 2022/23
  - b. Auditors, Improvement Leads and Practice Develop Leads
  - c. Two additional Heads of Service (Fostering and Quality Assurance)
  - d. Data and Systems Analyst
  - e. Additional Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
  - f. Managing Practitioners across the service
  - g. Service Managers across the service
  - h. Additional management and worker capacity in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
  - i. Funding to scope and implement Trauma Awareness Training being part of the learning offer
  - j. Scoping and commissioning of Family Group Conferences pending permanent recruitment
10. Following the most recent [Ofsted inspection](#) that took place between 18 and 29 July 2022, the decision was made to ring-fence £1million specifically to assist the council to respond specifically to some of the areas highlighted by Ofsted.
11. This included amongst others the appointment of an interim Service Director Improvement, an interim Head of Service to focus on Fostering, dedicated resource to review and update policies and procedures and additional capacity for Business and Performance Analysts to assist in the development of the Mosaic system and reporting.
12. As of the 19 January of this ring-fenced £1million it is forecasted that £527,000 will be spend by the end of the current financial year.
13. The remaining £473,000 has been set aside to be carried forward into 2023/24 to enable the continuation of key posts to support the response to Ofsted.

14. Of the remaining funds, £10.49million, there will be a forecasted underspend of £688,337 at the end of the current financial year. It is proposed that these monies will be returned to Resilience Reserve.
15. Progress in respect of improvement has been tracked by and has been reported to Scrutiny, Cabinet and the Improvement Board and the finances in respect of the £11.49 funding has been scrutinised and tracked by the Director of Resources and Assurance through a dedicated Resource Board.
16. The funding has been invaluable to our current improvement journey

### **Community impact**

17. The notice requiring improvement has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
18. The County Plan 2020–2024 includes the ambition to ‘strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together’. Specifically, the council aims to:
  - a. Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve;
  - b. Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices; and
  - c. Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people. Set out any considerations relating to community impact including contribution made to corporate plan / health and wellbeing strategy or other local or national strategies or policies.

### **Environmental Impact**

19. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.

### **Equality duty**

20. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the ‘general duty’ on public authorities is set out as follows:
21. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –
  - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
22. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Whilst this is an update to the scrutiny committees and will in itself have minimal equalities impacts,

consideration has been made in the consideration of Executive decisions and the Executive Responses provided by the Cabinet.

### Resource implications

23. The costs and resource implications in respect of the monies made available from Resilience Reserve funding has previously been considered by Cabinet.

### Legal implications

24. The Council was issued with a statutory direction by the Department for Education on 21 September 2022. To comply with this notice, the Council must adhere to a number of measures, which includes complying with any instructions of the Secretary of State or the Children’s Services Commissioner in relation to the improvement of the council’s exercise of its children’s social care functions.
25. If there is a failure to comply with this notice or should ministers not be satisfied with the council’s progress at any stage, ministers may choose to invoke their statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children’s services.

### Risk management

Risk	Mitigation
There is a risk that we would not be able to recruit permanently to posts resulting in potential potential instability and increased cost during 2022/23 which could adversely impact on our ability to improve with pace.	A recruitment campaign has commenced and will continue throughout the year. Interim staff are encouraged to apply for permanent posts or where appropriate be offered fixed term contracts.
There is a risk that a significantly adverse report from Ofsted following an inspection in the future might place additional demands on the improvement and transformation activity.	The service, through the activity and impact of the Improvement Plan and in collaboration with the Improvement Advisor, the Commissioner and partners continues to work to demonstrate impact and evidence of improvement and to prepare our best evidence for a future inspection.

### Consultees

26. There has been no public consultation on this paper

### Appendices

None

### Background papers

None identified

## Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

**Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published**

Governance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Communications	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by Darryl Freeman Date 02/02/2023





# **Title of report: Children's Services Improvement Plan – Implementation Review Update**

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 28 February 2023**

**Report by: Gail Hancock, Service Director Improvement**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present an update to the committee in respect of the progress and implementation of the Children's Improvement Plan.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) **That the contents of this report are noted by the Children and Young People scrutiny committee**

## **Alternative options**

1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee could choose not to review information contained in this report; this is not recommended as the Children's Improvement Plan is one of the council's priorities.

## Key considerations

2. A [High Court judgment](#) was published on 26 March 2021, which raised significant concerns about Herefordshire's Children's Social Care Services. Following this, on 18 May 2021, [the council was issued with a non-statutory improvement notice](#) by the Department for Education (DfE).
3. On 21 September 2022, Herefordshire Children's Services was rated inadequate following an [Ofsted inspection](#) that took place between 18 and 29 July 2022, and the council was given three months to prepare an Improvement Action Plan in response.
4. Following the publications of the Ofsted report a [statutory direction](#) was issued by the Secretary of State to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022, and Eleanor Brazil was appointed as Commissioner for Children's Services in Herefordshire.
5. The [Children's Services Improvement Plan](#) was updated setting out how the council is addressing each of the areas identified for improvement by Ofsted and a tenth area identified during a recent LGA SEND Peer Review.
6. Having been presented to [Scrutiny Committee on 13 December](#), [Scrutiny Committee recommended](#) for Cabinet to endorse the Improvement Plan and for Cabinet to authorise for the Improvement Plan to be submitted to Ofsted.
7. The Improvement Plan was endorsed by [Cabinet on Thursday 15 December](#) and submitted to Ofsted on 20 December. The Plan aims to improve the outcomes for children and young people across the county.
8. The final Improvement Plan included two additional actions as recommended by the Scrutiny Committee regarding Trauma Awareness Training to be part of the learning offer (1.2 in the plan) and for information for families whose children are subject to pre-proceedings to be published on the council's website (6.3 in the plan)
9. On 11 January 2023, the Improvement Board, chaired by the Department of Education Advisor, Gladys Rhodes-White met.
10. Presented to the Improvement Board were Progress Cover Report and a more detailed Improvement Plan Progress Update. These documents are appended to this report (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively).
11. Progress is reported against each element of the Improvement Plan by way of a traffic light performance management system.
12. Progress reporting in this manner and with this level of detail is new to the Improvement Board and Scrutiny Committee
13. Progress against the Improvement Plan continues to be largely positive at this stage, although further improvement is required 'at pace'.
14. Three activities were completed since the Improvement Plan was shared with Ofsted:
  - a. Strengthen quality assurance activity.
  - b. Launch and publish a revised Quality Assurance Framework
  - c. Strengthen the SEND Partnership Group
15. The progress for two activities was not as expected since the plan was shared with Ofsted.
16. One of these activities relate to the partnership priority to review and launch the multi-agency Neglect Strategy (3.8 in the Improvement Plan). This particular improvement action highlights a

broader need to improve the specificity of planning and associated arrangements for achieving partnership deliverables to determine who is doing what, where, when and how to deliver on the following which require improved leadership engagement and collaboration:

- a. Herefordshire Children's Safeguarding Partnership priorities
- b. Herefordshire Children and Young People's Partnership priorities
- c. Health priorities as they relate to children in need of support, protection and care and children with special educational needs and / or disabilities

17. An Interim Neglect Strategy has been published and this has renewed the focus and energy across partners and an extraordinary meeting has been arranged in February to work on the delivery of the work plan for the strategy.
18. The other activity where the progress was less than expected since the plan was submitted to Ofsted in December relates to the re-launch of the Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP) used by Independent Reviewing Officers to address the needs of children where there are concerns. This activity has drifted due to the late appointments of some key staff too close to the December 2022 delivery deadline. This matter has however been reviewed and there is confidence that the new appointees are addressing this and action is now being taken
19. As is evident from the attached Progress Cover Report and Plan Progress Update, the direction of travel in respect of progress for January 2023 is largely positive.
20. It is noted that most recent the Improvement Board meeting on 11 January was described by the DfE Improvement Advisor and chair of the Improvement Board as a positive meeting.
21. Attached to this report is a Newsletter from the DfE Improvement Advisor (Appendix 3) which further sets out the reflections of the DfE Improvement Advisor on the January Improvement Board.
22. This includes an acknowledgment of the improved infrastructure in place to support the improvement journey and confidence in the quality assurance framework which is now in place.
23. The Improvement Board included a presentation of a storyboard of "Jack". In essence this was a pen-picture presented by a number of professionals involved in Jack's life. The case study was an example of effective multi-agency working showing the impact of this on the life of Jack and his mother.
24. It is accepted and acknowledged that there continues to be much to do and we need to ensure that the pace of improvement does not reduce. However, progress in respect of the revised Improvement Plan is largely on track and a number of positives have been noted.

## **Community impact**

25. The notice requiring improvement has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
26. The County Plan 2020–2024 includes the ambition to 'strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together'. Specifically, the council aims to:
  - a. Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve;
  - b. Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices; and

- c. Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people. Set out any considerations relating to community impact including contribution made to corporate plan / health and wellbeing strategy or other local or national strategies or policies.

## **Environmental Impact**

26. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.

## **Equality duty**

27. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
28. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –
  - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
29. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Whilst this is an update to the scrutiny committees and will in itself have minimal equalities impacts, consideration has been made in the consideration of Executive decisions and the Executive Responses provided by the Cabinet.

## **Resource implications**

30. The costs of the work for the progress of the Improvement Plan have been met from resources which have been tabled previously at Scrutiny Committee meetings.

## **Legal implications**

31. The Council was issued with a statutory direction by the Department for Education on 21 September 2022. To comply with this notice, the Council must adhere to a number of measures, which includes complying with any instructions of the Secretary of State or the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to the improvement of the council's exercise of its children's social care functions.
32. If there is a failure to comply with this notice or should ministers not be satisfied with the council's progress at any stage, ministers may choose to invoke their statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the council to enter into an appropriate arrangement to secure the improvements required in children's services.

## Risk management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
There is a risk that we would not be able to recruit permanently to posts resulting in potential potential instability and increased cost which could adversely impact on our ability to improve with pace.	A recruitment campaign has commenced and will continue throughout the year. Interim staff are encouraged to apply for permanent posts or where appropriate be offered fixed term contracts.
There is a risk that a significantly adverse report from Ofsted following an inspection in the future might place additional demands on the improvement and transformation activity.	The service, through the activity and impact of the Improvement Plan and in collaboration with the Improvement Advisor, the Commissioner and partners continues to work to demonstrate impact and evidence of improvement and to prepare our best evidence for a future inspection.
There is a risk that we do not do enough to bring about the change needed, or that the pace of change is not quick enough.	We are regularly communicating with the DfE, Ofsted and key safeguarding partners. We will invite and report external review of our progress through the Improvement Board and sector-led improvement activity.

## Consultees

33. There has been no public consultation on this paper

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Improvement Plan Progress Update Cover Report – January 2023

Appendix 2: Improvement Plan Progress Update January 2023

Appendix 3: Herefordshire Children's Improvement Board Newsletter January 2023

## Background papers

None identified

## Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

<b>Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published</b>		
Governance	John Coleman	Date 01/02/2023
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
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Communications	Luenne featherstone	Date 02/02/2023
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Approved by	Darryl Freeman	Date 02/02/2023

## HEREFORDSHIRE CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT BOARD

### IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE – COVER REPORT JANUARY 2023

#### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The draft Children's Improvement Plan presented to the Improvement Board on 1 December 2022 was subsequently considered by the Council's Scrutiny Committee on 13 December 2022 and endorsed by Cabinet on 15 December 2022.

1.2 There was broad agreement and support for the draft Improvement Plan throughout the internal governance process and the final version of the Improvement Plan, which was sent to Ofsted on 20 December 2022, contained minor adjustments plus two additional high level actions.

1.3 The two additional high level actions recommended by the Scrutiny Committee and endorsed by Cabinet have been added to the Improvement Plan and are included below for ease of reference:

<p>1.2 Introduce trauma awareness training as part of the Children's Service learning and development offer for all relevant staff and members of the council so they can be signposted when appropriate.</p>	<p>Service Director (Improvement)</p>	<p>April 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping of trauma awareness raising training options to be finalised for the end of January 2023</li> <li>• Short list of potential providers identified and contacted December 2022</li> <li>• Details to be included in the Social Care Academy Continual Professional Development offer for 2023/24</li> </ul>	
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<p>6.3 Information for families with children subject to Public Law pre-proceedings will be added to the Council's website so that they are properly informed about Public Law pre-proceedings meetings and proceedings.</p>	<p>Service Director (Improvement)</p>	<p>January 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request made for links to the Family Rights Group website and information pages be added to the Council's website in January 2023</li> <li>• Further 'family friendly' information to be developed, shared and added to the Council's website</li> </ul>	
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## 2.0 Progress Updates

2.1 The Improvement Plan presented to the January 2023 Improvement Board includes the first progress updates and associated adjustments to the BRAG rating, where applicable. Moving forward, this process will be repeated for every Improvement Board.

2.2 The progress updates were shaped and informed by the Transformation Programme delivery dashboards and consultation with the Programme Managers and individual Service Leads, where required. All of this evidence and information is mapped against each of the ten practice improvement priorities, and associated high level actions identified through the Ofsted inspection and Local Government Association peer review for special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND).

2.3 The BRAG ratings relate to the delivery status of the identified priority actions. Essentially, these ratings rely on an evaluation of the evidence about whether identified actions have been started, progressed in a timely manner and achieved.

2.4 The 'measures that matter' are a selected number of mostly quantitative performance indicators, with some qualitative indicators.

## 3.0 Summary and Conclusion

3.1 Overall, the completion of the progress updates for January 2023 provide proof of concept that the transformation delivery dashboards provide reliable evidence, with some additional consultation with Project Managers and Lead Officers, to record, track and report how priority actions are being progressed and achieved. Learning from this reporting cycle indicates that some early adjustments are needed regarding the specificity of some transformation delivery plans as they relate to partnership priorities and this issue is addressed later in this report at point XX

3.2 In summary, the first progress update reporting cycle for January 2023 presents a mostly positive direction of travel. This is despite the fact that the date for submission of the plan to Ofsted and the Christmas and New Year holiday compromised the full month reporting. This will be addressed moving forward as the February 2023 reporting will represent a full month cycle.

3.3 In summary, the BRAG ratings continue to provide a largely positive picture at this stage, although further improvement is required 'at pace'. Unsurprisingly, many of the current BRAG ratings remain the same as they were at the point the Improvement Plan was sent to Ofsted on 20 December. There is some movement however and this is set out below:

#	20 December 2022 BRAG rating	11 January 2023 BRAG rating	Direction of Travel
2.2	Yellow	Green	Improved
2.3	Yellow	Green	Improved
2.4	Red	Yellow	Improved
3.6	Yellow	Green	Improved
3.8	Green	Yellow	Deteriorated
4.3	Yellow	Green	Improved



4.5			Achieved
6.5			Improved
6.6			Improved
7.3			Improved
7.4			Improved
8.4			Improved
8.6			Deteriorated
9.1			Achieved
9.4			Improved
10.4			Achieved

3.4 The generally positive trend, including 3 improvement actions that have been achieved in this reporting period, is due to the impact of the following factors:

- Continued focus and coordination by existing officers
- Agreed priorities coming to fruition as planned
- Additional capacity and expertise as a result of new starters being in post

3.5 The notable exceptions to the above relate to improvement actions 3.8 and 8.6. In respect of improvement action 3.8 this highlights the partnership priority to review, relaunch and evaluate the multi-agency Neglect Strategy. This particular improvement action highlights a broader need to improve the specificity of planning and associated arrangements for achieving partnership deliverables to determine who is doing what, where, when and how to deliver on the following which require improved leadership engagement and collaboration:

- Herefordshire Children’s Safeguarding Partnership priorities
- Herefordshire Children and Young People’s Partnership priorities
- Health priorities as they relate to children in need of support, protection and care and children with special educational needs and / or disabilities

3.6 Priority action 8.6 relates to the re-launch of the Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP) used by Independent Reviewing Officers to address the needs of children where there are concerns. This priority action has fallen foul of some late appointments of key staff which have squeezed the December 2022 delivery deadline. This matter has however been reviewed and there is confidence that the new appointees are addressing this and action is now being taken. Reporting for February 2023 will report an improved position as a result of the actions that are outlined in the progress updates outlined in the Improvement Plan.

3.7 In conclusion, the progress updates presented in the updated Improvement Plan for January 2023 set out a largely positive direction of travel, with improved BRAG ratings and some achievements. Further joint planning and decision making is required to address the partnership deliverables to clarify strategic leadership and associated arrangements for the HSCP, CYPP and with Health.

**Gail Hancock, Service Director (Improvement)**

**05.01.2023.**





# **Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Plan**

## **January 2023 Improvement Board - Progress Update Report**

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**Version control:**

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0.01	Draft	24/11/2022	Draft for Operational Board		28/11/2022
0.02	Draft	28/11/2022	Draft for Corporate Leadership Team		01/12/2022
0.03	Draft	01/12/2022	Draft for Improvement Board	Appendix A and B	11/01/2022
0.04	Draft	15/12/2022	Draft for Cabinet	Pages 9, 22 & 24	20/11/2022
3.0	Final	19/12/2022	Final version for Ofsted	Pages 7, 9, 15, 22, 24, & 25	11/01/2023
3.1	Final/update	11/01/2023	Improvement Board Progress Report Update	All pages from 10 to 39	

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## Background

Children’s Services were inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework.

The inspection report was published on 21 September 2022 and is available on the Ofsted website<sup>1</sup>.

The overall judgement was that Herefordshire Children’s Services are ‘inadequate’. The judgements contributing to this outcome are as follows:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

Following the inspection, we have moved openly and swiftly to acknowledge the key areas for improvement, many of which we had already identified and incorporated into our existing Transformation Programme. We have taken immediate action to increase capacity where it was needed to strengthen our MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and other frontline services for children and young people.

At the time of the inspection, we were already developing a number of practice priorities within the service and were focussing on addressing some wider systems issues. We have increased the pace of this activity and we know that in order to realise our vision and aspiration for improved children’s outcomes, a comprehensive transformation of our service is required to achieve the long-term and sustainable changes that local children, young people and families in Herefordshire need, deserve and expect.

This high-level Improvement Plan has been prepared in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including children, young people, parents and carers, our workforce and our multi-agency / cross sector partners. Some of this engagement has been very challenging, particularly given the impact and legacy of inadequate service delivery. It has been necessary to do this however so that we can confront and abate the current problems and make improvements as quickly as possible. 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.

<sup>1</sup> <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50192875>

## Our transformation programme

Our plan sets out the first phase of our post-inspection improvement activity as a direct response to receiving the inspection feedback and report. Having accepted the service's shortcomings, we are focusing on what we need to do to deliver safe and effective core services as quickly as possible. It focuses on the next 12-18 months although the transformation activity will necessarily take longer than this and the plan will be reviewed, refreshed and further developed as required. This builds upon the activity undertaken before the inspection to diagnose the extent of existing weaknesses and is followed up with a focus on strengthening core systems, clearing backlogs, securing thresholds and stabilising the service. We will continue to work at pace to problem solve and assure the quality of our practice moving forward.

The plan carries forward the key elements of the previous plan and reflects changed priorities following the recent Ofsted inspection. Our transformation programme has a number of Projects, including Workforce, Service and Practice Development, Performance and Quality Assurance, Commissioning Resources, Early Help and Partnerships, Corporate Parenting and Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities (SEND). Improving outcomes for children with Special Education Needs and/or Disability is not restricted only to the SEND work stream and is included in each of the work streams. Each work stream has a member of the Corporate Leadership Team as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)

The corresponding project plans have all been reviewed and aligned to address the high level actions for each of the priority improvement areas identified by Ofsted inspection, and the LGA peer review of SEND services. A diagram outlining the governance arrangements is included at Appendix A and outlines the relationship between the Projects, the plan, and the Improvement Board.

For ease of accountability, responsible leads are primarily senior officers of the council but there is an increased focus on partnership working reflected in the various task and finish groups and in the project plans that sit behind this high-level plan.

Our improvement activity will be supported and driven by strengthened performance management and quality assurance arrangements, with clear lines of accountability that are overseen by single and multi-agency governance arrangements reporting into our Improvement Board, which is independently chaired by our Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Advisor.

We will be reflective and embrace the learning opportunities that are afforded to us from working in partnership with our Commissioner, Sector Led Improvement Partners and through an open dialogue with support and challenge provided by our colleagues in the DfE and Ofsted.

## How we will achieve success

Success is dependent upon a county-wide approach working together with the Service, the Council and all stakeholders, including working in partnership with parents and carers and taking full account of children and young people's voices.

High support and high challenge will be essential, backed by robust governance arrangements and effective partnerships. In addition to the work of the Improvement Board, key partnerships including the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP), Corporate Parenting Board, Children and

Young People’s Partnership, SEND Partnership Group, Health and Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership will each have a significant contribution to make to deliver improved services and achieve better outcomes for children, young people and families in Herefordshire.

### Our workforce

Our workforce is our greatest asset and we are building an organisational culture characterised by strong relationships, high support and high challenge. We are committed to working with our workforce and have established a Staff Reference Group, have appointed a Principal Social Worker and developed other engagement fora, to ensure our workforce has a voice that is championed to inform and influence our improvement activity. The Staff Reference Group meets monthly and their representation is heard at the Improvement Board.

### Evidencing Impact

To ensure that we are both increasing the pace and the impact of our improvement activity, the impact of our actions will be monitored by the Children’s Improvement Board on a monthly basis. The progress reporting will provide a rating to determine if improvement activity is on track as well as the impact it is having. Ratings will be informed by the progress reporting of activity as well as analysing quality assurance and performance reporting.

### ‘BRAG’ rating guide:

The BRAG ratings will report on the status of both the improvement activity and the overall impact and outcome of this with children, young people and their parents, carers and families. This will show the status of the activity being undertaken both in terms of its timeliness and progress as well as confirming if it is having the desired impact to deliver improved outcomes with children and young people. Details of the BRAG descriptors are as follows:

**Green** ratings will indicate when activity has started, is on track and progressing according to agreed plans.

**Amber** ratings will indicate where activity has started and although some issues have been identified these are being dealt with but are causing some delay

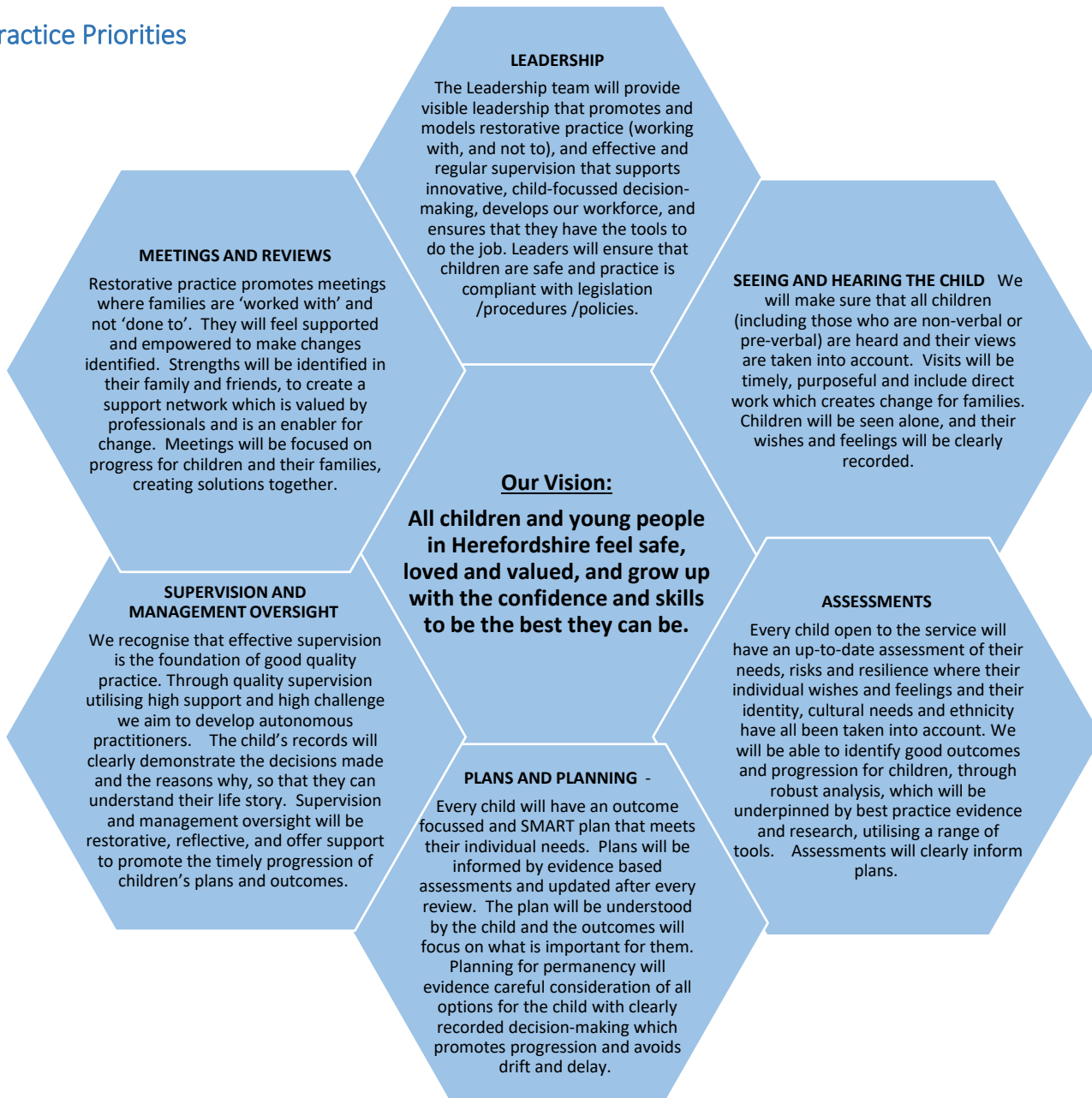
**Red** ratings indicate where activity has not started, stalled or stopped due to unresolved issues which are preventing progress, causing delay and presenting significant risks

**Blue** ratings indicate when activity has been completed according to agreed plans, and the **impact** needs to be tested to ensure the desired **outcomes** are delivered. These will require further review as part of ‘business as usual’ practice and performance arrangements.

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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## Our Practice Priorities



## Areas for Improvement

The Ofsted inspection report identifies the following nine improvement areas which provide the framework for this high level Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Plan:

1. Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.
2. The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of foster carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service.
3. The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.
4. The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need.
5. Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.
6. Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public Law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes.
7. The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation.
8. Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.
9. Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.

In addition to the nine improvements areas outlined above, the plan also includes a tenth improvement area that focuses on Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). This improvement priority has been included following a SEND Peer Review undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) in October 2022.

1: Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.

Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
1.1 Allocate additional corporate resources with dedicated project management support to strengthen strategic and operational planning for the improvement and transformation activity.	Director of Programme Management Office & Performance	October 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-inspection, Corporate Senior Responsible Officers aligned with the Transformation Programme</li> <li>Programme Management Officer resources allocated</li> <li>New Improvement Director appointed</li> </ul>	
1.2 Introduce trauma awareness training as part of the Children's Service learning and development offer for all relevant staff and members of the council so they can be signposted when appropriate.	Service Director (Improvement)	April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scoping of trauma awareness raising training options to be finalised for the end of January 2023</li> <li>Short list of potential providers identified and contacted December 2022</li> <li>Details to be included in the Social Care Academy Continual Professional Development offer for 2023/24</li> </ul>	
1.3 Re-establish the Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) to create a multi-agency/cross sector forum to develop and Early Help offer with families	Director of Public Health	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CYPP Board and Terms of Reference (TOR) completed and require ratification</li> <li>First Board meeting took place on 28.11.22</li> <li>Workshop to review CYPP Plan to be discussed with CYPP Board at the next meeting</li> <li>Board administration and support yet to be confirmed</li> </ul>	

Key	Activity Not yet due to start	Activity Started and on track	Activity Started with some issues/delay	Activity Not on track and at risk	Activity completed (impact to be tested)
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1.4 Work quickly and collaboratively with the community and voluntary sector to utilise assets and increase capacity for undertaking Early Help assessments and providing family support.	Head of Service (Early Help)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement event held and baseline position established</li> <li>World Café Events convened on 30.11.22 and 01.12.22 were well attended by 110 participants</li> <li>Next steps to be agreed in January 2023. Follow up meeting set for 9 January.</li> </ul>	
1.5 Review the work of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) and the local offer for care experienced young people, including access to education, employment and training	Head of Service (Corporate Parenting)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPB TOR and membership agreed</li> <li>Corporate Parenting Strategy under development, including refreshed offer</li> <li>Engagement with Child in Care Council to strengthen and relaunch</li> </ul>	
1.6 Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) to identify a corporate lead as a council-wide ‘champion’ for corporate parenting.	Chief Executive	September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Director (Community Wellbeing) appointed as council-wide lead.</li> </ul>	
1.7 Ensure multi-agency governance arrangements provide a clear framework for decision making and accountability, specifically in relation to the Improvement Board and the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (HSCP), but also in relation to other key partnerships.	Corporate Director for Children and Young People	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mapping process with relevant Partnership Chairs underway</li> </ul>	?
1.8 Implement a Communication Strategy so ‘Messages that Matter’ are disseminated clearly and regularly to all key stakeholders.	Service Director (Improvement)	February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial scoping of the strategy completed in accordance with the existing Corporate Communication Strategy November 2022</li> <li>Meeting with Corporate Communications Team scheduled for 05.01.23.</li> </ul>	
1.9 Launch a Leadership Pledge to communicate the purpose, values, strategy and goals for improving outcomes for local children and young people.	Corporate Director for	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft outline for consultation with Directorate Leadership Team (DLT)</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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	Children and Young People		and CLT for completion December 2022	
1.10 Ensure there are strong and effective arrangements in place to address identified concerns about multi-agency safeguarding practice/arrangements which includes escalation to the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) for swift resolution when required.	Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Independent Scrutineer	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch as part of Communication Strategy (January 2023)</li> <li>• Review of HSCP arrangements and development work approved by Executive Partnership Group.</li> <li>• Independent Scrutineer completed an assessment and presented his recommendations in November including a recommendation for a HSCP Workshop in the New Year</li> <li>• HSCP leadership development workshop for Strategic Partners Board, Sub-group Chairs and Key Partners (ESG) deferred to the new year 2023</li> </ul>	

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<b>Expected Outcomes (how we will know)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected Members and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) will take timely and necessary action, supported by accurate data that makes a difference for children and young people. (Performance data and records of decisions)</li> </ul>

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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- Multi-agency partners will hold equal responsibility and accountability for children who are identified at risk. This success will be seen in the reduction of children on repeat child protection plans and children requiring court intervention. (Performance data and quality assurance activity)
- All of those with corporate parenting responsibilities will have sufficient understanding of their role to offer robust challenge to ensure positive outcomes for children in our care and those that we have previously looked after. (Feedback)

Measures that Matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage and number of care experienced young people aged 19 – 21 in education, employment and training (higher is good)</li> <li>• Percentage and number of Early Help assessments completed by services other than the Herefordshire Council Early Help Team</li> </ul>

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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2: The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of foster carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service.

Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
2.1 Reinvigorate our Workforce Strategy, informed by a comprehensive workforce profile, by increasing our recruitment and retention activity so there is an increasingly stable, permanent, skilled and experienced workforce providing continuity of support and intervention with children, young people and families	Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft Strategy for sign off in January 2023</li> <li>Recruitment microsite launched November 2022</li> <li>Dedicated Recruitment Team established October 2022</li> <li>Workforce profile being developed to accompany the launch of the Strategy</li> </ul>	
2.2 Refresh and relaunch induction arrangements for new starters so they receive a comprehensive Herefordshire welcome, orientation and introduction to our practice priorities and ways of working with local children, young people and families	Principal Social Worker (PSW)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New permanent Principal Social Worker appointed November 2022</li> <li>Draft refresh of induction arrangements completed December 2022</li> <li>Draft ready for consultation January 2022</li> </ul>	
2.3 Develop the Academy's continuing professional development (CPD) offer and progression pathway for professionals working directly with children, young people and families to ensure it is aligned with our priorities and their learning needs.	Principal Social Worker (PSW)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Care Academy (SCA) Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Programme Quarter 4 offer refreshed to align with refreshed practice priorities, standards, and principles</li> <li>Draft Career Progression Pathway completed November 2022 and agreed December 2022</li> <li>First Progression Panels scheduled for January 2023</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2023/24 SCA CPD under review for April 2024</li> </ul>	
2.4 Review the Fostering Service capacity and capability to support Herefordshire’s foster carers and launch a new Campaign to recruit more local foster carers.	Head of Service (Fostering, Adoption & Placements)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment to build officer capacity to provide assessment and support is underway but proving challenging</li> <li>Stakeholder engagement events in early November 2022 proved very challenging</li> <li>One to one consultations with foster carer households underway and on-going by Head of Service with Foster Care whole service event scheduled for 21.11.22</li> <li>Foster Carer fees and allowances uplift approved by DLT</li> <li>Draft Foster Carer recruitment and retention strategy due end of January 2023</li> <li>Fostering Network completed Fostering Service training need analysis ready for DLT January 2023</li> </ul>	
2.5 Review our Sufficiency Strategy to increase the availability and choice of homes, including foster homes, to meet the needs of children and young people in our care	Service Director (All-Age Commissioning)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interim Commissioner appointed to review and refresh the Sufficiency Strategy</li> <li>Appraisal to scope accommodation placement options underway</li> <li>New Home Finding Team recruitment campaign undertaken and completed December 2022</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Commissioning Quality &amp; Review Team scoped December 2023</li> <li>• 903 data project scoped December 2022</li> </ul>	
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Expected Outcomes (how we will know)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce profiling data, average caseload data, and improving performance data will together evidence increased capacity to implement and achieve improvement at pace, supported by strong leadership. (Performance data)</li> <li>• Children and young people will experience minimal changes in allocated worker. (Performance data and feedback)</li> <li>• All new starters will have a meaningful induction on joining children’s services to ensure that our workforce understand what is expected of them, what support is available, and key systems and processes. (Performance data, and feedback)</li> <li>• More families will be supported to continue caring for their own children and young people where this is safe and in their best interest to do so (Performance data, and feedback)</li> <li>• More foster carers will be recruited and retained to provide local placements for local children and young people when they are unable to remain living with their own family (Performance data)</li> </ul>				

Measures that Matter				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proportion of the established workforce that is permanent (increasing and high is good).</li> <li>• Average social worker caseloads (excluding Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW)) (target range 16-20 children)</li> <li>• Number of social workers with &gt;24 children allocated (zero or low is good)</li> <li>• Number of in-house foster care households (and the number of placements offered) (increasing is good)</li> <li>• Proportion of available in-house fostering capacity utilised. (high is good)</li> </ul>				

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3: The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.

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Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
3.1 Confirm Information Sharing Protocols and issues of consent with the partnership to ensure there are no barriers to safeguarding children and young people in a timely and informed way	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership leads have met to agree resolution</li> <li>Information sharing agreements to be refreshed and relaunched</li> </ul>	
3.2 Accelerate the co-location of agencies in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to improve the multi-agency identification and response to risk	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	August 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MASH Co-location complete and operating from Plough Lane offices</li> </ul>	
3.3 Urgently refresh arrangements for identifying, assessing and responding to the needs, risks and circumstances of unborn babies in collaboration with relevant Health partners	Head of Service (MASH & Assessment)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refreshed handbook and guidance completed and agreed by Herefordshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (December 2022)</li> <li>Pre-birth pathway completed (September 2022)</li> <li>New multi-agency Panel in place (October 2022)</li> <li>Pre-birth tracker in place</li> <li>Initial audit and dip sampling completed</li> <li>Updated review of pre-birth process completed December 2022</li> </ul>	

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<p>3.4 Develop promotional material and collaborate with the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) to promote awareness about Private Fostering across Herefordshire so notifications, assessments and support are timely and responsive to need.</p>	<p>Head of Service (Fostering, Adoption &amp; Placements)</p>	<p>Feb 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update of information leaflet to raise awareness completed and signed off by HSCP December 2022</li> <li>Communication strategy, promotional campaign and learning event to be finalised January 2023</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: green;"></p>
<p>3.5 Revise and relaunch our joint protocols for safeguarding and supporting 16 and 17 year old young people who present as homeless</p>	<p>Head of Service (Corporate Parenting) / Head of Service (Strategic Housing Manager)</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft protocol between Housing and Social Care developed November 2022</li> <li>Joint issues resolution meeting convened December 2022</li> <li>Legal advice received</li> <li>Final protocol due January 2023</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: yellow;"></p>
<p>3.6 Work collaboratively with safeguarding partners to strengthen multi-agency contextual safeguarding arrangements to identify and manage risk outside of the home</p>	<p>Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)</p>	<p>April 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service Director appointed as Herefordshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Sub Group Chair (September 2022)</li> <li>Review of Terms of Reference (TOR) for Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meeting complete November 2022</li> <li>Scoping of Contextualised Safeguarding models complete October 2022</li> <li>Review of response to young people and care experienced young people undertaken October/November 2022</li> <li>Alignment with the Operation Encompass approach to missing children complete October 2022</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: green;"></p>

<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started and on track</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership briefing delivered about cross border arrangements and potential for alignment</li> <li>Sub Group recommendation for the 'Get Safe' model and 'Get Safe Plus' model to support children as victims of exploitation.</li> <li>Report to HSCP December 2022 with agreement to establish Task and Finish Project to progress arrangements</li> </ul>	
3.7	Revise and relaunch multi-agency protocols for safeguarding and supporting children and young people who go missing from home and care and improve the quality of return interviews by exploring 'push-pull' factors and using available intelligence to support effective planning.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and refresh of existing protocol to be completed for February 2023</li> <li>Exploitation Team resources have been reviewed</li> <li>Exploitation pathway reviewed and due for completed in February 2023</li> </ul>
3.8	Review, relaunch and then evaluate the impact of the multi-agency Neglect Strategy	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-launched by HSCP in October 2022 with renewed commitment established with partners</li> <li>Risks associated with delay in recruiting data analyst and confirming funding to commission Health Watch have stalled the multi-agency data set and neglect needs analysis.</li> </ul>

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**Expected Outcomes (how we will know)**

- The MASH is high performing with capacity and capability to manage the nature and level of demand and complexity so children and young people have their needs identified and responded to efficiently and effectively. (Performance data, and feedback)
- Partners work well together and in partnership with parents to safeguard children and young people in a timely and effective way so they are safe, well and able to fulfil their potential throughout their childhood and beyond. (Performance data, quality assurance activity, and feedback)
- The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership has strong and effective arrangements in place to safeguard children and young people at risk of harm from a range of different presenting circumstances (Performance data, quality assurance activity, and feedback)

**Measures that Matter**

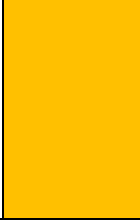

- % of child and family assessments completed within timescales (high is good)
- % of strategy meetings initiated at the right time (high is good)
- % of Initial Child Protection Conferences convened within 15 days (of the strategy discussion at which the need for child protection enquiries was agreed) (high is good)
- % of return interviews which took place within 72 hours of the missing episode ending (high is good)

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

Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
4.1 Review and refresh our Academy learning and development offer to ensure a clear focus on our practice priorities, principles and standards including practice guidance and tools.	Principal Social Worker (PSW)	April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice Principle Tools developed and design completed by Corporate Communications December 2022</li> <li>Quarter 4 of 2022/23 Social Care Academy (SCA) Continuing Professional Development Programme refreshed to incorporate Practice Development Programme ready for launch in early January 2023</li> <li>Collaboration &amp; delivery between Practice Development Leads, PSW and SCA</li> </ul>	
4.2 Develop and implement a service wide Engagement and Participation Strategy to ensure children and young people’s voices are heard and taken into consideration.	Head of Service (Corporate Parenting)	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement and Participation Strategy being developed for January 2023</li> <li>Launch of strategy due February 2023</li> </ul>	
4.3 Champion the voice of the child to take account of their views, wishes and feelings by promoting direct work skills and purposeful visiting so this remains a central feature of our engagement and relationship with them.	Principal Social Worker (PSW)	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relaunch guidance January 2023</li> <li>Develop direct practice skills workshops</li> <li>Review of direct work tools / resources completed December 2022</li> <li>Purchase of direct work tool kits for teams / services January 2023</li> </ul>	

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<p>4.4 Revise, develop and launch our practice model to emphasise the importance of relationships, respect and restorative practice for how we will work <i>with</i> children, young people and parents/carers, especially where this may not have been their experience previously.</p>	<p>Corporate Director for Children and Young People</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad agreement received to explore a restorative model</li> <li>• Proposal to promote relational practice with a restorative practice model</li> <li>• Further consultation and planning underway</li> </ul>	
<p>4.5 Strengthen quality assurance activity in accordance with the re-launch of the Quality Assurance Framework to provide robust assurance that the quality of practice is improving.</p>	<p>Service Director Improvement</p>	<p>December 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised QAF complete November 2022</li> <li>• Re-launch in December 2022</li> <li>• First monthly QAF reporting to January Improvement Board to include:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ QA highlight report</li> <li>○ QA compliance report</li> <li>○ Quality Matters summary report</li> </ul> </li> <li>• First report of 'Good' moderated audits</li> </ul>	

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<p>Expected Outcomes (how we will know)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Academy promotes and supports continuous learning and development that is evidence based, research informed and makes a demonstrable impact on improving practice. (Performance data, quality assurance activity)</li> <li>• Practitioners and managers know what is expected of them, are supported to practice confidently and capably and are increasingly more restorative in their approach which builds trust and strong relationships. (Quality assurance activity and feedback)</li> <li>• The needs of children and young people are of paramount importance, their voices are championed and they report feeling safe, well and able to meet their full potential (Quality assurance activity and feedback)</li> <li>• Practice is routinely audited against best practice standards and evidences increasingly good and better practice that improves outcomes for children and young people (quality assurance activity)</li> </ul>

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**Measures that Matter**

- Overall number and % of outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate audit grades each month

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**5: Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.**

Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
5.1 Re-launch and embed the partnership thresholds to improve awareness, understanding and application in relation to decision making across the child’s pathway from needing to receiving support, protection and care	HSCP /Corporate Director for Children and Young People / Independent Scrutineer	February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audit referral activity to analyse evidence and feedback to partners about the application of thresholds and the effective use of the Multi Agency Referral Form (MARF)</li> </ul>	
5.2 Review and address MASH social work capacity and management decision making capability to ensure there are consistent responses to concerns that evidence professional curiosity and analysis	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MASH / Assessment management addressed through appointment of interim managers</li> <li>Permanent HOS recruitment resulted in a formal offer</li> <li>Dip sampling activity demonstrates some impact and improvement</li> <li>Further improvement and embedding required</li> <li>Exit plan to BAU following further audit activity in March 2023</li> </ul>	
5.3 Review and adjust the interface between Early Help and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure robust screening arrangements with a clear and effective pathway are in place to ensure needs are addressed promptly.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refreshed guidance to clarify Early Help / MASH relationship, roles, responsibilities and expectations about decision making complete</li> <li>Step Up / Step Down audit with refreshed protocol complete</li> <li>Enhanced EH resources in place to strengthen triage and pathway to services</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further audit due July 2023</li> </ul>	
5.4 Work collaboratively with the partners to ensure there are always appropriate resources to convene child protection strategy meetings when required so these are timely, involve all relevant partners and protect children at the point they are referred and when they are already known to the service and subject to existing support, protection or care plans.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support) & Detective Superintendent, West Mercia Police	December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police action during inspection has provided additional resources and built capacity</li> <li>• Audit activity October 2022 indicated improvements in MASH / Assessment which are largely secure now</li> <li>• Audit activity October 2022 indicated delays still evident in other teams elsewhere in the service</li> </ul>	
5.5 Re-establish and strengthen multi-agency arrangements to improve safety planning and risk management arrangements whenever child protection enquiries are being undertaken.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refreshed practice guidance regarding roles, responsibilities and expectations complete</li> <li>• Safety planning audit activity to be completed December 2022</li> </ul>	
5.6 Develop a multi-agency/cross sector 'Edge of Care' offer supported by the existing Edge of Care and Home (ECHO) Team and other allied services that build on family strengths and resources so children and young people are able to remain with their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edge of Care Strategy underway and to be completed January 2023</li> <li>• Operating model and resource to be decided February 2023</li> <li>• Implementation of plans for March 2023</li> </ul>	
5.7 Develop and launch a Family Group Conference model of approach to engage, support and promote family based arrangements to address identified needs, risks and circumstances and ensure there is robust decision making for children entering care when all family options have been exhausted.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate funding and resources in January 2023</li> <li>• Determine FGC model and approach by April 2023</li> </ul>	

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<p>5.8 Take action to strengthen risk management arrangements with disabled children and young people so their additional needs, risks and circumstances are appropriately addressed.</p>	<p>Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)</p>	<p>November 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional social work Service Manager appointed into Children With a Disability team to strengthen safeguarding arrangements</li> <li>• Since the Service Manager appointment, the CWD team has stabilised with 2 members of staff did not leave, 1 other who resigned but stayed with the team on the day she was due to leave and 1 other who was not coming back after her maternity leave but is now returning in January 2023.</li> <li>• There have been 2 new staff appointed, 1 permanent and 1 agency and there are no vacancies once these 2 staff members start.</li> <li>• Caseloads are 23, higher than desired but equitable.</li> <li>• The waiting list has been halved from 18 to less than 9 months. Reducing the waiting list has increased the number of assessments to be completed for which there is a plan in place with additional monitoring and support provided by the Service Manager</li> <li>• A new Short Breaks Assessment in Mosaic is being piloted.</li> <li>• Performance meetings are being held weekly. Incorrect Mosaic performance data and workflows are being rectified</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started and on track</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team review of children’s needs, including unmet needs, completed and shared with All-Age Commissioning Team to inform sufficiency planning and engagement to build new relationships with potential providers.</li> </ul>	
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Expected Outcomes (how we will know)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thresholds are well understood and applied consistently across the partnership so children and young people are identified and have their assessed needs, risks and circumstances responded to in a timely manner so they are supported, protected and cared for. (Quality assurance activity, feedback)</li> <li>Children, young people and families are provided with the right help at the right time. (quality assurance activity, feedback)</li> <li>Safety planning and risk management arrangements engage all partners to work well together so children and young people are protected from the risk of harm. (quality assurance activity, feedback)</li> </ul>

Measures that Matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Family Group Conferences (FGC) (when established) (increasing and high is good)</li> </ul>

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6: Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children’s homes.

Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
6.1 Review all Public Law Outline (PLO) pre-proceedings and on-going care proceedings with Legal Services to establish a clear position across all teams and services and continue to track and report this on a monthly basis to achieve and maintain compliance with national standards.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review baseline position for all children subject to PLO process complete August/September 2022</li> <li>PLO process review with updated PLO pre-proceedings flow chart complete</li> <li>PLO tracker in place with monthly reporting</li> <li>New PLO Panel launched October 2022</li> </ul>	
6.2 Establish improved leadership and management oversight of PLO practice to address any drift or delay, ensure families are effectively engaged where there are concerns that may lead to court proceedings and so children receive legal protection when required.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further reviews of PLO practice and progress due February 2023 and July 2023</li> <li>Action to repair and strengthen relationship with the judiciary commenced and on-going via the court user group. To be reviewed December 2022.</li> <li>‘Learning together’ sessions focusing on the quality of Social Work Evidence Template (SWET) and collaboration with Legal Services due January 2023.</li> </ul>	
6.3 Information for families with children subject to Public Law pre-proceedings will be added to the Council’s website	Service Director (Improvement)	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Request made for links to the Family Rights Group website and information</li> </ul>	

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so that they are properly informed about Public Law pre-proceedings meetings and proceedings.			<p>pages be added to the Council's website in January 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further 'family friendly' information to be developed, shared and added to the Council's website</li> </ul>	
6.4 Increase the leadership and management oversight for any child placed in an unregistered setting and publish revised guidance for our staff to ensure there is a clear understanding of what is a placement unregulated by Ofsted and what is an unregistered placement.	Service Director (All Age Commissioning)	February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No child to be placed in any unregistered placement without the authority of the Corporate Director for Children's Services</li> <li>• Full review of the Home Finding Team underway to strengthen leadership, capacity and capability with interviews completed December 2022</li> <li>• End to end review of home finding policies, procedures and processes for January 2023</li> <li>• Revised guidance to be issued February 2023</li> </ul>	
6.5 Revise the Permanence Policy and Procedures to achieve legal, emotional and placement permanence with children and young people as soon as possible.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping of practice, policy and procedures underway by Permanence Champion with draft due February 2023</li> </ul>	
6.6 Develop and implement a reunification framework to assess and support children and young people who are able to return home to the care of their parents/families when it is safe and in their best interest to do so.	Service Director (Improvement)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping of framework completed</li> <li>• Draft framework completed for consultation and branding by Corporate Communications December 2022</li> </ul>	

Expected Outcomes (how we will know)

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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- Parents with children subject to PLO pre-proceedings are helped to appreciate the concerns about their parenting and supported to make changes in a timely manner so their children remain safe and well g and Family Support for so that care proceedings are not necessary. (quality assurance activity, feedback)
- Families are encouraged and supported to come together to explore opportunities, problem solve, plan and makes decisions that promote family based solutions to address identified concerns for children and young people. (Performance data, feedback)
- Where parenting concerns persist and children continue to be at risk of significant harm they will be safeguarded and legally protected so that alternative permanent care can be achieved in a timely manner. (Performance data, quality assurance activity)
- Plans are reviewed over time to make sure that if and when circumstances change there are opportunities for children and young people to return to the care of their parents and family, so long as this is safe and is in their best interest (Performance activity, quality assurance data)

Measures that Matter

- % of children for whom PLO pre-proceedings were completed within 16 weeks (Rolling Year)
- Number of children in unregistered provision, including where the Corporate Director’s oversight and decision is recorded on the child’s record
- Number of children subject to Deprivation of Liberty (DoL) including the % of these children where DoL has been in place for 6 months or more

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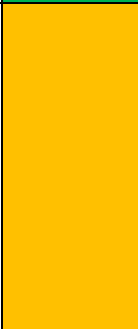
7: The availability of support and services to meet children and young people’s needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation.

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Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
7.1 Work with the Director of Public Health and with the Integrated Care Board to review the availability, accessibility and quality of support in Herefordshire to provide services that make a difference for children and young people in need of support, protection and care	Corporate Director Children and Young People / Director of Public Health	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership mapping of health provision underway and to be completed December 2022</li> <li>Thereafter to agree partnership governance for addressing and prioritising support needs</li> <li>Partnership workshop scheduled for January 2023</li> </ul>	
7.2 Complete a partnership mapping exercise to establish the availability of local services and publish this with clear pathways to ensure children and young people in care and preparing to leave care are supported to access timely and appropriate multi-agency support and, where identified, address any gaps.	Head of Service (Corporate Parenting)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Parenting Board has convened and agreed partnership contributions October 2022</li> <li>Review of Care Leaver’s Offer underway and to report in December 2022</li> <li>All care experienced young people will have an up to date Pathway Plan by March 2023 to take account of the refreshed Offer</li> </ul>	

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<p>7.3 Ensure there is sufficient support and provision in place to meet the demand for high quality life story work with children and young people</p>	<p>Service Director (Improvement)</p>	<p>July 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life story best practice guidance under development for end of January 2023</li> <li>• Newly appointed Principal Social Worker (PSW) to champion implementation of best practice guidance</li> <li>• Scope of resource options to address legacy, current and new demands for April 2023</li> </ul>	
<p>7.4 Review, refresh and publish our Sufficiency Strategy to increase the choice and availability of suitable accommodation for children and young people.</p>	<p>Service Director (All Age Commissioning)</p>	<p>July 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist commissioner appointed to refresh the Sufficiency Strategy</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> review complete October 2022</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> draft complete and presented to DLT &amp; Commissioning &amp; Resources Board December 2022.</li> <li>• Recommendations to include SEND and transition to Adult Services to reflect the continuum of need</li> <li>• Further draft due end of January 2023</li> </ul>	
<p>7.5 Ensure that care experienced young people are provided with their health histories with all the essential information they need to become an independent young adult.</p>	<p>Head of Service (Corporate Parenting)</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaison with Designated / Named Health leads for care experienced young people</li> <li>• Consultation with care experienced young people</li> <li>• Sample health history to be developed February 2023 for all new care leavers</li> <li>• Agree model of implementation</li> </ul>	

Expected Outcomes (how we will know)

<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started and on track</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)</p>
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- Children and young people in need of support, protection and care have a range of suitable therapeutic, emotional and mental health support services and receive priority access so their needs can be assessed and supported without delay. (Performance data, quality assurance activity, feedback)
- The partnership is increasingly knowledgeable, skilled and experienced at working together to identify the range of local services and pathways so children and young people receive prompt support that addresses their needs effectively. (Quality assurance activity, feedback)
- The choice and number of available accommodation is suitable to meet the assessed needs of young people so they are settled and secure. (Performance data, quality assurance activity)

Measures that Matter

- % of children in care with an up-to-date initial health assessment
- % of children in care with an up-to-date dental check
- % and number of children in care for 6 months or longer who have a life-story book
- % and number of care leavers aged 19 -21 who live in suitable accommodation




<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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8: Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.

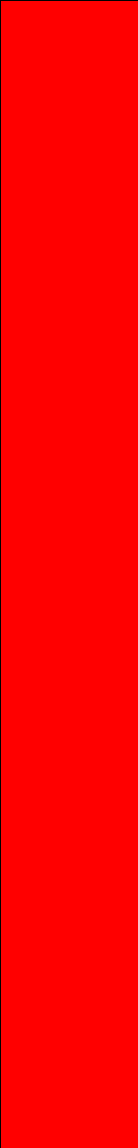
Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
8.1 Review the structure of the Directorate Leadership Team and the Heads of Service Group to ensure there is sufficient capacity and capability to lead and manage the service.	Corporate Director for Children and Young People	October 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structure reviewed and recruited to with interim Heads of Service.</li> </ul>	
8.2 Review supervision and management oversight to ensure it is regular, reflective and well recorded so those working directly with children, young people and families receive clear direction and support.	Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervision audit of 70 records completed December 2022 – findings and proposals to support review of policy completed</li> <li>Audit summary with options appraisal for 1:1 supervision model proposed to inform review and refresh of Supervision Policy - December 2022</li> <li>Preferred option recommended as 4' x 4 x 4 mode' by Tony Morrison (2005)</li> <li>Plan to introduce a 1:1 supervision model that reflects the key principles of good practice that make a difference, holds relationships at the central and where critical reflection underpins helpful discussions.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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<p>8.3 Introduce a reflective case discussion model of group supervision to create emotionally informed thinking and promote respectful uncertainty and healthy scepticism.</p>	<p>Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)</p>	<p>July 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit completed (as above, December 2022) – audit summary and options appraisal for group supervision model proposed to inform review and refresh of Supervision Policy – December 2022</li> <li>• Preferred option recommended as ‘Reflective Case Discussion model of Group Supervision’ by Professor Gillian Ruch</li> <li>• Plan to introduce a reflective case discussion model</li> </ul>	
<p>8.4 Review and adjust where required the service structure and pathways to ensure these are clear, responsive and support practice and service delivery.</p>	<p>Service Director (Improvement)</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End to end service review of the child’s pathway through the service to streamline and rationalise internal transitions and hand offs</li> <li>• ‘Walk through’ Workshop being planned for February 2023</li> <li>• Use the above to address the systems review of MOSAIC (recording software system) to support clear workflows (see 9.3 below)</li> </ul>	
<p>8.5 Review and relaunch policies and procedures on tri.x (commissioned company) to ensure these are up to date and fit for purpose.</p>	<p>Policy &amp; Procedures Lead</p>	<p>April 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of interim lead completed October 2022</li> <li>• Review of tri.x local procedures completed November 2022</li> <li>• Detailed programme of remedial action underway November 2022</li> <li>• Detailed work with individual Heads of Service and Lead Officer underway</li> <li>• Business as usual (BAU) updating and review to be established for April 2023</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started and on track</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)</p>
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<p>8.6 Re-launch the Independent Reviewing Officer Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP) to address the needs of children where there are concerns</p>	<p>Head of Service (Safeguarding &amp; Review)</p>	<p>December 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revision of DRP scheduled for week commencing 09.01.23. Activity being progressed by newly appointed Heads of Service for Safeguarding and Review and Quality Assurance - deadline but should be for February 2023</li> <li>• Meeting with Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs scheduled for 10.01.23 to review the current process and its impact.</li> <li>• Review of current / outstanding DRPs underway with introduction of a new escalations tracker and monthly impact report</li> <li>• Audit of children subject to Child Protection Plans for children aged 15 to 17 and for children with a repeat Child Protection Plan within the last 2 years to consider use of DRP, where appropriate</li> <li>• Activity to increase the IRO and CP Chair 'footprint' on children's records, including through increasing the use of DRPs, being promoted via team meetings and supervision.</li> <li>• Training and support to be provided to the IROs, CP Chairs and operational teams/services to launch and embed the revised DRP.</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started and on track</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)</p>
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Expected Outcomes (how we will know)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The workforce is sufficient, stable, skilled and experienced to lead, manage and respond to the nature and level of service demands so practice and performance improves, is in line with established best practice standards and in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance. (Performance data)</li> <li>• Supervision routinely provides high quality management, development, support and mediation to ensure children and young people receive the best support possible and staff have the knowledge, skills and support they need to undertake their role confidently and competently. (Performance data, quality assurance activity, feedback)</li> <li>• The service structure and pathways are enablers to achieving good outcomes with children and young people and support staff to undertake their role efficiently and effectively. (Quality assurance activity, feedback)</li> <li>• As an employer of choice, the conditions within which staff are undertaking their roles, and the resources that are available to them, in Herefordshire are conducive to supporting and promoting consistently good quality practice and performance. (feedback)</li> </ul>

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Measures that Matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of allocated children who have an up-to-date (within the past month) supervision completed on their record</li> <li>• Number and % of concerns raised and resolved at stage one of the Dispute Resolution Protocol</li> <li>• The number of unallocated cases in the service (snapshot at month end)</li> </ul>

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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**9: Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.**

Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
9.1 Launch and publish a revised Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) that will test practice by analysing all available evidence, including practice performance and improvement activity, and take into account what relevant stakeholders, including children, young people and parents/carers, are telling us.	Service Director (Improvement)	December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refresh of the QAF has been completed November 2022 with DLT sign off</li> <li>Formatting and design underway December 2022</li> <li>Ready for publication and launch January 2023 with schedule of QA activity and corresponding processes for auditing and review</li> <li>First monthly QA reporting completed for presentation to the Improvement Board January 2023, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlight report</li> <li>Compliance report</li> <li>'Quality Matters' summary</li> </ul> </li> <li>Of note, first moderated audits reporting 'Good' grades</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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<p>9.2 Decide on a performance reporting framework and deliver a timely and accurate monthly performance and management data report with analysis to support management and drive improvement</p>	<p>Corporate Director for Children and Young People</p>	<p>January 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance reporting framework agreed and being built for December 2022</li> <li>• Regular monthly reporting due for January / February 2023</li> <li>• First monthly Performance reporting for presentation to Improvement Board January 2023, including Measures that Matter</li> </ul>	
<p>9.3 Review and address the MOSAIC system changes to ensure it is fit for purpose, user friendly and supports the service’s workflow and reporting requirements</p>	<p>Corporate Director Children and Young People</p>	<p>July 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope of preliminary issues completed with timeline of 9 months to complete the required changes but ideally this needs to be prioritised and completed sooner</li> <li>• To date new Contact and Referral forms and the MASH workflow has been designed, tested and implemented in the live Mosaic system</li> <li>• Impact to date means that the service is now able to RAG rate contacts and this ensures a more proportionate approach and the new contact and referral forms in Mosaic are reported to be more user-friendly.</li> <li>• Next steps are now underway to replace the forms and pathways in the assessment area, including the assessment template, the significant events on an open case forms, the way visits are captured etc. These forms will be redesigned, tested and made live by the end of February 2023.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started and on track</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk</p>	<p><b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)</p>
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9.4 Develop and launch refreshed recording standards setting out clear expectations about what good quality children’s records and reports look like and including ‘Language that Cares’ guidance used with and about children and young people is appropriate	Service Director (Improvement)	March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope of good recording standards being clarified November 2022</li> <li>• Draft of refreshed recording standards underway</li> </ul>	
9.5 Work collaboratively with other agencies across the safeguarding partnership to develop and publish a quarterly multi-agency data set to safeguard children and young people.	Herefordshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership / Independent Scrutineer	April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope of partnership data hub being developed with HSCP but stalled due to recruitment of analyst</li> </ul>	

Expected Outcomes (how we will know)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality assurance and performance frameworks and the system that supports them are robust, reliable and routinely provide evidence and analysis to support and drive continuous improvement and assurance. (Performance data, quality assurance activity)</li> <li>• The day to day management of operational practice and performance is supported by quantitative data, information and intelligence that is readily available and easy to access so practitioners and managers have a clear view and appreciation of what this shows and what it means for them and the children, young people and families they are supporting at an individual, team and service level. (quality assurance activity, feedback)</li> <li>• The focus, findings and follow up to quality assurance activity provides a shared narrative based on qualitative evidence of what the service has done, how well it has done it and what is required to address recommendations and remedial action to improve outcomes for children and young people (Performance data, quality assurance activity)</li> </ul>	

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- The partnership achieves and maintains a shared appreciation of quantitative and qualitative data, information and intelligence to fulfil its statutory functions to assess the effectiveness of help being provided to children and families, whether partners are fulfilling their obligations, assure the quality of joint practice and identify lessons, as well as monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of training.

Measures that Matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and % of children’s file audits completed each month by Managers, Child Protection Conference Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers</li> <li>• Number and % of children’s file audits moderated each month by senior leaders (Heads of Service, Service Directors and Corporate Director).</li> <li>• Number of outstanding priority actions on the audit tracker following an inadequate audit outcome where concerns were escalated about the likelihood of significant harm (zero or low is good)</li> </ul>

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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10: Services to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and / or a Disability (SEND)

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Action	Lead	Deadline	Progress	BRAG
10.1 Relaunch the revised Special Education Needs and / or disability (SEND) Strategy across the local area, with co-production at the heart	Service Director (Education, Skills and Learning)	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working party met and agreed changes in October 2022</li> <li>Draft Self Evaluation completed and aligned to the new Ofsted framework published in December 2022</li> <li>Draft strategy prepared to share with newly formed SEND Strategic Board in mid-January 2023</li> <li>Draft Delivery Plan also completed to share with the newly formed SEND Strategic Board</li> </ul>	
10.2 Establish the SEND Strategy Board with appropriate representation from each sector to provide strategic oversight and direction for improvement.	Corporate Director for Children and Young People	December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership agreed and first meeting set for January 2023</li> <li>SEND dashboard under development, education indicators complete and awaiting contribution from Health</li> <li>Director now in receipt of monthly performance reports relating to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EHC timeliness</li> <li>EHE pupils</li> <li>SEND placement information</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
10.3 Strengthen the SEND Partnership Group with current participants from the strategy group.	Service Director (Education, Skills and Learning)	November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership has met and has full representation</li> <li>Chairing now by Service Director</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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10.4 Review the graduated response with a focus on early identification of support for children and young people with SEND.	Service Director (Education, Skills and Learning)	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working party established and agreed course of action.</li> <li>Draft to be presented to partnership group in the autumn term</li> </ul>	
10.5 Review the Education, Health and Care (EHC) planning process and establish a procedure with a clear pathway that is understood by all so all Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are within timescale, high quality and include contributions from all partners	Service Director (Education, Skills and Learning)	Spring 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SD and data analyst have strengthened tracking information templates</li> <li>Working party established to formulate an EHC procedure that can be circulated to all parties. Procedure to be agreed by December 2022</li> <li>EHC timeliness is accelerating and above West Midlands and National averages.</li> <li>Workshop with paediatricians completed to ensure health outcomes capture the voice of the child November 2022</li> <li>Rolling workshop programme to be offered to social care practitioners to ensure care outcomes are reflecting child's views</li> </ul>	
10.6 Develop a Preparing for Adulthood Strategy for young people with additional needs to receive timely and well-coordinated transitional arrangements and support.	Service Director (Education, Skills and Learning)	December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marches Careers Hub has launched Inclusion Community of Practice (COP) events for careers leads to support the careers education agenda for young people with SEND within local schools</li> <li>A draft guide document for the website has been produced – graphics and final version needs to be agreed. First COP event 6 October 2022</li> </ul>	

<b>Key</b>	<b>Activity</b> Not yet due to start	<b>Activity</b> Started and on track	<b>Activity</b> Started with some issues/delay	<b>Activity</b> Not on track and at risk	<b>Activity</b> completed (impact to be tested)
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**Expected Outcomes (how we will know)**

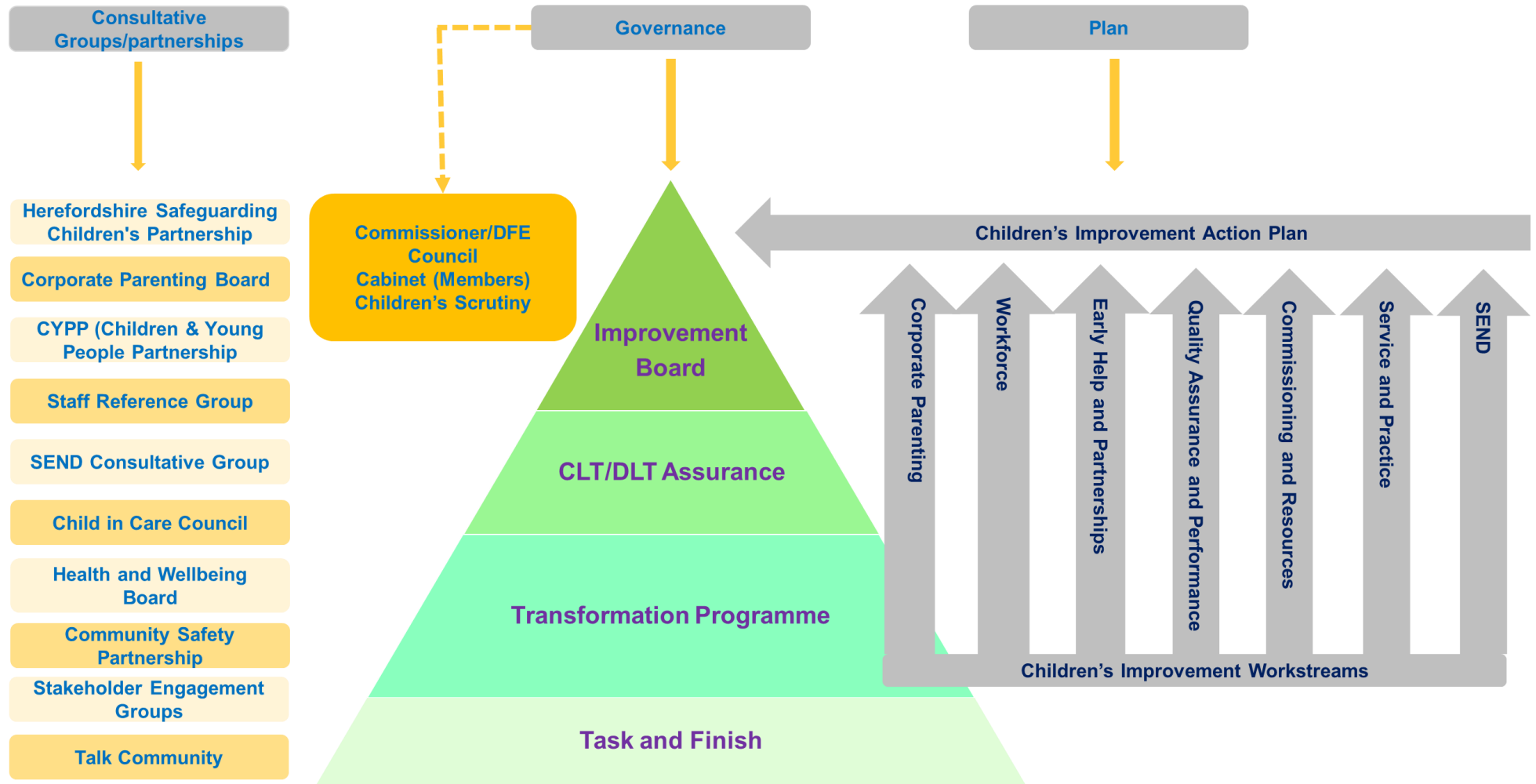
- SEND Strategy is shared publically and with all stakeholders; Strategy widely supported and used to shape/complement other areas of work supporting children and young people. (feedback)
- Data dashboard in place and all partners/service providers provide timely and accurate information; Each sector has a clear data matrix which defines the specific measures being used to evaluate individual success of the strategy
- Pathways identified on the Local Offer and can be easily found and understood by families and young people. (Feedback)
- Graduated approach co-produced and published
- Phase transfers are completed within statutory timescales ensuring that children / young people have an updated Education, Health and Care Plans for their next setting and parents are assured where their child / young person will be attending.(Performance data, quality assurance activity, feedback)
- There is an increase in the proportion of Education, Health and Care Plans published within statutory timescales. (Performance data)

**Measures that Matter**

- Ratings of EHCPs under Quality Assurance process (agreed QA process)
- Timeliness of health and social care assessments (completing / updating EHCPs) (to be covered in new performance report)
- Timeliness of EHC plan issue (90% of plans are issued within statutory timeframes, in January 2023 at 70% which is above the national and West Midlands average)
- Timeliness of EHC annual review process (90% EHC planned phase transfers and annual reviews are completed on time – in January 2023 on track for March 2023 to review all Year 6 and 11 pupils with SEND due to have a school transfer)

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### Appendix A – Herefordshire Children’s Services Improvement Plan Governance



## Appendix B - Glossary of Roles with Names:

Chief Executive	Paul Walker
Corporate Director for Children and Young People	Darryl Freeman
Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development	Tracey Sampson
Head of Chief Executive's Office	Joni Hughes
Director of Public Health	Matt Pearce
Detective Superintendent, West Mercia Police	Jon Roberts
Head of Service (Corporate Parenting)	Julie Mephram
Head of Service (Early Help)	Nicky Turvey
Head of Service (Fostering, Adoption & Placements)	Robina Khan
Head of Service (MASH & Assessment)	Denyse Ratcliffe
Head of Service (Strategic Housing Manager)	Hayley Craine
Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Independent Scrutineer	Kevin Crompton
Policy and Procedures Lead	Michael Nugent
Principal Social Worker	Kerry Oddy
Service Director (All-Age Commissioning)	Ewen Archibald
Service Director (Education, Skills and Learning)	Liz Farr
Service Director (Improvement)	Gail Hancock
Service Director (Safeguarding and Family Support)	Rachel Gillott





# Improving Outcomes for Children in Herefordshire

Issue 3 – January 2023

Update from Chair and DfE Improvement Advisor, Gladys Rhodes White OBE



Hello everyone,

The Improvement Board met for this first time this year on Wednesday 11 January, and it was a positive meeting. As always our multi-agency partners and our Children's Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil attended the meeting.

Through everyone's hard work we are beginning to see the early signs of improvement in Herefordshire Children's Services. It feels like we now have a much better infrastructure in place in line with the improvement plan, and although this news is encouraging, we will not rest on our laurels and will be continuing to build on this progress at pace.

The journey to creating a robust quality assurance framework has been extremely tough but we are now confident that we have a good set of performance measures in place. We have a number of critical 'measures that matter' which we will use to benchmark and track our progress, along with the invaluable qualitative evidence we receive. We are beginning to have much more confidence in our data, which brings more clarity to our improvement work and allows us to drill down and look closer at practice. This information will help us to focus on areas where there are issues that need to be addressed. It will also highlight the things that we need to be better at, such as regular visits to families, better capturing children's experiences and completing assessments in a timely way. These are measures that we know impact on our ability to ensure children and young people have better outcomes.

We will continue to push for the completion of agreed audit reports, as the information they provide is important to our improvement journey. Unfortunately we are still receiving some inadequate audits but having more insight enables us to recognise good practice where quality work is being carried out and we can also identify the teams that are working below standard and support them to improve their practice. We will also be looking at partner reports at future board meetings to see the progress of the multi-agency audit work.

I know there are some issues with some partners, including schools, not receiving copies of minutes and actions from critical meetings. We will be doing some work to tighten up on our processes. This will ensure essential information is cascaded promptly with those that require it.

I've also been made aware that the trauma informed training has been well received and there has been a request for the training to be extended across the partnership, so we will look at this for the future.

## **Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Plan**

The revised [Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Plan](#) was approved by the [council's cabinet on 15 December 2022](#) and was submitted to Ofsted on 20 December 2022.

### **Progress reports**

The first improvement 'progress update' report was presented at the board and the statistics are showing that we are moving in the right direction. The summary report shows that we need to look at the partnership priorities. We have a long way to go to resolve our acute recruitment and retention difficulties, and there are discussions arranged to look at these issues. We are also still receiving a high level of referrals compared to our partner local authorities and too many that do not convert into assessments or interventions.

### **'Jack's' referral to Herefordshire Children's Services**

During the meeting we were delighted to hear from a small number of colleagues who presented a storyboard, which laid out the journey of 'Jack'.\* Jack was referred to Herefordshire Children's Services following concerns about his care as a new born and the board heard about the actions that followed. The story was a great example of good practice and agencies working proactively together to provide the best support possible for Mum and baby. On behalf of the board I would like to thank Alison Barraclough and Tanisha Freeman from Herefordshire Council's, Children's Services, Assessment Team 2, and to Amy Tootel, Specialist Nurse Advisor at Wye Valley Trust and Charlotte Yeomans from West Mercia Police, for presenting the storyboard. I know that it's not easy to speak to a group but these colleagues did a fabulous job of bringing Jack's story to life and it was really well received by members of the board. It was great to hear that there's been a huge improvement in multi-agencies working together but we will not stop there and we will continue the progress with our partnership working.

We will be inviting other teams along to our future meetings to showcase some of the excellent work that goes on across the partner agencies, and as a reminder of why it's so important that we continue to improve our practices to protect vulnerable children, young people and their families.

*\*We have referred to the baby in the story as 'Jack' to protect the identity of mother and child.*

### **Staff Reference Group**

We've opened up the staff reference group so that anyone can now attend and it's working really well. The dates and times of the meetings are being rotated and they are now available as hybrid meetings (face to face and online), making it easier for staff to take part.

### **Work Locations**

Herefordshire children's services staff presence has greatly improved and currently no staff work from solely from home. However, we do need to discuss locality working at future meetings to ensure staff are working effectively and offering the best service possible to children and families across the county.

### **Next Improvement Board**

Following a discussion about the frequency of the meetings they will now change to 6 weekly meetings. This decision has been made to ease the pressure on officers and allow them to have more time to get on with their work.

The next Improvement Board will be on Wednesday 1 March and will take place in the afternoon. The time and venue will be confirmed as soon as possible. This will be a face-to-face meeting with an option to join us virtually for those who can't make the meeting in person. We do encourage attendance as the informal networking that happens before and after the meeting is always valuable.

**Thank you for your contribution to keeping children safe and improving their outcomes.**



## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Information Requests Tracking Report 2022-23

### Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 11th October 2022

Subject & Date	Information Request	Department Responsible	Response	status	Date updated
<p>Inspection of Herefordshire Children's Services</p> <p>CYPSC 11th October 2022</p>	(a) A copy of the Children and Young People directorate Risk Register.	Corporate Director for Children and Young People	<i>Response pending.</i>		2/11/22
<p>Inspection of Herefordshire Children's Services</p> <p>CYPSC 11th October 2022</p>	(b) Clarification from the Monitoring Officer regarding what access social workers have to expert legal advice to embed quality in social work practice.	Governance and Law, Corporate Services	<p>“Social workers at Herefordshire Council have access to expert legal advice at all times. The Children’s Legal team promote an “open door” policy and have fostered positive working relationships with the service so they are seen as a supportive and approachable legal service.</p> <p>During office hours, the Children’s legal team operates a duty system; this enables social workers to email their legal queries direct to a specific mailbox. This inbox is monitored by a senior member of the legal team and every day a different member of the legal team is “on duty”. If a query is more urgent and requires a phone call for immediate advice, there is a dedicated duty number for social workers to call. The legal team are also available to convene urgent legal planning meetings as appropriate.</p> <p>Presently there are two Heads of Law and three Senior solicitors in the Childcare legal team. This ensures that there is a senior and experienced lawyer available to social workers at all times,. Furthermore, if an issue is complex, and requires a piece of specialist legal advice, a senior member of the team would seek counsel’s opinion. This culture of seeking a second opinion is promoted within the legal team, and is supported by a protocol which requires a second legal opinion to be sought as and when required.</p>		2/11/22

			Furthermore, outside of normal office hours (during the evenings, at weekends and bank holidays), an out of hours legal service is provided by Weightmans solicitors, meaning social workers working outside of hours have the same opportunity to access expert legal advice when necessary”.		
Inspection of Herefordshire Children's Services  CYPSC 11th October 2022	(c) A workforce profile for Herefordshire to benchmark against other local authorities the level of staff churn and the proportion of permanent and interim staff working in social care.	Corporate Director for Children and Young People	<i>Response pending.</i>		2/11/22

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 26 July 2022

<b>Subject &amp; Date</b>	<b>Information Request</b>	<b>Department Responsible</b>	<b>Response</b>	<i>status</i>	<i>Date updated</i>
Children's Social Care and Early Help Improvement Plan 2022-2024  CYPSC 26 July 2022	Baseline key performance measures to enable the Committee to scrutinise delivery of the Improvement Plan be prepared by the Children's Services department for the next meeting.	Corporate Director for Children and Young People	<i>The baseline key performance measures to enable the scrutiny committee to scrutinise delivery of the Improvement Plan are anticipated to be included or derived from the Children's Services Improvement Plan report to be considered by the committee on 13th December 2022. Thereafter the Key Measures are proposed to be included on the revised committee work plan.</i>		2/11/22

Key

Items marked with a tick ✓ are marked “completed”. Once items have been agreed as completed by the committee they may be removed from future updated versions of the tracker table.

## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2022-2023

Agreed by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 13th December 2022. *To be agreed, as amended by the committee on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023*

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Agenda item	Cabinet Member/s	Officers	External Witnesses
<p><b>Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - Autism provision and nurture hubs</b>                      To consider the provision offered for children with autism, within the context of the wider services for SEND in Herefordshire, service developments and any new Government directives, any new Government Guidance, key challenges facing SEND services more broadly and the preparedness of this service for a potential external inspection or review.</p>	<p>Councillor Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>	
<p><b>Social Care Recruitment and Retention</b>                      To consider Social Care Recruitment and Retention.</p>	<p>Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>	

<b>Children's Social Care Improvement Plan 2022-2024 - Key measures</b>	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People	
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**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Cabinet Member/s</b>	<b>Officers</b>	<b>External Witnesses</b>
<b>Inspection of Herefordshire Children's Services</b>  To receive the recently published report detailing the findings of the inspection by Ofsted inspectors of Herefordshire Council children's services in July 2022 and to consider the action taken immediately and since the inspection to address some of the concerns raised, and the implications of the Statutory Direction issued by the Secretary of State.	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People	



Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Agenda item	Cabinet Member/s	Officers	External Witnesses
<p><b>Corporate Parenting</b> To consider the Council’s Corporate Parenting Strategy, the plans for the review of the Strategy in 2023 and opportunities for policy review and development of the strategy with any recommendations to the Cabinet.</p> <p><a href="http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/21412/achieving-the-best-for-our-children-herefordshire-s-corporate-parenting-strategy-2020-23">www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/21412/achieving-the-best-for-our-children-herefordshire-s-corporate-parenting-strategy-2020-23</a></p> <p><i>Reports deadline: 2nd December 2022</i></p>	<p>Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>	<p>Liz Murphy - Independent Chair of Herefordshire Safeguarding Partnership</p>
<p><b>Children’s Services Improvement Plan</b> To consider the revised Draft Children’s Services Improvement Plan.</p> <p><i>Reports deadline: 2nd December 2022</i></p>	<p>Children’s Services Improvement Plan – Implementation Review Update (Key Measures)</p>	<p>Children’s Services Improvement Plan – Implementation Review Update (Key Measures)</p>	<p>Children’s Services Improvement Plan – Implementation Review Update (Key Measures)</p>
<p><b>Herefordshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership</b> To consider the Annual Report of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (MASA).</p> <p><i>Reports deadline: 2nd December 2022</i></p>	<p>Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>	<p>Liz Murphy - Independent Chair of Herefordshire Safeguarding Partnership</p>

		Head of Service Safeguarding and Review, Children and Young People	
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**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Cabinet Member/s</b>	<b>Officers</b>	<b>External Witnesses</b>
<p><b>SEND Strategy</b></p> <p>To consider Herefordshire Council Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Reports deadline: 2 February 2022</i></p>	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p> <p>Liz Farr - Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning</p> <p>Les Knight – Head of Additional Needs</p>	<p>The National Autistic Society (NAS)</p> <p><a href="https://nas-herefordshire.co.uk/">https://nas- herefordshire.co. uk/</a></p>
<b>SEND – Results of LGA Peer Review &amp; preparedness for a SEND inspection</b>	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director,	The National Autistic Society (NAS)

<p>To consider Results of LGA Peer Review &amp; preparedness for a inspection Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Reports deadline: 2 February 2022</i></p>		<p>Children and Young People</p> <p>Knight, Les – Head of Additional Needs</p>	<p><a href="https://nas-herefordshire.co.uk/">https://nas-herefordshire.co.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>Herefordshire Council - Children's Wellbeing Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021/2022</b> To consider the Herefordshire Council - Children's Wellbeing Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2021/2022.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Reports deadline: 2 February 2022</i></p>	<p>Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p> <p>Head of Service Safeguarding and Review, Children and Young People</p>	<p>Liz Murphy - Independent Chair of Herefordshire Safeguarding Partnership</p>
<p><b>Children's Improvement Plan Transformation Funding</b> To consider Children's Improvement Plan Transformation Funding.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Reports deadline: 2 February 2022</i></p>	<p>Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>	
<p><b>Children's Services Improvement Plan – Implementation Review Update (Key Measures)</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Reports deadline: 2 February 2022</i></p>	<p>Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families</p>	<p>Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>	

<b>June 2023</b>			
<b>Provisional Agenda Items</b>			
Improvement Plan key measure dashboard scrutiny of the data by each of the 10 Ofsted improvement areas to ascertain progress of the improvement plan against objectives	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People	
Partner engagement process: a. Engagement model b. Key partners targeted c. Feedback from them on progress	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People	
<b>August 2023</b>			
<b>Provisional Agenda Items</b>			
SEND update on the strategy progress	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People	
Youth Justice annual report	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director, Children and Young People	
In depth scrutiny of progress on one of the Ofsted areas of improvement: Health pathways	Diana Toynbee – Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Freeman, Darryl - Corporate Director,	

		Children and Young People	
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Work for the current committee to complete before end of the business year and not in public meetings:

- Consider the answers to the CYPSC questions on the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Annual Report feedback from the Independent Scrutineer to produce a committee report with any recommendations for Cabinet to consider
- Respond to the summary Child on Child CSO report independent review with any comment
- Work with officers to develop and implement before the end of the current business year, a CYPSC member portal of trainings, reports, glossary of terms, a services organogram and other important information agreed as being necessary as an essential resource for members of the new CYPSC committee to get up to steam on committee work and be equipped to scrutinise children's services effectively

Reserve Items

1. Fostering (and Adoption) Services
2. Family Group Conferences/Family Advocacy Services
3. Signs of Safety
4. Adoption Central England (ACE) report
5. Pastoral Care in Schools.
6. All Ages Commissioning - To consider Herefordshire Council all ages social care commissioning strategy.
7. Placement Sufficiency - To consider the Council's strategies for ensuring sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after.

8. Herefordshire Council Strategy to Safely Reduce Numbers of Children in Care. To consider the Council's strategy to safely reduce the number of children in care.
9. Proposed Education Legislation (the Education White Paper) - To consider the planned legislative proposals for Education and its impact on local authorities roles in supporting education, multi-academy trusts, school placements planning and schools improvement. MOVED TO LONG LIST from 22nd Nov 2022.
10. Electively Home Educated Children/Children Missing Education. - To consider electively home educated children and children missing education in Herefordshire. MOVED TO LONG LIST from 10th January 2023.
11. Child Exploitation. - To consider Herefordshire Child Exploitation and prevention strategies.