

Agenda

Cabinet

Date: **Thursday 19 December 2024**

Time: **2.30 pm**

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

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

For any further information please contact:

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Agenda for the meeting of Cabinet

Membership

Chairperson Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council
Vice-Chairperson Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council

Councillor Graham Biggs
Councillor Harry Bramer
Councillor Clare Davies
Councillor Barry Durkin
Councillor Carole Gandy
Councillor Ivan Powell
Councillor Philip Price
Councillor Pete Stoddart

Agenda

		Pages
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive any apologies for absence.	
2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive declarations of interests in respect of Table A, Table B or Other Interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.	
3.	MINUTES To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2024.	11 - 24
HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS		
<i>The deadline for submission of questions for this meeting is:</i>		
<i>5pm on Friday 13 December 2024.</i>		
<i>Questions must be submitted to councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk. Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted.</i>		
<i>Accepted questions and the response to them will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved</i>		
4.	QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC To receive questions from members of the public.	
5.	QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS To receive questions from councillors.	
6.	REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES No scrutiny reports have been received.	
7.	CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY To approve the corporate parenting strategy 2025-2027.	25 - 60
8.	OFSTED MONITORING VISIT FEEDBACK To share the feedback letter from Ofsted following their fifth Monitoring Visit conducted on 22 - 23 October 2024	61 - 70

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- 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.
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<http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1597/hereford-city-bus-map-local-services->

Guide to Cabinet

The Executive or Cabinet of the Herefordshire Council consists of a Leader and Deputy Leader and seven other Cabinet Members each with their own individual programme area responsibilities. The current Cabinet membership is:

Cllr Jonathan Lester (Leader)	Corporate Strategy and Budget
Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst (Deputy Leader)	Environment
Cllr Ivan Powell	Children and Young People
Cllr Harry Bramer	Community Services and Assets
Cllr Pete Stoddart	Finance and Corporate Services
Cllr Carole Gandy	Adults, Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Graham Biggs	Economy and Growth
Cllr Barry Durkin	Roads and Regulatory Services
Cllr Philip Price	Transport and Infrastructure

The Cabinet's roles are:

- To consider the overall management and direction of the Council. Directed by the Leader of the Council, it will work with senior managers to ensure the policies of Herefordshire are clear and carried through effectively;
- To propose to Council a strategic policy framework and individual strategic policies;
- To identify priorities and recommend them to Council;
- To propose to Council the Council's budget and levels of Council Tax;
- To give guidance in relation to: policy co-ordination; implementation of policy; management of the Council; senior employees in relation to day to day implementation issues;
- To receive reports from Cabinet Members on significant matters requiring consideration and proposals for new or amended policies and initiatives;
- To consider and determine policy issues within the policy framework covering more than one programme area and issues relating to the implementation of the outcomes of monitoring reviews.

Who attends cabinet meetings?

- Members of the cabinet, including the leader of the council and deputy leader – these are the decision makers, only members of the cabinet can vote on recommendations put to the meeting.
- Officers of the council – attend to present reports and give technical advice to cabinet members
- Chairpersons of scrutiny committees – attend to present the views of their committee if it has considered the item under discussion
- Political group leaders attend to present the views of their political group on the item under discussion. Other councillors may also attend as observers but are not entitled to take part in the discussion.

**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.

DRAFT

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 28 November 2024 at 2.30 pm

Cabinet Members Physically Present and voting:	<p>Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairperson) Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairperson)</p> <p>Councillors Graham Biggs, Harry Bramer, Barry Durkin, Carole Gandy, Ivan Powell and Philip Price</p>
Cabinet Members in remote attendance	<p>None</p> <p><i>Cabinet members attending the meeting remotely, e.g. through video conferencing facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.</i></p>

Cabinet support members in attendance Councillors Dan Hurcomb and Nick Mason

Group leaders / representatives in attendance Councillors Clare Davies, Liz Harvey, Terry James and Diana Toynebee

Scrutiny chairpersons in attendance Councillors Pauline Crockett, Ben Proctor and Louis Stark

Officers in attendance: R Cook, A Deans, H Hall, Luenne Featherstone, C Porter, R Sanders, Rosie Thomas-Easton and P Walker, S Gregory (Secretary),

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies from Councillors Stoddart, O'Driscoll and Fagan.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

30. MINUTES

Resolved: **That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.**

31. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 11 - 12)

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

32. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 13 - 14)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

33. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no reports from scrutiny committees for consideration at this meeting.

34. ADDITION OF CAPITAL BUDGET TO DELIVER IT CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The cabinet member for environment introduced the report and councillor Mason expanded on the report in Councillor Stoddart's absence who was noted on sick leave.

It was discussed that the decision to invest in the technology needed would produce improved outcomes with optimised efficiency. It was explained that it is a move of existing capital expenditure that was intended to be taken in the subsequent year. Instead it would be brought forward into this year to progress the Council's essential transformation work.

The £368,000 helps ensure the Council is cyber secure and can provide a level of support for residents in terms of improving communications.

There were no comments from cabinet members.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups.

The report was welcomed and it was noted that investment in technology and IT would be beneficial. It was queried if there were any other projects that could be brought forward given £5.5m of the capital programme wouldn't be spent or was associated with projects delivering under budget or not continuing. Caution was also expressed whether improved technology would improve the service for residents.

In response to the query, it was confirmed that these were the two urgent IT projects that needed to be brought forward. It was clarified that if too many projects were in progress it could be detrimental to do all at once.

Councillor Swinglehurst proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that the following be recommended to Council

- a) **To approve the addition of £368,000 in this year's capital programme, to deliver Wide Area Network (WAN) replacement project and Telephony Contact Centre project, funded from underspends in the capital programme.**

That: Cabinet

- b) **Delegates to the Director of Strategy and Transformation the spend, subject to Council approval, up to £368,000 to deliver the projects as part of the IT Capital Programme.**

35. Q2 2024/25 BUDGET REPORT

The cabinet member for environment introduced the report and councillor Mason expanded on the report in Councillor Stoddart's absence who was noted as on sick leave.

Councillor Swinglehurst, cabinet member for environment, extended their congratulations to the finance team for winning the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) award.

In respect of the Quarter 2 Budget report, it was noted that the forecast overspend was £10.2m, and with management action this will reduce to £2m. The approved net budget for 2024/25 was £212.8m which included £11.6m of planned directorate savings and £7.9m of council wide savings. It was noted there are cost pressures of £11.6m from in demand led services, supporting social care budgets, temporary accommodation and SEN transport services but is offset by the delivery in full of £1.4m of the 2024/25 savings targets in the children young people budget.

It was highlighted that the report represents six months of actual transactions and six months of estimated income and expenditure. It was noted that the children and young people budget line at quarter 2 was balanced, confirming that the directorate budget set for 2024/25 was sufficient and realistic. It was confirmed that additional expenditure controls remain in place to support recovery action.

It was noted that a review of the £19.5m savings for 2024/25 had been undertaken which confirmed that £8.9m (46%) of the total savings target had been delivered at quarter 2 and £5.6m (28%) were assessed as on target or in progress. Savings of £5m (26%) were assessed at risk. A breakdown by directorate of 2024/25 approved settings is shown in Table 3 of the report.

Regarding ear marked reserves, the last report to cabinet in May 2024 noted total audited balances of £82.8m, comprising the general fund balance of £9.6m and earmarked reserve balances of £73.2m. An assessment to confirm the adequacy and robustness of balances was undertaken annually by the section 151 officer as part of the budget setting process. It was highlighted that the council continues to experience significant in-year financial pressures in respect to social care budgets for adult and children and home to school transport, with these budgets representing the majority of the forecast overspend in quarter 2.

A contingency reserve of £11m was proposed to mitigate against in-year and future year pressures. The funds would be transferred from the business rates risk reserve, reducing this from £19.7m to £8.7m. It was confirmed that a full risk assessment to determine appropriate levels of reserve balances would be undertaken as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26. Also, a full and detailed review and update of the future council's reserve strategy will be presented at cabinet.

Regarding the dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficit, it was confirmed that this is accounted for as an unusable reserve on the council's balance sheet as permitted by statutory instrument and remains in place until 31 March 2026. It was clarified that this enables all local authorities to ring fence the DSG deficit from the overall financial position in the statutory accounts. It was highlighted that the deficit will have an impact on the council's overall financial position and the risk was being managed alongside the assessment of the adequacy of the council's reserves as part of the council's medium term financial strategy. It was further highlighted that this issue is a major concern amongst local authorities nationally. As of 1st of April 2024 the cumulative deficit brought forward was £6.1m, the current in-year forecast shows an overspend of £7.6m which will increase the cumulative deficit to £13.7m by the 31st March 2025. It was noted that the council continues to work with the Department of Education, the Local Government Association and other local authorities to seek clarification on the position once the statutory instrument expires and for a sustainable funding strategy for the high needs.

The approved capital budget of £160m had been revised to £96.4m which included £15.3m of unspent project budgets brought forward from 2023/24, approved movements of £2.8m, removal of 'the Maylords library' project of £2.6m, £3.7m additional grounds. It was confirmed that in line with external audit advice, the capital budget has been re-profiled at quarter 2 in line with expected delivery and £82.8m of the budget had been re-profiled to future years. Full details are set out in Appendix B, table C.

It was confirmed that significant progress with the delivery of the capital programme was being made. At the end of October 2024 capital spends were £30.9m with further commitments of £32.3m providing a total of £63.2m. In comparison to October 2023, it was noted that the capital spend was £19.7m and commitments were £21.9m, a total of £41.6m. It was highlighted that this was an increase of £21.6m.

There were comments from Cabinet members. Councillor Gandy highlighted that in respect of Table 3 delivery of savings, there was no risk of being able to deliver Health and Wellbeing savings compared to this time last year. It was also noted that whilst quarter 2 shows an overspend the cabinet member was confident that this would be resolved by the end of the financial year.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. It was noted that it was an in-depth report and there had been a positive move in the finances of the council over the previous 12 months. A query was raised if there could be more uptake on the Green Home Grant and homes upgrade schemes.

Concerns were raised regarding deleting vacant posts, how confident cabinet were regarding savings and if there will be a reduced demand for social workers in children and young people directorate. Also, whether the business cases referred to for projects were necessary.

It was queried whether unused grants had to be repaid. Also, if the £1m in the severe weather reserve was sufficient.

Specific questions were raised regarding the following points.

If the savings being delivered in the children's directorate were being returned to reserves. It was noted this was the agreed position when the budget amendment was supported by full council in February 2024.

If the additional income of £1.2m from higher interest rates being applied to council investments, will be used to support additional hardship initiatives.

If the 2024/25 service level agreement with Hoople had been agreed and if not, what were the reasons for the delay.

Concerns were also raised regarding the change in detail provided in the appendices regarding the shortfall in delivery of savings, what was putting the transformation savings at risk, why was the thrive programme not progressing and what was the issue regarding the new operating model. It was also queried if the delivery plans existed and what management action was in place to delivery the improvements in the overspend that is forecast.

Concern was raised that nearly £83m of the capital programme was being moved into the next financial year and whether the council will deliver on the remaining programme.

In response to the queries, in respect of vacant posts it was confirmed they are cancelled because they are no longer needed to be filled. It was confirmed this was not a case of getting rid of posts.

Regarding reduction of demand in social workers it was clarified that the savings had largely been delivered through the conversion of agency workers to permanent staff and a small element of service redesign. The directorate are looking at how it can use multidisciplinary workers to support children and families alongside social work, how families could be supported to meet their needs without having to move to social work intervention. It was noted that this was a work in progress and the directorate will report on the progress in the new year.

Regarding the amount of business cases, it was clarified that business cases were needed for all the projects. However, it was raised that they may need to be

reconsidered in light of 'transformation' and if the business cases were becoming too arduous it would be an opportunity to become more agile.

It was confirmed that the severe weather reserve was being used now and will be reviewed as part of the ear marked reserves work. It was clarified that when grants are not used in-year, they do not have to be returned.

Regarding Hoople, the savings and the SLA, it was confirmed that detail was provided in the appendix regarding the savings expected from Hoople and work is ongoing with Hoople in respect of services delivered. It was confirmed that the SLA with Hoople had been signed.

In respect of savings and the transformation initiative, it was confirmed that this was progressing and it was noted that the Director of Strategy & Corporate Services had now joined the council.

Regarding the level of detail in the delivery of the savings plan, it was acknowledged that this would be considered moving forward.

In response to the speed of the capital programme being delivered, it was confirmed that there had been a 50% increase in delivery of the capital programme. It was highlighted that the projects needed to be phased appropriately to avoid too many projects at one time.

Regarding the home upgrade grants, it was noted that this was increasing year on year. It was confirmed that the grant will be delivered to 230 homes this year, 130 properties have already received 278 measures, and 66 properties were pending installation with 35 at survey stage. Reassurance was provided that this grant would be rolled out to its fullest extent.

It was confirmed that written responses would be provided notably regarding; if the children's savings would be repaid to reserves and if the £1.2m acquired in additional interest would be used to for hardship initiatives.

Councillor Swinglehurst proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that Cabinet

- a) Reviews the financial forecast for 2024/25, as set out in the appendices A-D, and identifies any additional actions to be considered to reduce forecast cost pressures;**
- b) Notes the progress in delivery of savings targets for 2024/25; and**
- c) Approves the transfer of Earmarked Reserve balances to establish a Contingency Reserve to manage the risk of unforeseen demand and cost pressures**

36. Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The cabinet member for environment introduced the report and councillor Mason expanded on the report in Councillor Stoddart's absence who was on sick leave.

It was highlighted that in respect of the 174 milestones in progress during quarter two under the delivery plan, 152 or 87% had been completed or on track to be completed by the end of the financial year.

It was noted that the council had continued to deliver on its capital investment programme which comprised of over 100 projects. It was highlighted that the design work for the museum and art gallery was largely completed, and early-stage procurement was underway. A framework provider had been engaged to develop the procurement strategy and a funding bid was being assembled for the public sector decarbonisation scheme. RIBA stage 3 was completed for the Shirehall library and learning centre and listed building planning consent was submitted, RIBA stage 4 was underway as well. It was noted that 40% of the road resurfacing was complete across the county. It was confirmed that 19 work packages had been completed for the schools maintenance programme with further planned in 2025. The works to the Black and White House were completed in October, ahead of schedule. Improvements were being made to Brookfield school and due for completion in Autumn 2025. The school improvement programme had delivered 18 schemes and emergency works at Aylestone School were completed in September. It was confirmed that the 'Here for Herefordshire' holiday programme distributed £228,000 during the summer of 2024 and grants were awarded to 41 organisations.

Regarding the theme of 'People', it was confirmed that out of 55 milestones, 23 were completed, 30 were on target and 2 were at risk of missing their deadline. Notable successes around improving public health had been made in respect of stop smoking advisors, an agreement in principle had been reached regarding better mental health and the good mental health wellbeing implementation plan was approved, with work underway to implement specific projects. Progress was also made to improve the lives of the county's aging population. Discharge pathways have been reviewed leading to new models aimed at ensuring patients leave the hospital with the right support. Direct consultations will take place with service users as part of a broader review as well.

Regarding the theme of 'Place', it was confirmed that out of the 53 milestones, 13 were completed, 27 were on target, 10 were at risk of missing a deadline, 2 were paused and 1 was not on target. A cabinet working group was currently developing the next carbon management plan for next five years. There were 93 installations for the home upgrade grant and 3 through the home energy scheme. There were now 30 live charging points. The western bypass programme was still on track to deliver the design review of phase one of the southern section of the western bypass by end of March 2025. It was confirmed that additional work was needed for phase 2 to meet Government green belt requirements. The strategic case for phase 2 was now scheduled for June 2025. In August 30 sites were surface dressed across the county.

Regarding the theme of 'Growth', it was confirmed that out of 42 milestones, 10 were completed, 24 were on target, 3 were at risk of missing a deadline and 5 were not on target. It was noted that significant efforts were underway to develop affordable housing. Land is being secured for the improvements to the Great Western way pathway. Engagement with businesses at Skylon Park regarding future management arrangements was also underway. A local framework has been established as a procurement tool for the towns investment related to the greening the city initiative.

Regarding the theme of 'Transformation', it was confirmed that out of 24 milestones, 7 were already completed and 17 were on target. It was confirmed that significant technological advancement were in progress including testing the new telephony system, developing a project plan for the new website, piloting the migration to Microsoft 365, enhancing digital functionality and customer services and piloting the use of artificial intelligence. The future council operating model was launched at the employee conference and efforts are ongoing to develop the transformation strategy and the strategic transformation programme to facilitate its implementation and delivery. The employee survey conducted in quarter 2 showed an increase in the employee engagement score to 3.7, up from 3.56 in 2022. It was noted that some of the data published by the office for local government (Oflog) and office for the ministry for housing

communities and local government was historic and should be interpreted with caution. The council had selected 10 indicators to demonstrate a more meaningful indication of the latest performance. It was noted that the KPI for two of those were flagging as red. The first one related to the percentage of social work assessments completed within 45 days which was due to the impact of higher case loads in June due to staffing vacancies. It was confirmed that case loads were reduced and there will be an improvement in quarter 3. The other issue was with regards to affordable homes and the delivery of affordable housing, it was confirmed that this is expected to vary from quarter to quarter due to inclement weather and shortages on skilled workers. It was noted that two large development sites, where the contractors had gone into administration, caused a delay in the delivery of the properties.

There were comments from Cabinet members.

It was highlighted that 40% of resurfacing works was only up to quarter 2, and it would now be much higher. It was noted greater efficiency would be obtained during the summer months and next year, work will look to start earlier in the year as well. It was confirmed the full programme of resurfacing works will be completed by the end of the financial year and at the end of November 94% of the roads will be completed.

It was noted that the rough sleepers shelter will be open at the beginning of December and this is supported significantly by a number of voluntary sector organisations.

It was highlighted that the planning software procurement was progressing well, and the allocation list has decreased from 350 in April to under 50 this week, with the team continuing to meet the statutory reporting requirements. A full response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was submitted and the outcome was awaited. The mandatory housing targets in Herefordshire had also been challenged. The council's carbon journey was at 63% and this was progressing. It was noted that the environment team was now at a point of publishing survey and mapping opportunities. Regarding phosphate mitigation a contractor has been commissioned for Tarrington and this will start when the weather permits. It was confirmed that other mitigation schemes will be coming forward and anticipate releasing more credits next year. It was confirmed there are currently 742 houses released to date. Also, the river conference was successful. Congratulations were also extended to the team for the RTPI award for excellence in planning.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. Congratulations were extended across all the portfolios for the work that was on track and that welcomed progress had been made over 6 months.

Concerns were expressed regarding electric charging points and impact on residents who cannot park outside their house and the cost for dropping the kerb for those residents who can park on their driveway. It was also raised regarding the amount of traffic lights in Hereford.

It was raised that it would be beneficial for resurfacing works to take place in the spring/summer months. Similarly, if timing can be considered for the flood mitigation and phosphate mitigation works as well.

It was raised why the council was not delivering to target in terms of supporting young people not in education, employment or training and the delay with the delivery of traffic regulation orders and spending on section 106. It was noted that the public realm contract re-tendering was showing as amber and delivering on sustainable travel projects was also behind target. It was raised that the great western way pathway improvements were behind and the heads of terms were not signed for the Wye Valley Trust on the education centre. It was also raised that there was no urgency regarding

partnership working with parishes and the lengthsman scheme or public rights of way. It was raised that communication with Parish Councils needed to be improved and more consistent.

It was raised that there was no mention of funding to help with drainage and it was noted that phase 2 of the bypass was showing as red. The naming and title of the bypass was also queried in terms of funding and policy. It was noted that the Golden Valley Parkway was showing at red and it was unclear if the Hereford and Worcester group training centre was going ahead. It was queried why the new transport model was still under wraps. It was also raised how the transformation targets could be marked as 'on track or delivered' when the budget report set out the risks with in-year savings.

Regarding natural flood management it was queried if there would be an opportunity for mentoring schemes between farmers and landowners.

In response to the queries, it was noted that in respect of charging points and dropped curbs clarification would be provided. Similarly, the point regarding the number of traffic lights would be covered after the meeting.

It was noted regarding partnership working there would be some delay due to certain projects but it was confirmed that the progress was being monitored.

It was confirmed that cabinet were keen to invest in the lengthsman scheme and were keen to invest in paying for drainage solutions for Parishes, as well as ensuring that issues within public rights of way were finalised. It was acknowledged that Parish Councils play a critical role in ensuring drainage issues were fixed. It was also acknowledged that getting communication right with Parish Councils was important, and it was equally important in providing them with investment. It was confirmed that this work will continue, and 67 Parish Councils had been successful in their bids so far. It was confirmed that further announcements on the councils flooding strategy would be provided when finalised.

Regarding the timing of the resurfacing works, it was noted that next year this will start earlier in the year.

It was also confirmed that the phosphate credits for Tarrington were already being traded in advance of the project.

Councillor Swinglehurst proposed the recommendations, and it was unanimously resolved that:

Cabinet

- a) review performance for Q2 2024/25**

37. THE NEW PUBLIC REALM SERVICES

The cabinet member for community services and assets introduced the report.

It was noted that in April the cabinet report approved the termination of the current public realm contract and set out the reasons for that decision. The June cabinet report approved the operating model for the purposes of market engagement which was carried out during the summer. It was highlighted that the findings of the market arrangement were summarised in appendix 1. It was confirmed that appendix 2 set out the operation model proposed to be adopted by the council and forms the basis for the procurement during 2025.

It was confirmed that the current contractor had been kept informed with developments and have committed to supporting the transition to the new arrangements.

It was noted that following procurement, it is proposed to return to cabinet towards the end of 2025 to secure permission and the new contract being operational from the 1st of June to 2026.

There were no comments from Cabinet members.

Group leaders gave the views of their groups. Parties were supportive but noted it was a challenging timeline and concerns were raised regarding management of the contract. It was noted that further plans regarding transition and handover would be welcomed to avoid a repeat of the previous handover. It was positively noted that the contract will be aligned with the carbon and biodiversity targets, and it was queried if social value would be activated when awarding the contract. It was raised whether the bereavement services would be kept in house.

In response to the queries it was acknowledged that a smooth transition was important, and the cabinet member was confident that the timeline allowed sufficient time to complete the tender. It was noted that the previous contractor did not transition well due to ongoing litigation at the time. It was acknowledged that social value will be embedded in the contract. It was confirmed that bereavement services will be part of the tender but it can be retained back to the council, and only grounds maintenance and grave digging would be included in the tender.

That Cabinet

- a) Cabinet adopt the Public Realm Services model set out in Appendix 2;**
- b) Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to;**
 - i. undertake the procurement of the Public Realm Services model set out in Appendix 2 within the allocated budget;**
 - ii. agree and award of all necessary leases to enable the provision of the Public Realm Services in consultation with property services;**
 - iii. procure and purchase or lease the fleet of vehicles to enable the provision of the Public Realm Services with the Director of Finance;**
 - iv. agree and implement the demobilisation of the current Public Realm Contract;**
 - v. make all operational decision to implement the above recommendations.**

The meeting ended at 4.10 pm

Chairperson

Agenda item no. 4 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Sarah Melia, Leominster	During the 30th July CYP Scrutiny Committee the term 'Child Friendly Herefordshire' was used with examples given of parks being available to children. My child's local Herefordshire Council maintained park has been in a state of disrepair since she was born. She is now 6 years old and her park has continued to deteriorate. The play 'surface' is a cushion of weeds which have grown in the bark and the play structures have not been cleaned for over 5 years. Repeated contact with BBLP has been unsuccessful in addressing this. An example of the responses to reports of issues with it are "Balfour Beatty are not contracted to clean playground equipment unless safety related and...HC are not commissioned to do it either". How will Herefordshire Council ensure their own park provisions, where they exist, are 'child friendly' and well maintained?	Cllr Bramer
<p>Response:</p> <p>Thank you for your question and comments regarding the condition and maintenance of your local play area.</p> <p>We are aware of how important play areas are across the county for our young children. As an administration we are currently looking at how we can provide longer term investment to improve the quality of all our play areas across Herefordshire to address exactly the points that you have raised.</p> <p>In the meantime, I will ask the relevant service area to review the situation at your local play area and to see what steps can be undertaken in the immediate future and I will further ask that you be contacted directly with the outcome.</p>			
<p>Supplementary question:</p> <p>Many thanks for the response to my question 'How will Herefordshire Council ensure their own park provisions, where they exist, are 'child friendly' and well maintained?'</p> <p>Without Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timescaled targets being set, it could be many months before the issues with my local play area are addressed and many years before play areas across Herefordshire are fit for purpose to meet your ambitions to be 'child friendly'.</p> <p>What SMART targets will Cabinet agree today, relating to the response given to my question?</p>			

Supplementary response:

Thank you for the question.

I can confirm that once the inspections have been completed, we will be prioritising work to ensure we can achieve the best outcomes for our play areas across the County.

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from Councillors

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Cllr Mark Woodall	<p>Concerning the recommendations presented for approval in Appendix 1- Findings of Market Engagement Public Realm Services Model Report 24 September 2024</p> <p>Recommendation 1 significantly increases the value of scheme work to councils' discretion and recommendation 2 removes the upper threshold entirely.</p> <p>1: Will the 'value for money' justifications be presented to council members <i>before</i> contracts for these high value schemes are approved and 2: What type of format or level of detail can we expect to see in the demonstration of value?</p>	Cllr Bramer
<p>Response:</p> <p>Question 1) It is proposed project work up to £250,000 in value per project is to be included within the scope of the contract. The prices secured for the services including such project work will be subject to a competitive tendering process, which will deliver the necessary assurances regarding value for money. The contract provides flexibility should the council wish to deliver such projects by alternative arrangements.</p> <p>Question 2) The contract mechanism for including works above the £250,000 project threshold, including demonstration of value for money, are being developed a part of the contract documents. And this can be shared with Members once developed.</p>			
<p>Supplementary question</p> <p>Thank you Cllr Bramer. As a supplementary question to item 2 could he provide assurance that the contract terms explaining the required demonstration of value for money <i>will</i> be circulated to members and to the Audit & Governance Committee <i>before</i> qualifying contracts are awarded?.</p>			
<p>Supplementary response</p> <p>We will ensure the contract mechanism, including the demonstration of value for money, is circulated in accordance with the governance framework.</p>			



Title of report: Corporate Parenting Strategy

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: 19 December 2024

Cabinet member: Ivan Powell, children and young people

Report by: Corporate director Children and Young People

Report Author: Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve the corporate parenting strategy 2025-2027.

Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet

- a) **Endorse the corporate parenting strategy 2025-2027 as approved by the Corporate Parenting Board (appendix 1)**

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Caroline Marshall, Julie Mephram, Tel: 01432 260249,, email: caroline.marshall3@herefordshire.gov.uk,l

- b) **Delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director for Children and Young People to take all operational decisions, as set out within this report and appendices, that fall within the responsibility of Herefordshire Council.**

Alternative options

1. The strategy sets out the ambition, actions and outcomes we, as a local authority, need to achieve for our children and young people as a Corporate Parent. We need to evidence the Council's commitment to corporate parenting, to define what difference it will achieve and to evaluate how outcomes are improved for looked after children and care leavers. The most appropriate way to do this is through a Corporate Parenting Strategy. Not to have such a strategy limits our ability to communicate the commitment and priority we are giving to our Looked After Children, Care Leavers and their carers.

Key considerations

2. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a duty on councils to have regard to the following corporate parenting principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people;
 - I. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
 - II. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - III. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - IV. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - V. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - VI. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - VII. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
3. To be able to evidence the council's commitment and action in relation to these responsibilities it is necessary to have a strategy. As corporate parents it is the council's responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to enable children and young people in care to succeed. Corporate parenting is a responsibility of all elected members and officers within the council as well as statutory partners. The strategy attached at appendix A, enables the council and its partners to be clear about priorities, what needs to be done and by whom if change is to be achieved.
4. The key priorities of the strategy are: Our children and young people
 - I. Have safe, stable and caring places to live and call home.
 - II. Are emotionally, physically and mentally healthy.
 - III. Have inclusive and enriching environments to learn, develop, have fun, and achieve

- IV. Are able to build trusted relationships with the people in their lives, are able to be themselves and are free from stigma
 - V. Can make their voice heard and shape how services are designed and delivered.
 - VI. Are safe and protected from harm, abuse and exploitation.
 - VII. Young people leave care and become independent and thriving adults
5. In order to track the progress of the strategy, the Corporate Parenting Board will receive regular progress updates.

Community impact

6. The Council Plan 2024–2028 includes the ambition to support to children and young people to thrive, be safe, and for families to be supported. We believe that children and young people are best supported in their family networks and within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. Our children are the future.
7. The delivery plan 2024/25 includes the ambition to develop and launch an updated corporate parenting strategy, together with an implementation.

Environmental Impact

8. There is no direct environmental impact as a result of this strategy.

Equality duty

9. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
10. Due to the broad scope of this strategy and its potential impact on certain protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is provided at Appendix 2 for the impact on the children and young people. No negative impacts have been identified.
11. The Equality impact Assessment provided will be kept under review, and developed during the course of the strategy and will be further reviewed as part of the development of the next strategy.

Resource implications

11. There are no resource implications as a result of this strategy as it will be delivered through existing resources.

Legal implications

12. As set out within the report above, The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a duty on councils to have regard to a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising

their functions in relation to looked after children and young people. This is found within s(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017:-

“s1 Corporate parenting principles

(1) A local authority in England must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people mentioned in subsection (2), have regard to the need—

(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;

(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;

(c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;

(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;

(e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

(f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;

(g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

13. As identified within this report it is necessary and appropriate to have a Corporate Parenting Strategy which sets out how the Council will meet its statutory duties to adhere s1 of The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the Corporate Parenting Principles contained therein. The Strategy correctly sets out how the Council will meet its statutory duties in this regard.

Risk management

14. There are no risks identified to adopting a clear strategy for Corporate Parenting
15. There are risks associated with having no clear strategy in place. There are expectations upon the Council and its partners to act as responsible and ambitious corporate parents for looked after children and care leavers.

Consultees

16. A consultation has been carried out with our Care Leavers through the participation groups. They provided the open letter to the council which is recorded in the opening pages. Their views continue to be gained to ensure that the process remains connected to the people at the heart of the strategy. All partners have been consulted for them to provide evidence of actions for previous strategy and ambitions moving forward.
17. A Political Group Consultation was also held on 26 November 2024 to discuss the corporate parenting strategy. The session was attended by ten councillors, representing four different political parties

Appendices

Appendix 1 Corporate Parenting Strategy

Appendix 2 Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 21/11/2024
Finance	Judith Tramner	Date 18/11/2024
Legal	Tess Burgess	Date 26/11/2024
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 14/11/2024
Equality Duty	Harriett Yellin	Date 29/11/2024
Procurement	Claire Powell	Date 15/11/2024
Risk	Chris Tindall-Jones	Date 22/11/24Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by	Tina Russell	Date 10/12/2024
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Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2027



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What is 'Corporate Parenting'?

Put simply, Corporate Parenting is a whole council responsibility to be loving, caring and aspirational for all children and young people who have been in our care up to the age of 25.

There is a legal requirements for us to be Corporate Parents, Section 1 of Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 1) sets out seven corporate parenting principles which local authorities must have regard to for children looked after or care experienced young people.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published in May 2022, this looked at the needs, experiences and outcomes of the children supported by social care and put forward recommendations for changes. Josh MacAllister listed his 5 missions for Care Experienced young people he noted that "The disadvantage faced by the care experienced community should be the civil rights issue of our time. Children in care are powerless, are often invisible and they face some of the greatest inequalities that exist in England today. In spite of these injustices so many care experienced people go on to run businesses, start families, earn doctorates, produce drama, write poetry, become government ministers and contribute to the world in countless ways. Five ambitious missions

are needed so that care experienced people secure: loving relationships; quality education; a decent home; fulfilling work and good health as the foundations for a good life. Central government and local authorities, employers, the NHS, schools, colleges and universities must step up to secure these foundations for all care experienced people. This will require a wider range of organisations to act as corporate parents for looked after children, and the UK should be the first country in the world to recognise the care experience as a protected characteristic. In December 2022, Ofsted announced the introduction of a new judgement for care experienced young people to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS). The new judgement will focus on experiences and progress of care experienced young people. This will include consideration of whether local authorities are making good decisions for care experienced young people, and what they are doing to support them into adulthood

In February 2023 the UK government published its implementation strategy and consultation called 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'. The strategy responded to the independent review and concentrated on how to provide nurturing, stable and loving homes for children in care and care experienced young people.

Above all else, this means protecting our children and young people from harm and keeping them safe. Importantly, we must strive as we do for our own children, to want and act for them to gain the best in life, act to empower them to achieve, protect their interests and nurture their ambitions so that they feel secure and grow into independent and thriving young adults. Our ambition to be good Corporate Parents goes far beyond any laws. Instead, we have a moral, social and economic responsibility, as public services, civil society, local communities and wider society, to work together to equip and empower our care experienced children and young people to succeed and thrive.

At its heart, Corporate Parenting means always asking ourselves "would this be good enough for my child?"
An open letter from children and young people with care experience

We are children and young people who have experience of Herefordshire's care. As our Corporate Parents we want you to think about how you care for us, support us and help us reach our aspirations. We want to be respected for who we are as individuals. This means showing us that you care in every way that you can - by listening to us and hearing us. By making sure that we have the right care and support where and when we need it.

Communication is really important to us. Treat us how you would expect to be treated and don't be patronising. Be honest with us, listen to us, and be open-minded about how best to get to know us. Ask us the best way to work with us e.g. go for a walk when we meet - not always during the day and sometimes at the weekend; go for a coffee. Speak to us informally as this is more natural. Formal conversations/terminology create a hierarchy which can make our voices unclear. And remember you were once a child, a teenager and then a young adult. We won't always get it right but you need to be there to catch us when we fall to make sure we will be okay. We want you to listen to our views. This might be about asking how we are and how we are feeling. Make sure you understand what we are really saying and feeling by checking back in with us. It is really important that you show how you respect us and our experience in real ways. Remember, we are all unique individuals, who are children and young people first and foremost. We are not defined by our care experience. Finally, we expect you to do what you say you will do, stick to your promises and not make excuses. We want to have good relationships with the people who work with us, who are flexible, willing and open-minded to always try and do what is best for us.

An open letter to children and young people with care experience

Dear children and young people who are in our care and those with care experience,

We are your Corporate Parents and our job is to ensure that we keep you safe and well, support you to be the best that you can be and get the very best out of life. We will do this by listening and hearing your voice, supporting you with your education and aspirations for the future, making sure you have a safe home. We will support you to ensure your health needs are met. We will aspire to meet the recommendations of Josh MacAlister's (December 2022) missions to gain equality for care experienced young people and that you secure: loving relationships; quality education; a decent home; fulfilling work and good health as the foundations for a good life.

We are all passionate about making Herefordshire a place where all children and young people have the best possible start in life and are able to access all the things that they need to feel loved, learn, grow and have fun and to reach your aspirations. We want young people to go on to become well-rounded, resilient and independent young adults who are engaged and thriving members of their local communities. We will do this by making sure your social workers and personal advisors meet with you regularly to support you with all of the above to ensure you never feel alone or unsupported. We want you to know that the team around you from within Herefordshire County Council and across our partners will be the best Corporate Parents they can be to ensure we all

support your journey to adulthood. Together we want you to flourish and thrive.

We will know we have done what we should when you tell us you feel safe, loved and cared for in our County. That you feel accepted for who you are, as unique individuals. That you feel listened to, heard and understood and that you believe our relationship is built on trust and respect.

As senior leaders in Herefordshire Council, alongside all our hard-working and dedicated staff and carers, we are committed to being the best possible Corporate Parents we can be. This is our plan of how we aim to do this together.

Paul Walker
Chief Executive,
Herefordshire
Council

Tina Russell
Corporate
Director
Children's
Services,
Herefordshire
Council

Tori Lynch
Head of Service
for
Corporate
Parenting,
Herefordshire
Council
Councillor

Jonathan Lester
Leader,
Herefordshire
Council

Councillor Ivan
Powell
Elected member
for
Children's
Services
Herefordshire
Council

Our vision for all children and young people in Herefordshire

We believe that every child and young person in Herefordshire should have the best possible start in life and the opportunity to thrive. We want to ensure children and young people receive the right support, at the right time, and in the right place. We want to inspire them, enable and support them to aim high and achieve in their lives. For children and young people with care experience, our vision is no different.

We recognise that children and young people, who have care-experience, can face additional challenges that others their age may not. As their Corporate Parents, and in spite of these obstacles, we will support them to achieve good and better outcomes in all aspects of their lives.

Our seven priority outcomes

- Homes and Housing
- Health and wellbeing
- Learning, developing and having fun
- Relationships, identity and belonging
- Listening, hearing and understanding
- Being safe and protected
- Independence and adulthood

Over the last year, we have listened to our children and young people in Herefordshire about some of the more specific things that they would like to see improve. These have been their access to housing, their physical and mental health and wellbeing, education, relationships, making their voice heard, and gaining independence later in life.

Children and young people have told us that feeling secure in who they are, their identity, and what they want to achieve in life is so important. They want inclusivity and their diversity to be celebrated. They would like to have Corporate Parents who they can turn to and rely on to 'fight their corner', building relationships which have trust, respect and care at the centre. We will be aspirational for them and encourage them to be ambitious. Our care and support will be there for them both in the good times and the bad. It will be unconditional and fair –

regardless of background, experiences or personal choices in life. We may have to have difficult conversations with you where you may not agree but we will listen and ensure that you are treated as an individual with equity, equality and respect.

“Restorative Practice” is our practice model and this focuses upon building relationships that create and inspire positive change. Creating change sometimes requires challenge as well as support. This approach can help build positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict. It can remove barriers, proactively promote a sense of community, engender an understanding of social responsibility and shared accountability. Working in ‘restorative’ ways helps us to get to know the children, young people and their families we support better, build on their strengths as individuals and find solutions to problems together.

Working together

Corporate Parenting is a joint effort. Strategic Leaders through the Herefordshire Children’s Safeguarding Partnership have committed to work together to meet the requirements of Working Together 2023 to have a shared vision, learn from children and young

people and ensure we are ambitious about helping, supporting and protecting children and young people. Together, as Corporate Parents, we will work collaboratively and constructively to enable children and young people to engage, participate and co-produce future changes and services. Being the best possible Corporate Parents means engaging with children and young people with care experiences and finding out what works for them. The most effective decisions have children’s and young people’s lived experience at their heart. We are committed to co-production and there are a number of groups which support children and young people’s engagement and participation. This includes the new Inspire Change participation groups for care leavers, and the Voice Group.

Children and Care Experienced Young People in Herefordshire June 2024

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Children and Care Experienced Young People in Herefordshire June 2024			
85% of our children are from a White background. 15% are from Minority Ethnic Groups (Global Majority Group), an increase from the 2021 census data where Minority Ethnic Groups account for 4.5% of the U18 population.	Children in our care are more likely to have Special Educational Needs (SEN). 30.7% have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 31.6% have SEN Support. This compares to 4.0% of pupils in all Herefordshire schools with an EHCP and 15.4% with SEN Support.	There were 412 children, including 41 UASC, in our care in March 2023. On the 1st September 24 there were 377. 30 children have been reunited with their family and their care order discharged in 23/24	Our Care Leavers Service was supporting 369 care experienced young people in March 2023 (this was 334 at March 2022, a 10.5% increase). In September 24, Care Leavers remain in touch with a contact every eight weeks In September 24, 87% of 18 years olds were in touch and 93% of 19-21

Children and Care Experienced Young People in Herefordshire June 2024			
Age groups for children in our care 0 to 4 years 15%, 5 to 9 years 17%, 41% were aged 10 to 15 and 24% were aged 16 to 17 at March 2023.	Children in our care achieved Attainment 8 scores (GCSE/Key Stage 4) above the national average of 19.1 in 2023 with a figure of 22. 1, an increase of 9.9 when compared to 12.2 in 2022. (The 8 subjects which make up Attainment 8 include English and Maths).	50% of our care leavers were in education, employment or training (EET) in March 2023, an increase from 48% in March 2022. On 1 September 24 67% of 17-18 were EET and 54% of 19-21 year olds	92% of our care leavers were in suitable accommodation in March 2023, above both the national (88%) and Statistical Neighbours rates (89.6%).



Our strategy for our priorities for children and young people with care experience

Homes and housing <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support more children and young people where it is safe to be with their family 2. Enable more children and young people in care to live with families in Herefordshire 3. Develop accommodation and early support which helps young people develop their independence 4. Offer earlier and more effective support for children and young people in crisis or at risk of care entry 	Health and wellbeing <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote good holistic health, wellbeing and resilience 2. Improve our understanding of health and wellbeing needs among professionals, carers, and young people 3. Design and deliver services as child-centred, trauma informed and rooted in lived experience 4. Support smooth transitions within and between services 5. Provide timely and effective support for additional health needs
Learning, developing and having fun <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be aspirational for children and young people's education and learning 2. Provide extra support for babies, children and young people with additional needs 3. Support children to remain in school by avoiding exclusions and absences 4. Make sure nurseries, schools and colleges are inclusive spaces for care experienced pupils 5. Encourage young people to get involved in extracurricular activities and follow their interests 	Relationships, identity and belonging <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Help children and young people understand their life story, and maintain strong connections with their birth families 2. Support children and young people to build trusted relationships and support networks with the people in their lives 3. Provide wrap-around support for care experienced young people who are new parents 4. Respect children and young people's identity and support them to be proud of who they are

Listening, hearing and understanding <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Put the voice of children and young people at the centre of all levels of decision-making 2. Provide opportunities so that young people co-produce more services and strategic plans with us 3. Let children and young people know the outcomes of decisions, what is possible to do, what is not, and why 	Safe and protected <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work together to understand risks, vulnerabilities and needs in the home, in communities and online 2. Respond together to harm, abuse and exploitation early, effectively and in child-centred and trauma-informed ways 3. Work holistically with young people to avoid criminal behaviour and activity 	Independence <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare early for adulthood and independence 2. Offer financial, practical and emotional support for young people who need it in early adulthood 3. Support young people to take up further education, employment and training opportunities
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Children and young people have safe, stable and caring places to live and call home. They told us we want :

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Stable placements we can call home

Homes that gives us independence

Homes that support us to be better parents

Homes close to our friends and family

Tell us what we are entitled to



We have

- Worked closely with Strategic Housing to support Care Leavers and have now gained higher priority for housing and are now Band A.
- Ensured where challenges occur there is a clear escalation process in place which ensures resolution is swift, at the right level and barriers are challenged.
- Supported 30 young people up to 21 who are living independently.
- Successfully stood as guarantor for 9 young people this year.
- Wherever possible, ensured that children live in family based settings, and we have successfully supported 26 children and young people to return to a family based setting from residential.
- Continued to build services to support the diverse needs of our young people.
- Ensured our home-finding and commissioning teams quality assure placements and have successfully challenged providers to improve where they have not met our standards.
- Reviewed and updated the Individual Placement Agreement to ensure providers are held to account as to what they are expected to provide for the young person.
- Two commissioned supported living accommodations with two planned properties for single gender for 16-18 year olds.
- Ensured that unaccompanied young people where possible, are placed together to build their UK family and relationships. We are building services to meet their cultural and diverse needs within Herefordshire.
- Improved housing by agreeing and implementing a Care Leavers Protocol for Housing and one for 16/17 year old homeless young people.
- Increased choice and capacity to enable more 'short breaks' for children with special needs, with two additional providers.
- Ensured the Local Offer for Care Leavers is now on each Pathway Plan so young people are aware of their options.
- Supported 35 young people to continue living with their foster family beyond the age of 18.

We will :

- Ensure there is greater sufficiency of choice of home for young people and refresh our Sufficiency Strategy.
- Ensure greater representation of views of children and young people to shape our commissioned services, through the reformed Children in Care Council,

- Youth Forum and Participation Groups and apprentices.
- Ensure more children gain permanence through Special Guardianship, adoption or child arrangement orders.
 - Ensure foster carers have the right training and support to build resilience and improve placement stability.
 - Increase the number of foster carer's homes by 20% and ensure we build a specialist scheme to support out children with the most complex needs to remain in family based care.
 - Ensure more children and young people are placed within the boundaries of Herefordshire.
 - Improve placement stability to reduce the needs for children to change their home.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people will tell us that they are feeling safe, stable and cared for.
- That the people caring for them are ambitious for them and they are supported to follow their interests, hobbies and passions.
- Young people will tell us that, where they are living – the type of place and who they are living with - is helping them be ready to live independently as they get older.

- Our placement stability will improve with children and young people remaining in their homes , and less placement breakdowns.
- More children and young people are living locally in Herefordshire with Foster carers.
- More children and young people are living in suitable houses after they leave our care.
- More young people will remain living with their former foster carers after leaving care.

Health and wellbeing: Children and young people are emotionally, physically and mentally healthy. They told us:

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Think about our past and our future

Being Healthy can be about your physical, emotional and mental health

Mental Health Support during pregnancy and early parenting is important

Going to Counselling and having therapy can be scary

It needs to be easier to get support after 18



We have:

- Promoted good health and wellbeing in all aspects of children and young people's lives including health centre passes which included gym membership and swimming lessons for our children and young people.
- Given young people a health passport from their 16th birthday, which outlines their health history, and where to access health and dental care if they require it.
- Offered every child and young person the opportunity to have an individual health review annually up to the age of 18.
- Made sure that young people turning 18, who no longer require an annual health assessment, are registered with a GP have been offered a dental check and where possible are dental fit when they turn 18, and have had their eyesight checked.
- Supported young people, wherever possible, to access dental care and eye tests.
- Advocated for improved access to health services, including dental, eye care, and mental health, that takes into account the lived experience of young people.

- Helped young people, their foster carers and PA's, to understand where children and young people can gain support for their mental health and wellbeing.
- Health services have commissioned 'Lumina', a digital programme to support the mental health needs of children aged 7-12.
- Employed a psychologist to work with young people and alongside staff to support young people.
- Recommissioned our services for young people with Meadows (our new provider), who offer direct work with young people. They are supporting 21 young people.
- As of June 2024 all our education, health care plans Education and Health Care Plans are up to date.

We will:

- Make sure, wherever possible and appropriate, that help and support for health and wellbeing is consistent, wherever young people are living, and that it is provided either at home, within the community or at school or college.
- Make sure that, if support is being transferred within and between health services, this will be smooth, and that young people will still get the right level of support at the right time.

- Make sure mental health support continues when young people become an adult if they need it, with clear transition plans so that the right referrals can be made at the right time.
- Provide young people, wherever possible, with flexibility to decide the health and wellbeing support they receive.
- Support young people to be resilient by equipping and empowering them to navigate, overcome and recover from adversity in their lives.
- Provide a wraparound service for foster carers (through Meadows) which will launch in November 20xx to support foster carers to provide step down homes for children in residential.
- Offer our carers a range of training to meet the children's therapeutic needs, where appropriate.
- Meadows will also operate an out of hours service for carers between 5 pm and 8 am together with weekend support.
- Meadows will offer therapeutic based training to internal carers considering specialist fostering.
- Improve our reporting on health appointments to ensure all children have up-to-date health records which will provide assurance that health needs are being met.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people will tell us that they feel more emotionally and physically well.
- Children and young people tell us that they know where to access support if they are feeling physically or emotionally unwell.
- Children and young people tell us that they do not feel judged if they choose to have a baby and become a parent.
- Children and young people tell us that the health care and support they receive is joined-up, consistent and is tailored to their needs as an individual.
- Children and young people know who to turn to for support with their health and wellbeing, and that they trust that we will listen and care.
- All children and young people are registered with a GP and a dentist.
- All children and young people are fully up-to-date with all of their immunisations.
- More children and young people have health assessments which are up-to-date and on time.
- Children and young people have better emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- Children and young people are able to access health services in a timelier way.

**Learning, developing and having fun:
Children and young people have inclusive
and enriching environments to learn,
develop, have fun, and achieve. They told**

us:

Our Mental Health
can affect us in school

We need extra
support some times
for groups and
activities

Stability helps us
to engage with our
education

Apprenticeships are
really valuable and
help us take the first
step for work

We like to do
fun things with
our friends outside
school

Some of us don't
like going to school
because of bullying



We have:

- Ensured all our children in care between the ages of 3 and 18 years have an allocated Virtual School Education Officer (VSEO) to support them to succeed with their education and to reach their full potential.
- Revised the Personal Education Plan (PEP) document so that pupil premium funding is closely linked to targets and evidenced based interventions to improve outcomes.
- All children and young people can contribute to the PEP document and are supported to attend their PEP meetings.
- Increased expert advice for schools through two educational psychologists working with the Virtual School to support professionals in reducing suspensions and exclusions.
- Ensured close working arrangements between the Virtual School, Inclusion Service, SEN team and Early Years SEND Inclusion Service manager to ensure early identification of SEND needs and timely completion and reviews of EHCPs.
- Appointed a lead for children with a social worker so that professionals working with children and young people on the edge of care can access education advice and support.
- Appointed a Virtual School Education Officer as a lead for post-16 transitions and commissioned a careers advisor to better support those leaving school including advice on courses and apprenticeships.
- Supported multi-agency meetings where children who are struggling to attend school are discussed and ways forward identified.
- Developed a team of mentors (STEPS team) to support individual children and young people who are experiencing barriers to education to overcome their difficulties and engage with learning.
- Joined a regional network of Virtual Schools to offer a high-quality programme of arts and sports extra-curricular activities open to children and young people placed anywhere in the West Midlands.
- Run a local programme of extra-curricular activities in the school holidays allowing opportunities to socialise with other care experienced young people, improve self-confidence and learn new skills.
- Set up a programme through the Attachment Research Community (ARC) whereby schools are funded for ARC membership and supported by the Virtual School to become trauma-informed and attachment aware in their practice to better support vulnerable children.

We will

- Be ambitious for children and young people's education and learning. This means keeping an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP), which we will develop with the young person that has their personal interests and ambitions represented throughout.
- As of summer term 2024 there are 171 statutory school age children who are identified as having a special educational need; 87 with an EHCP and 84 who are registered as needing SEN support. We will be aspirational for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and support them to achieve highly through high-quality, up-to-date and ambitious Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and additional support provided by schools.
- Help children and young people feel safe, happy and well at school by working closely with schools. This includes supporting them if they are bullied, as well as working together to prevent bullying in the first place.
- Work with schools to make sure exclusions only happen as a last resort.
- The suspension rate for Herefordshire CLA has been above national comparators for the last three years. We will work with schools to reduce the suspension rate to below national levels for CLA.
- Encourage all Herefordshire schools to join the Attachment Research Community (ARC) scheme funded by the Virtual School to improve their relational practice and reduce their reliance on punitive sanctions, including suspensions.
- Make sure children and young people have the technology they need to access any online learning.
- Support children and young people with transitions from one school to another to ensure their learning is continuous.
- Ensure that all children have the opportunity to see a careers adviser before they leave the Virtual School at 18. Ensure all CLA children and young people have access to high quality sports and arts activities through a programme of funded opportunities throughout the year.
- Gather the views of children and young people through the PEP document to ensure they can access opportunities for extra-curricular activities that reflect their interests and strengths.
- Support babies and young children to grow and develop well in early life. This includes identifying and supporting any additional needs as early as possible when they first come into our care.
- Consulting with young voices about how to progress sensitive conversations about staying put arrangements.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they are enjoying learning and being at school more and feel able to do the best they possibly can.
- Children and young people tell us that they have times where they can have fun and take part in activities that they want to do.
- Children and young people are changing schools less and are less likely to be excluded or be absent from school.
- Children and young people are achieving highly at school.
- Young children and babies in our care are developing well and are more likely to reach key development goals.
- Outcomes for our children and young people are the same as children who are not in care.

**Relationships, identity and belonging:
Children and young people build trusted
relationships with the people in their lives,
are able to be themselves and are free from
stigma. They told us:**

45

Changing placements and workers makes it hard to trust and get to know them

Good to get advice and support on healthy sex and relationships can be difficult to talk to foster carers

Staying with our carers after 18 is good

We can feel singled out as a child in care

Some of us want to know who our birth families are and see them on our own terms

We want to be able to contact our PA when we really need to



We have :

- Helped some children and young people know their life-story and understand why they are living in care. We have ensured there are full resources to support this work.
- Supported children and young people to build and maintain good relationships with birth and extended families, wherever possible, to make sure they have strong support networks outside of our care. We have successfully discharged 30 care orders and have 26 children placed with parents.
- Celebrated achievements, events and key milestones. This was evidenced by the Celebration event in August 24.
- We are implementing “Language that cares”.
- If English is not a young person’s first language, we have worked with interpreters and ensured that their documentation is translated into their language.
- All Personal Advisors are permanent to support consistency and stability of relationships.
- Kept in touch with children and young people, through PA’s, after they leave care, if they would like this. We remain in touch with 93% of Care leavers aged up to 21.

We will:

- Follow the recommendations of the Cass Report.
- Train workers across our teams to undertake life story work over the next 12 months.
- Expand the network of support to care leavers by assisting them to develop and maintain key relationships, such as corporate parenting ambassadors and re-linking with key people from a young people’s journey.
- Ensure they can follow their faith and connect with others who speak their language.
- Ensure , where possible children and young people have placements with a similar ethnic background
- Offer a range of groups to support young people to develop friendships, interests and sense of belonging.
- Progress language guides to ensure that young people understand and are given an opportunity to be fully involved in the decisions in their lives.
- Help children and young people learn about healthy sex and relationships. Child in care nurses, school nurses, youth services, personal advisors and participation workers will support them with this. We will include sex and relationships in our training and induction for Foster carers to help young people find it easier to talk to them about these things. We will also

explore other options with young people, like apps where they can get support and information online.

- Join up pregnancy support services, and enhance the targeted health visiting offer, so that young people are supporting during pregnancy and early parenthood.
- Make sure, as new parents, young people have opportunities to make their voice heard during pregnancy. This includes opportunities for mutual peer support with other young parents.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they have stronger and more trustworthy relationships with the adults in their life. Children and young people tell us that they have supportive friendships and healthy romantic relationships (if they are in one).
- Social Workers and Personal Advisors change much less, meaning children and young people are able to build better relationships with them over time.
- Children and young people will keep in touch with us after they leave care, so we can best help and support them if they need and want it.

**Listening, hearing and understanding:
Children and young people make their
voice heard and shape how services are
designed and delivered. They told us:**

We want to make
our voice heard about
the things that affect
us

We should
be listened to
whenever a decision
is being made about
our lives

We
want more
opportunities to
meet up with other
care experienced
young people and
support each
other

We don't want to
be spoken about as
if we weren't there
or as if we were a
statistic



We have

- Introduced children and young people to the Participation Team when they come into our care and let them know how they can make their voice heard.
- Ensured all children and young people are aware of advocacy.
- Set up opportunities for children and young people to meet other care experienced young people.
- Enabled care experienced young people to play an active role in staff recruitment by participating in a panel interview
- Organised opportunities for children and young people to make their voice heard directly with the people who help make the decisions. They have met with key senior leaders.
- Advised through participation with children and young people about what is possible to do and what is not, and why that is.
- Make sure the views, interests and lived experiences of children and young people are listened to and taken into account in all individual plans and reviews.
- Proactively sought the views and experiences of children and young people who we may not hear from as much. For example, through the Youth Offending Service, Police, Youth Services and mental health services. We will make sure all services are informed

and shaped by children and young people.

- Support children and young people to be active and engaged members of their community and wider society.

We Will

- Put the views, interests and lived experience of young people at the heart of how our support services are designed and delivered.
- Be seeking regular feedback from care experienced young people on the service they receive.
- Make sure every child, where appropriate who becomes looked after is contacted by a member of the participation service to tell them what support is on offer to them as a looked after child.
- Ensure more children contribute to their child protection conferences.
- Increase the number of children who chair their looked after reviews.
- Widen the representation of young people who are part of the children in care council (Inspire Change).

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that their voice is heard and feel that they have a say in the decisions which affect their life.
- What children and young people tell us about their lives and experiences in care, wherever possible, leads directly to positive changes, and we always let them know when and how that happens.
- We can evidence that the views and interests of children and young people are at the heart all levels of decision-making.
- We are held to account for the things that we agree we will do.

Safe and protected: Children and young people are safe and protected from harm, abuse and exploitation. They told us:

49

We want to feel safe in our neighbourhoods

We want to know our choices

We want to keep in touch with our friends and family, don't ask us the same things lots of different times

We want to feel safe at home and on line



We have:

- Implemented Get Safe a multi-agency Exploitation Pathway, across our partnership.
- A dedicated team to do individual work where children have missing episodes or need support where there are concerns about exploitation.
- Continued to support children and young people in the youth or criminal justice system, and strive for their best outcomes unconditionally.
- Ensured that young people have had the opportunity to feed back to police with an open forum established.
- Worked together to understand the risks and vulnerabilities that children and young people may experience in life through mapping and joint disruption to support groups of young people.
- Communicated and worked closely between different agencies, at all levels, to share intelligence, knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting children and young people.
- Strengthened our response to Community Safety through the Local Multi Agency Child Exploitation Forums to prevent and disrupt exploitation
- Improved our skill, knowledge and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse and sexually harmful behaviour to better support children and young people.

We will

- Expand our Multi Agency Get Safe Pathway for young people aged up to 25.
- Review the pathway with children and young people to understand any changes that may be needed.
- Continue to review our services to ensure they meet any changing needs or threats.
- Make sure that children are asked routinely about their views on their safety.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they feel safer and more protected in their homes and communities.
- Children and young people are better protected from harm, abuse and exploitation.
- Children and young people are less likely to be involved in any criminal activity, either as a victim of crime or as an offender.

Independence: Young people leave care and become independent and thriving adults. They told us:

We want to live in safe neighbourhoods and be independent

We want to have enough money

We want chances to fail and for you to stay with us



We have :

- Reviewed 'the care leavers offer' and strengthened the finance support available to children and young people.
- We give young people opportunities to return to more supportive home arrangements, if living with greater independence has been too difficult or risky.
- We have continued to support and advocate for our young people where their choices have meant they may not be able to gain accommodation easily
- Reduced the number of young people who experience eviction.
- We have employed a specialist housing PA to improve knowledge around maintaining a tenancy and prevent homelessness.
- course.
- Support young people practically, emotionally and financially, if they are in Further or Higher Education, and link them into other forms of funding to make sure there are no barriers to being able to continue learning.
- Provide more apprenticeships, traineeships, work experience and internships, which cover a broader range of organisations and roles.
- Help young people take up education, employment and training opportunities by helping them get support for their mental health and wellbeing and overcome any logistical barriers like transport.
- Work with young people, from an early age, to build up their skills and confidence so that they are ready to take advantage of work and training opportunities.

We will:

- Support young people to prepare, as early as possible, for adulthood and independence through practical, emotional and some financial support, advice and guidance.
- Enable young people to develop wider support networks, through 'lifelong links' and family group conferencing.
- Help young people save some money regularly while they're in care to set them up for later in life.
- Help young people learn about managing money and living independently through a Tenancy-ready

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they feel able to live independently as a young adult and sort out things like budgeting, paying rent and bills, and claiming financial support.
- Children and young people tell us that their ambitions for life - like jobs, homes, families, and education - feel achievable and that they are motivated to reach them.

- More children and young people have an up-to-date Pathway Plan (meaning it has been reviewed with the young person in the last 6 months) after they turn 16.
- More children and young people are keeping in touch with us after leaving care.
- More children and young people are either studying, working, or on a training scheme or apprenticeship.
- More children and young people are learning to drive, so that they can be more independent in adult life.
- More children and young people are attending university.
- More children and young people benefit from lifelong links and family group conferencing approaches.
- We will work together to deliver a set of strategic actions, which will be outlined in the Corporate Parenting Action Plan and delivered through multi-agency groups.

Engagement and co-production

We will continue to engage closely with care experienced children and young people to understand their experiences, identify where more work still needs to be done and co-develop shared solutions. They will hold us accountable to what we commit to doing.

Being accountable

To make sure we do what we say we will, we will be accountable to children and young people with care experience, to the public (through our elected members), and to each other. We will report to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Appendix 1 - Legislative context

Legislation

- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Children and Families Act 2014](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

Statutory guidance

- [Applying Corporate Parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

National Strategies

- [Keep on Caring: supporting young people from care to independence](#)

National reviews

- [The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(The Case for Change\)](#)
- [National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers: Second Report](#)

International legislation

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\) 1992](#)

Appendix 2 - Using Language that Cares

To find out more from our young people about the importance of using language that cares. We are working with young people and professionals to make sure we are communicating in the best ways.

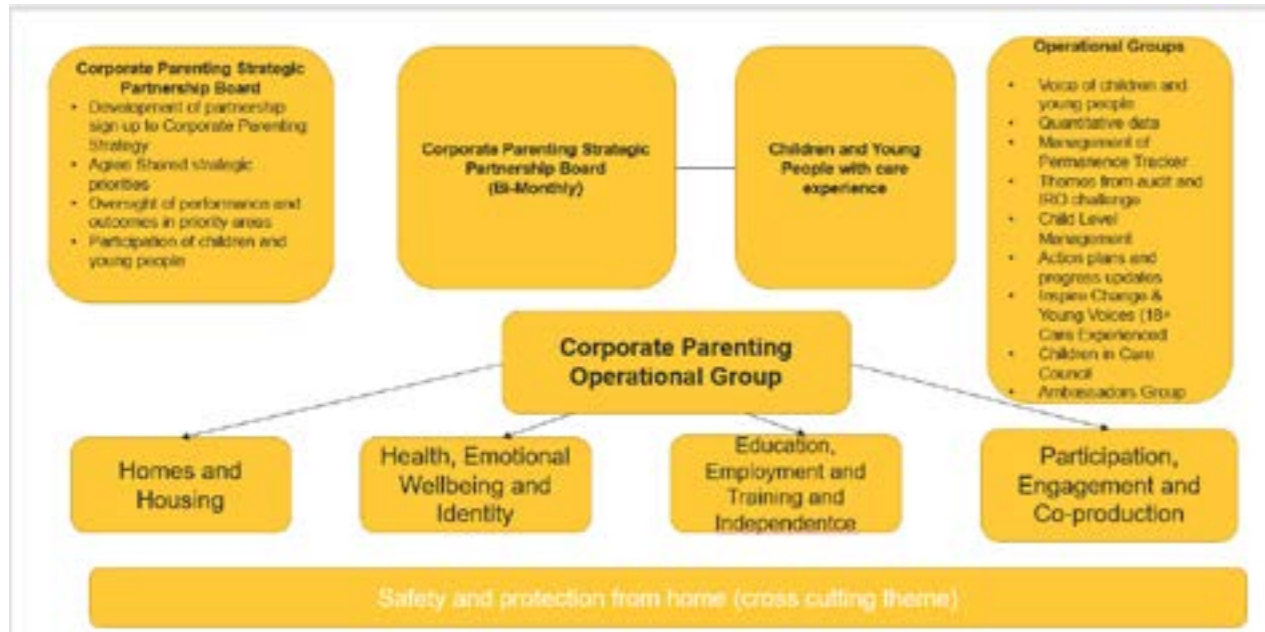
Appendix 3 - The Promise

Inform me!	Involve me!	Celebrate me!	Respect me!	Support me!
<p>We will..</p> <p>Talk to you about why you are in care and help you understand more about your family.</p> <p>Help you understand what happens when you become an adult and leave care.</p> <p>Make sure you know a person you trust who you can speak to for support.</p> <p>Let you know all you need to know.</p> <p>Speak to you in ways you understand and that are caring.</p>	<p>We will..</p> <p>Include you and listen to you in meetings.</p> <p>Use positive language if we are talking about you.</p> <p>Ask you about which possessions you want to keep and who you want to stay in touch with.</p> <p>Try to let you stay overnight at your new place, to test it out, if you need to move home.</p> <p>Try to give you choices about things, based on your views and wishes.</p> <p>Help you get your voice heard.</p> <p>Do what we say we're going to do. We won't make a promise if we can't keep it.</p> <p>Protect your confidentiality by not telling your foster carers what you tell us unless you are at risk of serious harm. If we need to tell other people, we will explain that to you.</p>	<p>We will..</p> <p>Celebrate your achievements we will have high ambitions and aspirations for you.</p> <p>Celebrate religious festivals with you, or help you celebrate them with others.</p> <p>Celebrate your 'moving in to foster-family day' each year if you would like that.</p>	<p>We will..</p> <p>Check your bedrooms sensitively and always ask your consent. We won't intrude on your personal space and belongings.</p> <p>Not make you stand out as being in care. We will have a conversation with you to find out what you prefer.</p> <p>Treat you fairly and equally in the family so that you feel at home.</p> <p>Try to make sure that if you stay over with other people, that you know them and enjoy being with them.</p> <p>Understand what it means to be a teenager and the need to take some controlled risks in life.</p> <p>Understand and respect your identity, including your religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities or health needs and ethnicity.</p> <p>Help you keep hold of your birth language and culture.</p>	<p>We will...</p> <p>Help you make happy memories.</p> <p>Support you to make friends and stay in touch with all the people who are important to you.</p> <p>Support you to build your confidence and overcome your fears.</p> <p>Support you to do your best in school-especially if you're having difficulties at school, like with bullying.</p> <p>Help you find work experience opportunities related to what you're interested in.</p> <p>Support you to have a smart phone and use it safely from age 11 onwards.</p> <p>Support you to have a healthy lifestyle in body and mind.</p> <p>Support you with opportunities to try new things and explore your interests, ambitions and aspirations.</p>

Appendix 4 - How we will check on progress

How we will check on progress and make a difference

These are the groups and reporting structures through which we will deliver our strategy, be accountable to what we say we will do, and ultimately make sure we are achieving positive outcomes for care experienced children and young people in Herefordshire.



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Appendix 5 - Scrutiny

The role of Elected Members

Councillors play a fundamental role in protecting and supporting care experienced children and young people by advocating for improved services for care experienced young people, as well as scrutinising and challenging services to achieve optimal outcomes.

Elected members will scrutinise the delivery of our aims and principles as set out in this strategy, through the Corporate Parenting Board. Working with children and young people, to act as a 'critical friend', they will check on progress to make sure children and young people with care-experience are seeing improved outcomes in their lives.

Corporate Parenting guide for Councillors

The Local Government Association (LGA) has produced a resource pack for elected Members to support them to be as effective Corporate Parents as possible. The pack contains information on the relevant legislation and policy reviews, local case studies, as well as a set of key lines of enquiry.

www.herefordshire.gov.uk

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form

1. Service Area/Directorate

Name of Head of Service for activity being assessed: Rachel Gillott, Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support

Directorate: Children and Young People

Name of lead person for this activity: Rachel Gillott

Individual(s) completing this assessment: Rachel Gillott

Date assessment completed:

2. What is being assessed

Activity being assessed (eg. policy, procedure, budget, service redesign, strategy etc.)

The corporate parenting strategy

What is the aim, purpose, or intended outcome of this activity?

This is to set out the strategy for the Council to meet their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent. Health and Education as key partners also provided data and information from their respective organisations

Who will be affected by the development and implementation of this activity?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Service users | <input type="checkbox"/> Visitors to the county |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communities | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Carers |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Patients |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All staff | <input type="checkbox"/> All part-time staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff at a particular location | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

Is this:

- Review of an existing activity/policy
- New activity/policy
- Planning to withdraw or reduce a service, activity or presence?

3. Background information and findings

What information and evidence have you reviewed to help inform this assessment? (name your sources, eg. demographic information, usage data, Census data, feedback, complaints, audits, research)

We have used data from the children's system, commissioning strategy and housing information.
We have also gained feedback from children and young people to refresh the strategy

Summary of engagement or consultation undertaken (eg. who you've engaged with, and how, or why do you believe this is not required)

A consultation has been carried out with our Care Leavers through the participation groups. They provided the open letter to the council which is recorded in the opening pages. Their views continue to be gained to ensure that the process remains connected to the people at the heart of the strategy. All partners have been consulted for them to provide evidence of actions for previous strategy and ambitions moving forward.

Summary of relevant findings (it is possible that you will have gaps in your evidence. You must decide whether you need to fill in the gaps now, and if it is feasible to do so. It might be that collecting robust information forms part of your action plan below)

This is a refreshed Strategy to ensure it remains relevant and sets out the steps and vision for the next two years.

4. The Public Sector Equality Duty

Will this activity have a positive, neutral or negative impact on our duty to:

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advance equality of opportunity between different groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foster good relations between different groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explain your rationale here, and include any ways in which you could strengthen the capacity of this activity to promote equality (remember to add anything relevant into your action planning below)

This strategy ensures that our care leavers and children in care know what to expect from us as Corporate Parents. Many care experienced people face discrimination, stigma and prejudice in their daily lives. This strategy aims to set out ways we can ensure that we as an LA recognise that stigma and provide the support to our young people that we would want for our own children.

5. The impact of this activity

Consider the potential impact of this activity on each of the equality groups outlined below and explain your rationale. Please note it is possible for the potential impact to be both positive and negative within the same equality group. Remember to consider the impact on staff and service users (current and potential) and partner organisations.

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
Age (include safeguarding, consent and child welfare)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The strategy is aimed at children in care and care leavers so covers up 18 to 25.
Disability (consider attitudinal, physical, financial and social barriers, neuro-diversity, learning disability, physical and sensory impairment)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The underpinning activity flowing from the strategy will seek to meet the individual needs of a CYP following a social care assessment
Gender Reassignment (include gender identity, and consider privacy of data and harassment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The strategy confirms that it will follow the outcomes of the Cass review into gender identity services.
Marriage & Civil Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This will not be impacted
Pregnancy & Maternity (consider working arrangements, part-time working, infant caring responsibilities)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Care Leavers will be offered support through their PA and health colleagues under universal services and specific support.

Equality Group	Potential positive impact	Potential neutral impact	Potential negative impact	Rationale
Race (including Travelling Communities and people of other nationalities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The strategy and underpinning activity will take into account their ethnicity when assessments or placements / accommodation are undertaken. We know that there are gaps but as part of the strategy we will be seeking to close those gaps.
Religion & Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The strategy and underpinning activity will take into account their religion or Belief when assessments or placements / accommodation are undertaken. We know that there are gaps which providing support for our children in care / care leavers but as part of the strategy we will be seeking to close those gaps.
Sex (consider issues of safety and sexual violence, part-time work)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This strategy will support all young people within the care of the council, whatever their sex or gender identity.
Sexual Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	All children and young people's wishes as to their sexual orientation are respected.
Others: carers, care leavers, homeless, social/ economic deprivation (consider shift-patterns, caring responsibilities)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The strategy is aimed at children in care and carers to ensure that their needs are met.
Health Inequalities (any preventable, unfair & unjust differences in health status between groups, populations or individuals that arise from unequal distribution of social, environmental & economic conditions)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The strategy seeks to ensure that children in care and care leavers' health needs are met and they are not put at a disadvantage.

Where a negative impact on any of the equality groups is realised after the implementation of the activity, the activity lead will seek to minimise the impact and carry out a full review of this EIA.

6. Action planning

What actions will you take as a result of this impact assessment? (you will need to include actions to mitigate any potential negative impacts)

Objective	What action will be taken	Who will lead	Timeframe
Progress reports to corporate parenting board	Reports will be taken to the corporate parenting to monitoring the progress of this strategy	Tori Lynch	Between 2025/27

7. Monitoring and review

How will you monitor these actions?

Progress against the corporate parenting strategy will be overseen by the corporate parenting board.

When will you review this EIA?

2026

8. Equality Statement

- All public bodies have a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to give due regard to how they can improve society and promote equality in every aspect of their day-to-day business. This means that they must consider, and keep reviewing, how they are promoting equality in decision-making, policies, services, procurement, staff recruitment and management.
- Herefordshire Council will challenge discrimination, promote equality, respect human rights, and design and implement services, policies and measures that meet the diverse needs of our population, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others.

Signature of person completing EIA

Rachel Gillott

Date signed

29.11.24

9. Make this EIA available

- Attach your EIA as an appendix to any decision reports so that decision-makers have all the equality data they need in order to make robust and fair decisions.
- Staff, trade unions, service users or members of the public may want to see this EIA, so it must be published on our website along with the decision report.

Title of report: Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	19 December 2024
Cabinet member:	Ivan Powell, children and young people
Report by:	Corporate Director Children and Young People
Report author:	Corporate Director Children and Young People

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To share the feedback letter from Ofsted following their fifth Monitoring Visit conducted on 22 - 23 October 2024

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet receive and note the feedback from Ofsted Inspectors' Monitoring Visit letter, at appendix a.**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options. Herefordshire Council Children's Service is judged to be inadequate by Ofsted and will be subject to monitoring visits until the next Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) where a re-grading will be considered.

Key considerations

2. Herefordshire's fifth monitoring visit took place 22nd and 23rd of October with a focus on children at risk of extra familial harm. Ofsted findings in full can be found in appendix one. The summary of findings is set out below with service response where appropriate.
3. **Get Safe specialist team**
Ofsted found that "*Children at risk of extra familial harm in Herefordshire benefit from a committed specialist team, which reduces risk for many of these vulnerable children*". They found the Get Safe team to "*work effectively to reduce risks for children and young people and their work to be timely and well structured*". Ofsted recognised these staff "*form trusting relationships with children and the quality of these relationships serve as a positive foundation to reduce risks for many children*".
4. **Early Help, Support, and identification of risk**
Ofsted found that a range of early help services were available to support children at risk of exploitation and that for most children who come to the attention of children services their needs and risks are promptly identified through effective systems in place in MASH. These systems enable the service to "*undertake prompt screening and allocation*", and through close work with the targeted early help there is a "*coordinated approach to how best support the child*".
5. **Partnership Working**
Ofsted found the external partnership collaboration is helping to protect vulnerable children through targeted interventions and or disruption activity and that this collaboration and information sharing between partners was improved since previous visits.
6. Multi Agency Child Exploitation meetings are held for all children identified as experiencing exploitation and Ofsted found these partnership meetings, chaired by the Safe Team Manager provide a "*structured and embedded multi-disciplinary analysis and evaluation*" and the outcome of these meetings were described as "*a collaborative approach to risk management leading to reliable decision about next steps*".
7. **Working with Children, Young People and Families**
Ofsted noted that children and families are encouraged to attend MACE meetings, which they noted increases their understanding and ownership of planned intervention. The Safe Team hold a weekly referral meeting to which children and families are not invited and we use as part of the management of the referral process informing next steps. Ofsted asked us to consider how this initial information meeting might be more productive if we gain parental and young person consent and engagement at this very early opportunity.

8. The service will take this into consideration though we also note importance of the professional partnership information sharing of police intelligence, which can be confidential / soft Intel, alongside the wider partnership information known about an individual child and any connections with other young people or known parties presenting risk. This valuable information sharing must not be compromised through the presence of children young people and families at this first information-sharing meeting.
9. Ofsted identified the children are engaged in their assessments and their plans. They noted that some plans can present as formulaic and would benefit from better use of the child's own words being recorded and more tailored plans described in the written document that would in fact better reflect the verbal account of plans in place that staff were able to present to Ofsted.
10. **Quality of practice**
We were pleased that Ofsted found that the child and family assessments that they had reviewed in other parts of the service, from front door to children in care and care leavers and completed in recent months, were *"an improved quality"* to those they have historically observed. Ofsted found these assessments as being *"detailed and reflecting overarching needs, with an exploration of risks to the child"*. Ofsted found that these quality assessments lead to *"risk being well understood, leading to effective protection action and support"*
11. Ofsted noted for a small number of children with complex needs and in care who have experienced placement disruption, including some who are placed a long way from home, they have presenting risks not sufficiently well managed and this constant disruption in placement is causing delay and disruption to their needs being understood and met. In response, the service is undertaking a senior management lead case review in each of these cases. This will provide critical reflective challenge to ensure that we are identifying, managing and minimising risks as we attempt to stabilise these children and progress their permanency plans. These reviews will include considerations for a change of plan to permanency via rehabilitation at home if it is safe and in line with the young person and parents wishes.
12. Ofsted recognised the service had already identified the need to increase the number of children taking up missing from home and care interviews and found when these interviews are completed they are *"timely and enable the child to share valuable information as they explore risk factors that influence children going missing from home and care"*. We were reminded about the need to always have professional curiosity.
13. Ofsted noted that the revised judgement guidelines for case audits had resulted in *"more accurate understanding of practice"* and for the first time Ofsted agreed with all the services own audit judgements. Recognising the quality assurance process is new and needs to embed Ofsted fed back how we could improve how we more consistently provide feedback and learning. As a response the service has developed a single record of the audit outcome, which takes account of both the peer and the lead auditor reports and identifies not just case learning but service learning more explicitly.

14. The service has also developed process and communication to go to young people and parents at the beginning of the month when the audits are identified, giving us more opportunity and flexibility to engage the child of the parent in the feedback during that audit process.
15. **Management & Leadership**
Ofsted reported, *“since the last monitoring visit in February 2024 a new interim director of children’s services has been appointed who has brought renewed focus to areas of the service which need to improve. A refreshed improvement plan is being implemented and there are some early signs of improvement”*. Ofsted found *“staff are consistently positive about the leadership of the new DCS and wider senior managers”* and that they reported a sense of an improving service, being able to access a range of training and development opportunities. Staff told Ofsted that they feel well supported and positive about recent changes taking place. Ofsted recorded finding of a workforce wide feeling of a *“drive to improve”* with staff reporting *“visible and approachable leadership in recent months who seek views of staff, meaning they feel invested in and listened to”*
16. Ofsted findings include *“a significant focus on improving performance management is enabling leaders to understand the areas that have started to improve and where further improvement is needed to ensure that developments are embedded and continue with pace and momentum”*.
17. The monitoring visit identified that supervision was now taking place regularly for staff but challenged supervision in itself was not effectively addressing drift in all cases and challenged us to ensure that the monthly supervision isn’t a silo monthly approach and ensure that actions between supervisions are picked up to identify and address drift and delay. As a service response, a three monthly case summary is now being completed by the case-holding workers, which includes a review of the last three supervision sessions. This will enable the team managers to undertake a December/January supervision and ensure that plans are identified and progressed.
18. Ofsted noted that establishing greater permanency in our workforce remains a priority.
19. In response to the verbal feedback the service put in place actions as identified above. A presentation to the full staff conference on the 22nd of November also took place providing the positive feedback to the workforce and identifying our actions that were taken in the context of the Ofsted feedback.
20. This approach enables us to ensure our workforce understand not only what they need to do to improve but why and how the changes in practice are to achieve improving quality of service for children and families.
21. The outcome findings letter will be shared and discussed with our partners through the Children’s Safeguarding Board to identify any further partnership actions required as a result of this focused monitoring visit

22. This Monitoring Visit outcome letter will be available to the public via the Ofsted website on 4th December 24. It will also be available via the Council website.
23. The next monitoring visit will be our sixth monitoring visit and is likely to take place in January / February 2025

Community impact

24. The Council Plan 2024–2028 includes the ambition to ‘enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and benefit from communities that help people to feel safe and supported’ and more specifically, the council aims to:
 - a. We want to support children and young people to thrive, be safe, and for families to be supported.
 - b. We believe that children and young people are best supported in their family networks and within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. Our children are the future. Sometimes children and families need our help.
 - c. We are committed to improving children’s services and providing support to families who need it. Acting on Ofsted monitoring visits are part of our drive to improve our services to children and families.
 - d. We will support all children to have the best start in life.

Environmental Impact

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

Equality duty

26. There are no equality issues arising from this report.

Resource implications

27. There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.

Legal implications

28. The Ofsted inspection in July 2022 was undertaken under the Framework, Evaluation Criteria and Inspector Guidance for the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS). This contains provisions regarding actions to be taken after an inadequate inspection report. These include monitoring by Ofsted, an action plan, a number of monitoring visits and a re-inspection.

Risk management

29. There are no new or additional risks arising from this visit. Risks associated with the wider improvement plan are monitored by the Improvement Board.

Consultees

30. None

Appendices

Appendix A: Ofsted Feedback Letter.

Background papers

None identified.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

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	Tina Russell	Date 29/11/2024
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Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

4 December 2024

Tina Russell
Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services
Herefordshire County Council
Plough Lane Offices
Hereford
HR4 0LE

Dear Tina

Monitoring visit to Herefordshire children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Herefordshire children's services on 22 and 23 October 2024. This was the fifth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in July 2022. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Alison Smale and Ceri Evans.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- The protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial risk.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

Since the last monitoring visit in February 2024, a new interim director of children's services (DCS) has been appointed, who has brought renewed focus to areas of the service which need to improve. A refreshed improvement plan is being implemented and there are some early signs of improvement.

Children at risk of extra-familial harm in Herefordshire benefit from a committed specialist team which reduces risks for many of these very vulnerable children. These risks include child exploitation, going missing from home or care and the risks associated with gangs, radicalisation, trafficking and modern slavery. The Get Safe team works effectively and reduces risks for many children who are vulnerable to or at risk of exploitation and other forms of extra-familial harm. Most work is timely and well structured. The team forms lasting and trusting relationships with children, some of whom maintain contact after they are closed to the team. The quality of these relationships serves as a positive foundation, and risks reduce for many

children. Interpreters are appropriately used with children and families, which helps facilitate discussion in visits and direct work where English is not the first language.

Most children vulnerable to exploitation risks who come to the attention of children's services are promptly identified. For these vulnerable children, collaboration and timely information-sharing between partners has improved, which is helping to protect vulnerable children through targeted interventions and/or disruption activity. However, a small number of children with very complex needs, many of whom the local authority has been involved with for a long time, experience delays in effective intervention, particularly when they cannot safely be cared for at home and there is continued difficulty in sustaining the right placement and keeping them safe.

Findings and evaluation of progress

A range of early help services support children at risk of exploitation. The specialist Get Safe team works alongside early help workers, which ensures a well-coordinated approach to intervention. Clear parameters are set for the required work, which enables a coordinated approach about how best to support the child.

The Get Safe team is based in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which receives referrals to children's services. Effective systems are in place to ensure prompt screening and allocation of new referrals relating to children at risk of harm outside of their family to the Get Safe team.

Multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) meetings provide a structured, embedded approach to multi-disciplinary analysis and evaluation. A collaborative approach to risk management leads to reliable decisions about next steps. At the initial MACE meeting, which decides whether the Get Safe team will become involved, the opportunity is missed to involve children and their family at the earliest opportunity. It is not sufficiently clear why they are not invited or asked for their consent. Children and their families are encouraged to attend subsequent MACE meetings, which increases their understanding and ownership of planned intervention. For children who are not subject to MACE review, closure decision-making is less strong. It is not consistently clear what actions and interventions remain in place to support and sustain progress already made to reduce risks for the child.

Most Get Safe risk assessments relating to risks outside of the family are clear and comprehensive. They utilise a wide range of multi-disciplinary information and intelligence, which is reviewed through regular MACE meetings. This means risks for children are mostly well understood, leading to effective protective action and support. Alongside the allocated social worker and multi-disciplinary partners, the Get Safe team considers the level of risk and what action is needed to best support the child.

Child and family assessments and plans completed in other parts of the service in recent months are of improved quality. Most assessments are detailed and reflect

children's overarching needs. They include an exploration of the current risk and level of need. For the vast majority of children, they are updated when circumstances change. For a small minority this is not the case, particularly for children in care with more complex needs, who have experienced placement disruption and unplanned change. A very small number of children in care are placed a long way from home or have experienced significant placement change. Delay and disruption to their needs being met means that their risks are not sufficiently well managed.

Children's risk management plans vary in quality. Some are formulaic and not tailored sufficiently to the particular child's circumstances. Staff are able to talk about how they tailor these plans in practice, but this stronger practice is not sufficiently reflected in these documents.

Children are able to access some helpful specialist support services to address issues which contribute to their vulnerability. While some children in care and care leavers benefit from activities including sport and exercise, for others there is little evidence of support to engage in physical and social activities that could enhance their lives and help address mental health and isolation.

Across the service, management oversight and supervision of social workers and personal advisers continues to need improvement. Most supervision is regular and the proportion of permanent managers has increased. Supervision does not effectively address drift or ensure that actions are progressed to improve children's circumstances.

The continued turnover of social workers means that some children experience too many changes of social worker. While this is starting to improve, the amount of change in these important relationships, experienced by some children who already have great difficulties with trust, has a negative impact on their capacity to form meaningful relationships with their social workers. Children are engaged in planning and assessment, but their voices are not consistently reflected authentically in documents.

Children who go missing from home or care are offered return home interviews. Leaders have started to address the need to improve the take up of these interviews, which they recognise remains too low. When return home interviews are completed, they are timely and completed in a way which makes the child feel comfortable. Most return home interviews explore risks and factors influencing risk, but some lack sufficient professional curiosity to fully understand risks.

A significant focus on improving performance management is enabling leaders to understand the areas that have started to improve and where further improvement is needed to ensure that developments are embedded with continued pace and momentum.

The effectiveness of the approach to quality assurance remains limited. The audit programme was recently reset. Revised judgement guidelines have resulted in a more accurate understanding of practice quality. Audits are now being moderated, but this is not being done in a way which consistently provides a reflective commentary to aid learning. It is positive that auditors consult with workers and parents, but the engagement of children remains under-developed.

Staff are consistently positive about the leadership of both the new DCS and wider senior managers. They report a sense of an improving service. Staff like working in Herefordshire and are positive about the range of suitable training and development opportunities. Caseloads are manageable, and staff recognise that their workloads have started to reduce, enabling them to see children more often. They feel well supported and are positive about the recent changes and feel that the service is changing for the 'better'. They feel that there is a 'drive to improve' and that this is shared across the workforce. They report a visible and approachable leadership in recent months that seeks the views of staff, meaning that they feel invested in and listened to.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Alison Smale
His Majesty's Inspector