

Agenda

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Tuesday 12 March 2024**

Time: **2.00 pm**

Place: **Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

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

For any further information please contact:

Simon Cann, Democratic Services Officer

Tel: 01432 260667

Email: simon.cann@herefordshire.gov.uk

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

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

Membership

Chairperson **Councillor Toni Fagan**
Vice-chairperson **Councillor Liz Harvey**

Councillor Clare Davies
Councillor Robert Highfield
Councillor Jim Kenyon
Councillor Ben Proctor
Councillor Rob Williams

Sylvia Cockroft
Anna Eccleston
Jan Frances
Kate Joiner
Stuart Mitchell
Sam Pratley

Hereford Diocese

Agenda

	Pages
<p>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive apologies for absence.</p>	
<p>2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES To receive details of members nominated to attend the meeting in place of a member of the committee.</p>	
<p>3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive declarations of interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.</p>	
<p>4. MINUTES To receive the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23 January 2024.</p>	9 - 16
<p style="text-align: center;">HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS</p> <p>The deadline for the submission of questions for this meeting is 5pm on Wednesday 6 March 2024.</p> <p>Questions must be submitted to councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk. Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted.</p> <p>Accepted questions and the responses will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved</p>	
<p>5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC To receive any written questions from members of the public.</p>	
<p>6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL To receive any written questions from members of the council.</p>	
<p>7. CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE A report providing an overview and update in respect of the Herefordshire Corporate Parenting Service.</p>	17 - 22
<p>8. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD A report providing an overview and update in respect of the Herefordshire Corporate Parenting Board.</p>	23 - 70
<p>9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING Next meeting: Tuesday 12 March 2.00 pm</p> <p>Provisional dates: Tuesday 7 May 2024 2.00 pm Tuesday 30 July 2024 2.00 pm</p>	

Tuesday	17 September 2024	2.00 pm
Tuesday	26 November 2024	2.00 pm
Tuesday	21 January 2025	2.00 pm
Tuesday	18 March 2025	2.00 pm



The public's rights to information and attendance at meetings

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

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

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

Thank you for your help in keeping Herefordshire Council meetings safe.

You have a right to:

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

Recording of meetings

Please note that filming, photography and recording of this meeting is permitted provided that it does not disrupt the business of the meeting.

Members of the public are advised that if you do not wish to be filmed or photographed you should let the governance services team know before the meeting starts so that anyone who intends filming or photographing the meeting can be made aware.

The reporting of meetings is subject to the law and it is the responsibility of those doing the reporting to ensure that they comply.

The council may make a recording of this public meeting or stream it live to the council's website. Such recordings are made available for members of the public via the council's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/HerefordshireCouncil/videos

Public transport links

The Herefordshire Council office at Plough Lane is located off Whitecross Road in Hereford, approximately 1 kilometre from the City Bus Station.

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

The seven principles of public life

(Nolan Principles)

1. Selflessness

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

2. Integrity

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

3. Objectivity

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

4. Accountability

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

5. Openness

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

6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership

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

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held in Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 23 January 2024 at 2.00 pm

Board members present in person, voting:

Councillor Clare Davies
 Councillor Toni Fagan
 (Chairperson)
 Councillor Liz Harvey (Vice-Chairperson)
 Councillor Robert Highfield
 Councillor Jim Kenyon
 Stuart Mitchell (Co-opted member)
 Councillor Ben Proctor
 Councillor Rob Williams

Board members in attendance remotely, non-voting:

Kate Joiner (Co-opted member)

Note: Board members in attendance remotely, e.g. through video conference facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.

Others present in person:

Ben Baugh	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
Kevin Crompton	Independent Scrutineer	Herefordshire Council
Steve Eccleston	Partnership Manager	
Darryl Freeman	Corporate Director, Children and Young People	Herefordshire Council
Victoria Gibbs	Service Director Early Help, Quality Assurance and Prevention	Herefordshire Council
Heather Manning	Nurse Safeguarding Children	NHS/ICB
Councillor Ivan Powell	Cabinet Member Children and Young People	Herefordshire Council
Superintendent Helen Wain		West Mercia Police
Danial Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council

Others in attendance remotely:

Eleanor Brazil	Children's Commissioner	Department for Education
----------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

175. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Anna Eccleston (Parent Governor Primary Co-opted Member) and Sam Pratley (Diocese of Herefordshire Co-opted Member).

176. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No named substitutes.

177. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

178. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

179. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A document containing a question received from a member of the public and the response given, plus a supplementary question and the response, is attached at Appendix 1 to the minutes.

180. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from councillors.

181. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Independent Scrutineer took the report as read and gave a brief overview including the following considerations.

- It was noted that the report covered 2022/23 and was ten months out of date.
- Significant progress had been made in many areas since the publication of the report. The Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup was used as an example, as its use of performance data, and analysis of partnership participation had greatly improved over the last ten months.
- It was noted that there was still a lot to do, but the Independent Scrutineer believed there were refreshing signs of commitment from partners to improve things.

Following the presentation the report was opened up to the Committee, the principle points of the discussion are summarised below.

1. In response to a question from the Committee the Independent Scrutineer explained that evidencing the positive impact of what the partnership does for children was still a challenge, but that this was true of similar partnerships in other areas.
2. The partnership now reports to the Improvement Board and has an agreement with the board that the partnership will deliver on the neglect strategy, continued improvements in the mash, adopting a get safe model and the implementation of the partnership wide trauma informed approach.
3. There had been a challenge finalising the neglect strategy, but good progress had been made with the interim programme, and the final strategy would be available for scrutiny as soon as it was complete.
4. The Family Approach was progressing well across the partnership and was tied in with the roll out of restorative practice training. The Independent Scrutineer

stated that they had seen clear evidence of agencies working together for the benefit of families.

5. The Committee heard that since the report had been published the Audit Subgroup had been combined with the Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup. There had been an improvement in the focus on multi-agency audits and the timescales for audits and annual plans.
6. The Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup had reported back on six cases where child abuse was suspected, the group had looked at those cases, conducted a multi-agency audit and received learning recommendations back, which were now part of an action plan that would be followed through.
7. The Independent Scrutineer stated that there were aspects of partnership work that could be taken as a specific focus and tracked through for the year. Regular updates on multi-agency audits could be provide for the Committee if it wished.
8. In accordance with 'Working Together 2023', the next report has to be available by September 2024.
9. The Committee raised concerns about individual partner members being too busy to engage with assessing how they're working together as a partnership. It was felt that communication and coordination should be at the heart of the partnership and not sliding away because people were 'too busy being busy'.
10. The Independent Scrutineer acknowledged an issue in relation to capacity challenge for the partners, because the same pool of people were tasked with working with multiple partnerships, which could create conflict. However, the situation was proving and this was likely to be reflected in the following year's report.
11. The Independent Scrutineer explained that, individually, most of the partners were quite strong in terms of safeguarding, but the whole was not greater than the sum of its parts. The challenge of partnership working and the journey the partnership was on was making the sum greater than the whole.
12. The Committee heard that multi-agency data was still a challenge and work was ongoing between the partners to remedy this. An embryonic safeguarding partners' dashboard was being supported by the local authority. There was sufficient partnership information for the Quality and Effectiveness group to tackle the next challenge, which was to look at the data, what it was showing and what to do about it.
13. The Committee heard that the partnership did not have a dedicated Children's data analyst, although there was one within the Council's Performance and Intelligence Team.
14. Greater resource in relation to partnership data analysis was necessary and there was a need to bring together all the individual data people from each partner to map out where things were.
15. There had been strong replies from individual agencies to challenges on Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, but as a partnership this was not in evidence.
16. In relation to a question regarding increasing the pace of change, it was explained that there was a multi-agency review of the MASH with Leeds, adopting a peer review methodology where colleagues would go into the MASH to observe some of the practices. There had also been governance changes, which now required the MASH to report to the Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup, which added another level of reviewing.
17. The Committee heard that measuring the impact of improvements was a challenge and that 'pulling levers' in certain areas and attributing impact to that was difficult to do in the short term.
18. The Committee noted the difficulty in measuring and allocating impact to improvements, but asked how and if the partnership could detail what impact it expected its improvements to have.

19. The Independent Scrutineer explained that to get to a point where sophisticated questions about measuring impact could be asked, there was a necessity to have certain architecture - such as data and training - in place. In the last 12 months the partnership had got this architecture in place, but there was still more to be done.
20. The Committee heard there were good links between the partnership, education department and schools. The challenge wasn't just about schools but the whole education sector. Schools under local authority control were straightforward to deal with, but independent schools, early years providers and specialist education needed to be engaged and included in a way that didn't look like or was tokenism. A piece of work to achieve this was currently underway.

Resolved: The Committee voted unanimously to approve the following actions:

Action: That a workshop be held including all data analysts from across the partnership.

Action: In relation to impact. That the partnership focuses and responds to the question of what it is expecting to see if the suggested improvements are implemented?

182. REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMISSIONER IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Children's Commissioner introduced the report and gave an overview of the main themes contained within. The key considerations included:

- An acknowledgment from the Commissioner that there had been clear improvements in some aspects of the service, but there were still areas where a significant amount of work needed to be done. The need to implement improvements at pace was emphasised.
- The Commissioner drew the Committee's attention to section 14 of the cover report, which detailed six areas where evidence of progress would be expected to be seen at the next review.
- The Committee was advised to consider the work being carried out by the Improvement Board and align its work programme accordingly to avoid duplication of work. It was suggested it might be useful to obtain officer feedback regarding parent and children's satisfaction and involvement in service developments. It was also suggested that the Committee might wish to focus its attention on areas not being directly looked at by the Improvement Board, such as the development of locality arrangements and multi-agency working.
- It was noted that the Families Commission report, published in June 2023, had raised issues about the approach taken in supporting families and helping them to understand better ways of caring for their children. The report had provided clear evidence and views from families that their experience with the service was not as positive as it should have been.
- It was explained that the partnership with Leeds Council had been developed shortly after the review. It was an 18 month programme funded by the Department for Education, with a primary aim of improving the quality of practice and addressing the culture of working with families.

Following the presentation the report was opened up to the Committee, the principle points of the discussion are summarised below.

1. In response to a question from the Committee it was explained that Leeds Council had longstanding locality arrangements, which were commonly referred to as 'The right help, at the right time, in the right place'. It was suggested by the Children's Commissioner that it might be useful if the Leeds partners delivered a presentation about how they deliver locally based multi-agency support to families.
2. The Corporate Director Children and Young People acknowledged potential issues around language and how services were described, especially in relation to early help. The Director clarified to the Committee that early help was not typically carried out by social workers, and that early help and prevention should be being conducted by a wide range of statutory, community, voluntary and faith agencies, with a view to preventing a higher level of need being reached where a social worker would be required.
3. It was explained that children's services did run targeted early help services when there was a particular level of need and that this would ideally remove the requirement for social care intervention.
4. The Committee heard that there was an opportunity to strengthen and coordinate relationships between the Council and multi-agency partners by using primary schools as early help hubs. This was a model that had already been employed and had worked well for autism hubs.
5. The Corporate Director explained that it was in the interests of children and families in Herefordshire that the service and its partners strengthened early help arrangements so that families got the right help at the right time. Ideally, families would be able to either go online or go into their local school, health centre, library or other setting and obtain information about parenting support or any other issues that might be impacting their families. This would eliminate or reduce the need for matters to be escalated to a point where the involvement of statutory services was required.
6. The Corporate Director explained to the Committee that starting in April 2024, the service was looking to allocate new referrals by postcode, so that social workers in assessment teams would be working with a cluster of families in a particular area. There would be a transitional element to this and where social workers had already built strong relations with families they would strive to avoid disrupting those existing relationships by waiting until interventions had concluded.
7. It was stressed that social workers would largely continue to be based at Plough Lane, with workloads and cases that were postcode allocated, then for several days a week workers could potentially hot desk at a school or health centre within their allocated area.
8. The Children's Commissioner was keen to see arrangements put in place that would be easily accessed and well understood by both families and agencies. Ideally there would be a mechanism for determining the most suitable professional/agency to support families.
9. There was a need to ensure that children's social care was well aligned with the arrangements of other agencies, such as the police and health partners, who had shown a willingness and readiness to be involved in new locality arrangements and multi-agency working. Milestones and timetables to monitor how partners were being engaged needed to be maintained.
10. The Committee heard that the service was keen to build trust with families and consult in relation to parent and children satisfaction with the service. Once a clear set of proposals for the service was in place then these would be shared widely and people would be asked for their input and feedback via surveys and other activities.

11. It was explained that websites containing service information were available across the partnership. The Council was looking to make its own website more accessible, but would not consider one over-arching site, as this would be too difficult to resource, update and maintain.
12. Social media platforms were increasingly being used to disseminate information and the Council was continuously learning from families about how they accessed and would like to access information.
13. The Committee heard that the majority of complaints relating to children's services fell within the statutory children's complaints process as laid down by legislation. This was a 3 stage process with recourse to the ombudsman. The number of complaints had been decreasing and number of compliments going up, with more cases being resolved at stage 1 and 2 of the process than before.
14. The Corporate Director offered to bring a report by the complaints team to the Committee if it wished to see it.
15. The Committee head that the six areas identified in the report at section 14 - where evidence of progress would be expected - replaced and ran alongside existing measures on the dashboard.
16. The Committee questioned how it might be possible to acknowledge work being carried out by the Improvement Board publicly. The Corporate Director suggested that it might be useful for the Chair, Vice Chair, Chair of Improvement Board, Corporate Director CYP and Scrutiny Officer to meet up and discuss the best approach to take in regards to the matter.

Resolved: The Committee voted unanimously to approve the following actions:

Action: For the Committee to consider, as part of its work programme, which areas it will focus on over the next six months and be mindful of, but avoid duplication of work being carried out by the Improvement Board. The Committee should also pick up on areas that aren't being covered off by the Improvement Board, such as locality arrangements and multi-agency support for families.

Action: Chair, Vice Chair, Chair of Improvement Board, Corporate Director CYP and Scrutiny Officer to meet to discuss how the work of the Improvement Board could be made more visible and accessible to the public and other members of the Council.

Action: The Committee to hold a work programme meeting to discuss how to approach subjects such as the complaints procedure including: how complaints/compliments are registered and scrutiny of the annual complaints report.

183. TASK AND FINISH GROUP - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DIRECTORATE BUDGET

The report was introduced by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, who provided the Committee with an overview of the findings and recommendations of the group. The key considerations included:

- The group had met once in person and twice online.
- The group had been provided with a number of documents - some in confidence - that provided information about oversight in relation to how the delivery of services in the directorate was being undertaken on a monthly basis.
- Cost consequences of decisions that were made on care packages were often monitored on a weekly basis.

- The level of detail that had gone into providing monthly reports to Cabinet, which Cabinet had scrutinised collectively in terms of maintaining oversight on in-year delivery.
- The group had looked at in-year delivery, as well as budget proposals, in order to gain an understanding of the trajectory/journey of the service in terms of delivering on the improvement plan.
- The group had sought evidence and assurance on progress being made in-year to support and underpin the balance and content of the budget in terms of service area budgets, but also areas of savings and identified pressures.
- It was noted that the directorate had overspent considerably over the last two years and that this had posed a significant risk to the Council and resulted in savings being imposed in other areas. The group had been keen to obtain assurance that the directorate would get it right this year
- The group had produced seven recommendations (a-g) covering the range of different areas that had been investigated.

Following the presentation the report was opened up to the Committee, the principle points of the discussion are summarised below.

1. The Committee acknowledged that progress had been made to improve the understanding of costs associated with service delivery, but expressed concern that the savings targeted for this year had not been delivered as of yet.
2. The quarter 2 performance report and monthly cabinet reports going up to October 2023 had not provided assurance that tangible savings relating to reduced costs of looked after children and the staff mix between permanent employees and agency staff were starting to be delivered.
3. The committee raised concerns about spiralling costs within the care service system and felt that it would be useful to look at the national situation to determine whether the system was dysfunctional and what could be done about it.
4. The Corporate Director echoed the highlighted problems with the system and explained that information and recommendations had been put to the government by various stakeholders. This was not a market the Council had direct control over, although it had built good relations with providers to ensure that costs had been kept lower than the national average, whilst making sure children's needs were being met.
5. A discussion took place in relation to each of the recommendations made within the report. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer suggested that six of the seven recommendation had been discharged during the course of the meeting, these related to proposed work programme item considerations for the Committee and data requests to the directorate. The final recommendation (g) would require a response from Cabinet.

The Committee voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, but acknowledged that recommendations 'a-f' had been discharged during the course of the meeting and should be noted by Cabinet. Recommendation 'g' would require a response from Cabinet.

Resolved: That it be recommended to the executive:

- a. **Financial performance data to form part of the 'measures that matter' and performance dashboard data, and should be reported back to staff teams**

so that they are aware of the financial consequences of the service performance alongside other measures.

- b. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to examine how SEND Transport demand and costs are managed, including a review of operations in other rural local authorities.
- c. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise work to step children down from residential care, and to reunify families where children have become looked after.
- d. Dedicated financial resource to continue to be embedded within the children and young people directorate to provide challenge and assurance that day-to-day costs are being captured and forecast correctly.
- e. Each monthly financial outturn report for the Children and Young People directorate, and weekly Children's Service Analysis Tool (CHAT) be provided to the chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
- f. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee undertake a piece of work to examine the robustness of the council's data and management information supporting the children and young people directorate.
- g. Savings as proposed to be targeted for Children's directorate to deliver in 2024-25 but assured funding to be found from elsewhere to balance the council's budget.

184. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee agreed to hold a work programming session for the coming year.

185. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 12 March 2024 2.00 pm

The meeting ended at 5.03pm

Chairperson

Title of report: Corporate Parenting Service

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 12 March 2024

Report by: Rachel Gillott – Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

For the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider this report which provides an overview and update in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The report in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service is considered; noting the progress made since 2018.**
- b) **The committee determine any recommendations it wishes to make to secure further improvement in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service.**

Alternative options

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

Key considerations

2. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee requested this report and helpfully provided a briefing note setting out the focus areas and questions to which the Committee seeks answers:
 1. What are the current number and the rate of looked after children in Herefordshire?
 - How have these figures changed since 2018?
 - How does this compare with statistical neighbours and West Midlands?
 2. Does the council understand the causes of the increase in numbers of looked after children?
 - What are the external factors?
 - What are the internal factors? (this is the important one)
 3. What proportion of our looked after children live:
 - With kinship carers?
 - With in-house foster parents?
 - In private fostering?
 - Living in residential care?
 4. What are the costs of placing children in these different types of placements?
 5. What factors are causing the recent increase in numbers of looked after children?
 - Factors out of our control (UASC, court delays)
 - Factors in our control (practice, strategy and funding)
 6. What are our solutions?
 - Longer-term/strategic (more families supported earlier)
 - ECHO
 - Reunification

3. Officer's Response:

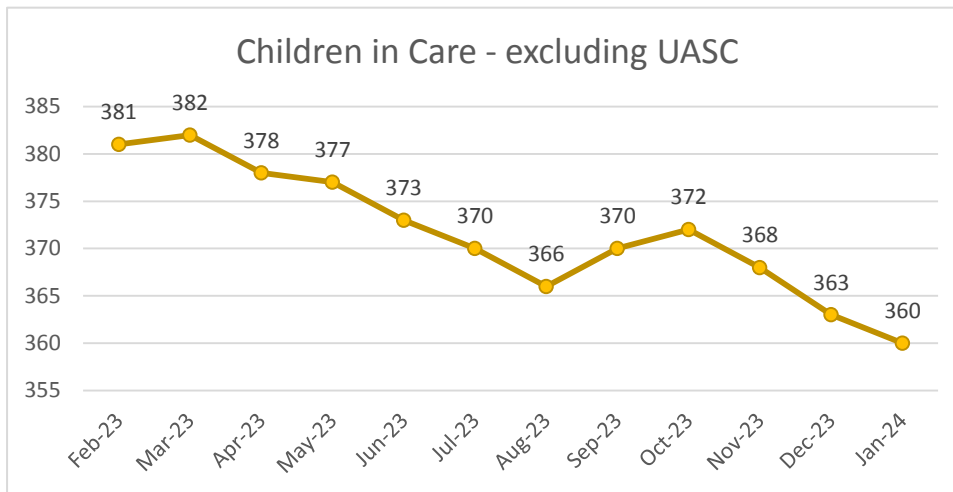
4. The numbers and rate (per 10,000 children) since 2018 are set out in the table below. Rates for England, our statistical neighbours and the West-Midlands are also shown:
- 5.

Year	Herefordshire		England	Statistical Neighbours	West Midlands
	Number	Rate			
2018/19	333	69	66	57	82
2019/20	351	103	68	59	83
2020/21	313	92	69	62	86
2021/22	378	112	70	64	88
2022/23	412	121	71	67	90
Current	396	110			

6. It is difficult to surmise the reasons for the historical fluctuation in the numbers/rate of children in care. Both the senior management team and the operational management team has since changed.

7. In March 2021, a High Court judgement detailed significant and systemic failings in practice within the local authority. The judgement noted that these failings had a significant and adverse impact on some children and families over several years.
8. In May 2021, the Department for Education issued Herefordshire Council children's services a non-statutory notice to improve.
9. The council committed to reviewing all cases open to Children's Services. This noted that there was significant drift.
10. In August 2021, Ofsted carried out a Focussed Visit. One of the findings was that the decision to initiate pre-proceedings was not always considered quickly enough.
11. In a response to these findings drift was addressed and the number of care proceeding and children in care rose during 2021/22 to 378 (up from 313 in 2020/21).
12. Since then we have changed practice and have implemented mechanisms to appropriately escalate children subject to pre-proceedings processes. This was recognised during our second Monitoring Visit by Ofsted (August 2023).
13. In July 2016, the Home Office and Department for Education launched the National Transfer Scheme. This is a voluntary transfer arrangement between Local Authorities to care for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Herefordshire has been part of the National Transfer Scheme since its inception.
14. Due to world events, the number of individuals claiming asylum in the European Union for the year ending March 2023 increased by 41% compared to the previous year. The UK saw a similar percentage increase in the number of people claiming asylum (44%) over the same period.
15. Of the people claiming asylum in the year ending March 2023, there were 50,843 applications by Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) of which the United Kingdom received 5,478.
16. This resulted in an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children supported by Herefordshire under the National Transfer Scheme.
17. To put this in context, in January 2022 there were 6 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. In January 2024 this was 38.
18. As a proportion of all children in our care, in January 2022, 2% of children looked after were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. In January 2024 this was 9%
19. Whilst the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has increased, over the last 12 months we taken steps to safely prevent where possible the number of young people entering care as a result of care proceedings.
20. The graph below provides an overview of the number of children in our care excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. It is noted that where this is safe to do so the increased activity in respect of reunification and a reduction in issuing care proceedings has also had a downward impact on the number of children in our care.

21.



22. An average cost for external foster carers and residential placements is provided in the table below but it should be noted that these average costs can vary depending on the cohort of children and their needs in each placement type. Average costs will therefore fluctuate over time.

Placement Type	Number of Children	Average weekly cost
External Foster Carer	111	£988
Residential	44	£6,023

23. Ninety-two (92) children in our care live with in-house foster carers whilst 78 children live with kinship carers (friends and family).
24. The Fostering Care Allowance to in-house and kinship carers is based on the age of the child; additionally a Fostering Fee is paid based on the experience of the in-house or kinship foster carer.
25. There is no difference in fees and allowances between a child living with kinship carers or with in-house foster carers. The most common Foster Care Allowance to our in-house or kinship carers is £219 per week with an addition of a Fostering Fee of £181.
26. Additional allowances such as those for the child's birthday, Christmas and festival, school uniform and holiday allowances might be payable.
27. Placement sufficiency remains a key priority and external placements continue to place cost pressures on the budget.
28. In respect of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the Local Authority receives a grant from the Home Office although this does not typically cover the full cost of our placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
29. We have refreshed and relaunched our Reunification Practice Guidance and a ring-fenced and dedicated staff to work on rehabilitation home for young people from care where this is safe to do so.
30. We are expanding our Edge of Care Home team (ECHO); this team consists of skilled workers who provide effective support to prevent family breakdown and provide help for carers. We have seen an increase in the use of Family Group Conferences.

31. Supported by our Leeds partners, we have introduced a restorative practice approach which aims to work alongside children and families and to provide support and services at the earliest point.
32. By continuing the approaches and preventative work as set out above, we should continue to see a decrease in number of children in our care.

Community impact

33. The activity in respect of preventative work and bringing children into care has a direct impact on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
34. As Corporate Parents there is a collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for children who are looked after by the council. Being a good corporate parent means we should; accept responsibility for children in the council's care; make their needs a priority; and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.
35. Corporate parenting responsibilities are not confined to elected members. All officers share the responsibility to promote the needs of looked after children. Key responsibilities of all officers are: to promote the life chances of looked after children and care leavers in their area of responsibility; and to consider the impact of decision making on looked after children and care leavers.

Environmental Impact

36. There is no direct environmental impact arising out of this report.

Equality duty

37. For children in our care and care leavers assessments are completed which allow for equality considerations to ensure these needs are met for through for instance the provision of a specialist placements to meet complex needs; the provision of translators and English language courses or access to places of worship.
38. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

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

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

Resource implications

39. The number of children looked and placement type have an impact on the resources of the council. Associated costs are set out the Children and Young People budget. The Committee is sighted on a regular basis in respect of the budgetary position of the Children and Young People directorate.

Legal implications

40. It is the function of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the Corporate Parenting Service and its role in the required improvement journey.

Risk management

41. 41. Risks in respect of budgetary pressures are covered within the overarching risk register of the council and actions are taken as required to mitigate any identified risk.

Consultees

42. There has been no public consultation on this report.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Simon Cann	Date 04/03/2024
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 02/03/2024
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 04/03/2024
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 04/03/2024
Risk	Chris Tindell-Jones	Date 04/03/2024
Approved by	Rachel Gillott	Date 04/03/2024



Title of report: Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 12 March 2024

Report by: Victoria Gibbs - Service Director, Early Help, QA and Prevention

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

For the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider this report, which provides an overview and update in respect of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The committee considers the report; and**
- b) **The committee determine any recommendations it wishes to make to relevant bodies to secure further improvement in corporate parenting in in Herefordshire.**

Alternative options

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

Key considerations

2. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee requested this report and helpfully provided a briefing note setting out the focus areas and questions to which the Committee seeks answers:
 1. What is the current composition of the board?
 - What has been the attendance rate of elected members?
 - Who attends from West Mercia Police and Wye Valley Trust?
 2. Is there a corporate parenting strategy and action plan?
 3. What management information on our looked after children does the corporate parenting board currently receive?
 4. What are the identified priorities for the corporate parenting board?
 - Does the board have an agreed work programme?
 5. How does the board monitor and support the education of its looked after children?
 6. How does the board ensure that our looked after children in residential care are in good accommodation and are well looked after?
 - How does it ensure children leaving care have suitable accommodation?
 7. How has the board heard from looked after children about their aspirations and concerns? How does it address their concerns when it hears them?

Officer's Response:

3. Following the local elections in May 2023, the Corporate Parenting Board reviewed their terms of reference and membership which were endorsed by the board at its meeting on 16 August 2023.
4. There have been three meetings since August 2023 which have seen good attendance at board meetings, including by elected members. The Named Nurse Children in Care attends as representative for the Wye Valley Trust.
5. Historically, police have not been standing members of the Corporate Parenting Board. The terms of reference have since been amended and a police representative is being identified, it is expected that there will be police representation from the next Corporate Parenting Board onwards.
6. As part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) offer, the board has undertaken a self-assessment and 2 workshops have taken place. To underpin the workshops, a survey was circulated to establish how confident members of the board felt in discharging their duties as corporate parents.
7. The LGA will also be observing the July board in order to support and strengthen our development of the board.
8. A draft of the corporate parenting strategy is attached (appendix 1) and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is requested to consider the document and provide their views. The strategy is due to be further reviewed following feedback from the fourth monitoring visit in order to ensure that it reflects the most up-to-date needs for Herefordshire.
9. The strategy sets out seven priority outcomes for our children and young people:
 - Homes and Housing

- Health and Wellbeing
- Learning, Development and Having Fun
- Relationships, Identity and Belonging, Listening, Hearing and Understanding
- Being Safe and Protected
- Independence and Adulthood

10. A thematic work programme has been developed for the board so that there is an opportunity for the board to focus on various areas in a systematic way. The first thematic focus took place in January 2024 and was in connection with placement sufficiency. The March 2024 meeting will focus on health.
11. Underpinning the corporate parenting strategy is an action plan. The action plan is updated by the corporate parenting operational group which has been established and sits under the Corporate Parenting Board. The operational group is chaired by the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting.
12. The purpose of this operational group is to work together to turn the corporate parenting strategy into a reality, delivering good services and the best outcomes for our children in care and care leavers.
13. The operational group will ensure that the voice of children in care and care leavers influences both policy and the service provision, and that young people are engaged with any action intended to develop and improve services or to recruit key staff members
14. The timing of the Corporate Parenting Board meetings have been changed so that young people can attend to provide their views and to participate in the board. This area is still being developed and it is hoped that it will be embedded by the July 2024 meeting.
15. In the interim, the Participation and Engagement Lead has attended the January board meeting where a “You said, We did” item was tabled providing an update to the aspirations and concerns previously voiced by children and young people.
16. The Participation and Engagement Lead facilitates a quarterly child in care and care leavers Challenge Panel with corporate parents to influence decision making and service delivery.
17. For every meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board, a number of routine reports are presented and considered including a service update from the Head of Corporate Parenting, a health update and a performance dashboard.
18. The performance dashboard incorporates the number and profile of the cohort of looked after children, including unaccompanied young people, and care leavers including data in respect of Suitable Accommodation and on Employment, Education and Training.
19. As well as the usual performance dashboard additional data is requested by the board as is deemed appropriate. For instance the January 2024 board saw a breakdown by age group on the length of time young people have been in care.
20. To monitor and support the education of children in care, the Virtual Head Teacher is a standing member of the Corporate Parenting Board. The Virtual School is also represented at the corporate parenting operational group.

21. This provides the board with information in respect of the educational attainment of children in care. As noted, information in respect of the Employment, Education and Training status of young people is part of the performance dashboard.
22. Representatives from Housing, Fostering & Placements, and All Age Commissioning are members of the Corporate Parenting Board with the latter two also being represented at the corporate parenting operational group. This provides updates and assurance to the board that our children in care and care leavers are in good accommodation and are well looked after.
23. A local joint housing protocol was endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board in January 2024 which, combined with a placement sufficiency strategy and a strengthening of relationships with local and independent placement providers, has increased the availability and breadth of suitable accommodation for children in care and care leavers.
24. The Corporate Parenting Board, supported by the operational group and through the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy will continue to ensure children and young people will be supported to thrive and get the most out of life.

Community impact

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

Environmental Impact

27. There are no environmental impacts associated with providing this report to the children and young people’s scrutiny committee. .

Equality duty

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

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

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
24. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Whilst this is an update to the scrutiny committee and will in itself have minimal equalities impacts, consideration has been made in the consideration of Executive decisions and the Executive Responses provided by the Cabinet.

Resource implications

- 25. There are no resource implications associated with providing this report to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Legal implications

- 26. It is the function of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the Corporate Parenting Board and its role in the required improvement journey.

Risk management

- 27. There are no risk management implications associated with providing this report to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

Consultees

- 28. None.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Strategy

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Simon Cann	Date 04/03/2024
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 02/03/2024

Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 04/03/2024
Risk	Chris Tindell-Jones	Date 04/03/2024

Approved by	Darryl Freeman	Date 01/03/2024
-------------	----------------	-----------------

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 - 2024



Contents

An open letter to children and young people with care experience	4
What is ‘corporate parenting’?	5
So, what’s the plan?	5
Our vision for all children and young people in Herefordshire	6
The lived experience of care.....	7
The Herefordshire Approach	7
How we will hear the voice of children and young people.....	10
At a glance: care experience in Herefordshire I will update these details.....	13
Outcomes for children and young people with care experience.....	16
Corporate Parenting Strategy cycle.....	34
Delivering on our aims, making a difference, and improving lives	34
Appendices	36

An open letter from children and young people with care experience

Dear Corporate Parents,

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.

Herefordshire Children in Care and Care Leavers Voice Group

An open letter to children and young people with care experience

Dear children and young people with care experience,

We are your Corporate Parents with a responsibility to keep you safe and well, and support you to get the very best out of life. We will do this by supporting you with your education, ensuring you have suitable, safe housing options close to home; by making sure you can access health support when and where you need it and, by making sure we review all of these regularly to make sure they meet your needs.

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. The whole of Herefordshire is made stronger as a result. We want you to know that all managers, from team managers to the Director, are part of your support network and will work with you and partners to ensure we all support your journey to adulthood.

As your Corporate Parents we want this to be true for you, as children and young people with experience of care. This means doing only the very best for you to help you flourish and thrive. We want you to feel safe, loved and cared for in our County. We want you to feel accepted for who you are, as unique individuals. We want you to be listened to, heard and understood in all that we do and deliver. We agree with you that having strong relationships with us, which are built on trust and respect, is fundamental to this.

As senior leaders in Herefordshire County 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

Darryl Freeman

Corporate Director
Children's Services,
Herefordshire Council

Julie Mephram

Head of Service for
Corporate Parenting,
Herefordshire Council

**Councillor Johnathan
Lester**

Leader of
Herefordshire Council

Councillor Ivan Powell

Elected Cabinet Member for
Children's Services

What is ‘Corporate Parenting’?

Corporate Parenting is our responsibility to be loving, caring and aspirational for all children and young people who are in our care, or who have recently left our care as adults.

Above all else, this means protecting children and young people from harm and keeping them safe. But, importantly, it is also about always striving for their best interests, nurturing their ambitions and helping our children and young people get the most out of life. Ultimately, it means they grow into independent and thriving young adults.

At its heart, Corporate Parenting means always asking ourselves **“would this be good enough for my child?”**

So, what’s the plan?

We have a plan for how Herefordshire can be the best possible Corporate Parents we can be. We want to be clear about what is expected of us, what we want to achieve and how we aim to do that.

Essentially, the strategy is about one thing: **making the lives and prospects of all care-experienced children and young people in Herefordshire better.**

It sounds simple, but it will take time, hard work and involve challenges along the way. But, by working together, holding each other to account, and delivering on a plan of action, we believe we can turn our words into positive outcomes in the lives of care-experienced children and young people across Herefordshire.

We have split the plan into seven outcomes, which cover every aspect of the lives and experiences of children and young people. If we make good progress against each of these, we will know we are doing what we set out to do.

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 place¹.

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 want them to achieve good 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
--------------------------	-----------------------------	--	--	---	---------------------------------	-----------------------------------

For this reason, 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.

The lived experience of care

What we say in the strategy comes out of the conversations we've had, both with children and young people who are currently in care, and those who have recently left our care. Not only are they the people who know first-hand what it is like to live in our care, but they are also the people who are most affected by what we say and do. Understanding and acting on their views, interests and lived experiences is fundamental to being a good Corporate Parent.

Over the last year, we have heard from children and young people with care experience in Herefordshire about some of the more specific things that they would like to see improve. These have been about the different parts of their lives, like housing, health and wellbeing, education, relationships, making their voice heard, and gaining independence later in life. Under each of our priority outcomes, we summarise what we have heard directly from children and young people.

35

The Herefordshire Approach

The Herefordshire Approach describes what our Corporate Parenting looks like in practice and how it feels.

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 would like to have Corporate Parents who they can turn to and rely on to 'fight their corner'.

As a result, our approach to Corporate Parenting will be about building relationships with each other which always have trust, respect and care at the centre. We want to be loving and caring Corporate Parents, who believe in our children and young people. We will be aspirational for them and encourage them to be ambitious for themselves too.

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.**

Our Promise to children and young people in care

The Promise is what our care-experienced children and young people have told us they expect to see from a good corporate parent.

As Corporate Parents, we promise to:

- Support you
- Inform you
- Involve you
- Respect you
- Celebrate you

Working together

Corporate Parenting is a joint effort. Achieving the best possible outcomes for care-experienced children and young people cannot be done alone. That is why our plan for corporate parenting is agreed alongside children and young people, and by all partners of the Herefordshire Children and Families Partnership. The Partnership includes Herefordshire Council, NHS, the Police, schools and the voluntary sector.

Together, as Corporate Parents, we will work collaboratively and constructively to be the best possible parents we can be. In practice, that means sharing knowledge, resources, and understanding between us to make sure we provide support in the most effective and consistent ways.

Working restoratively

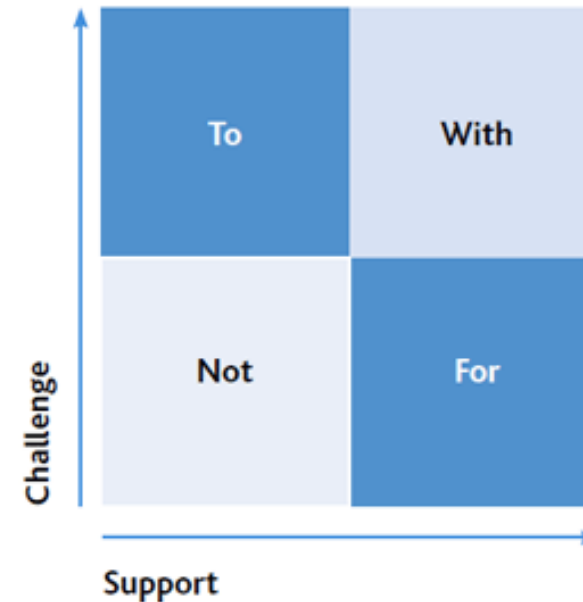
‘Restorative Practice’ is a term used to describe the behaviours, interactions and approaches which help build positive, healthy relationships, find ways to get through difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict. Working in ‘restorative’ ways helps us get to know the children and young people we support better, build on their strengths as individuals and find solutions to problems

together. This approach will be **who we are as Corporate Parents** in Herefordshire, rather than being a specific, conscious and planned thing that we aim to do.

We will work **with** children and young people, to empower them to make positive decisions about their lives for themselves. Rather than us, the adults in positions of authority, doing things to them or for them.

We will expect everyone who works with children and young people, to know what it means to work restoratively and how to do this in practice. We are developing restorative practice by running training sessions for staff across the Partnership and developing our approach through mutual support and challenge in our meetings together.

As a result of this we hope that children, young people, and their families, will have trust in us, feel that they have better relationships with the people who support them, and that, ultimately, they are able to achieve better outcomes in their lives.



How we will hear the voice of children and young people

All children and young people have the right to be listened to and have their views considered when adults make decisions which affect them. This is one of the United Nations Rights of a Child².

Our ambition in Herefordshire is to create a culture of engagement, which is shared across organisations and services, which put the views and interests of care-experienced children and young people at the heart of all that we do. This ambition is built on the belief that truly hearing the voice of the child means co-designing services with them and is far more than one-off pieces of consultation. We believe that our services will be fairer, more effective, and more sustainable as a result.

Our intentions for participation and engagement in Herefordshire are delivered through our Children and Young People's Plan and our approach to Participation and Engagement.

How children and young people can get involved

Being the best possible Corporate Parents means engaging with children and young people with care experiences themselves and finding out what works for them. The most effective decisions have children and young people's lived experience at their heart.

What is the Virtual School and how do they support care-experienced children and young people?

Herefordshire's Virtual School aims to make sure all children in care in Herefordshire enjoy their education, have access to the highest quality learning environments and achieve the best possible outcomes. Although it is not a real school, with buildings and classrooms, the Virtual School is much like any school in helping every child fulfil their potential and thrive throughout their educational journey.

The Virtual School team works with young people, designated teachers in schools, social workers, carers, families and other professionals to make sure everyone has high aspirations and shared goals for every single child or young person in care or who has recently left our care.

Who are the health team for children and young people in care in Herefordshire?

8

The Children in Care Health team are a mix of Nurses, Mental Health Practitioners and Doctors.

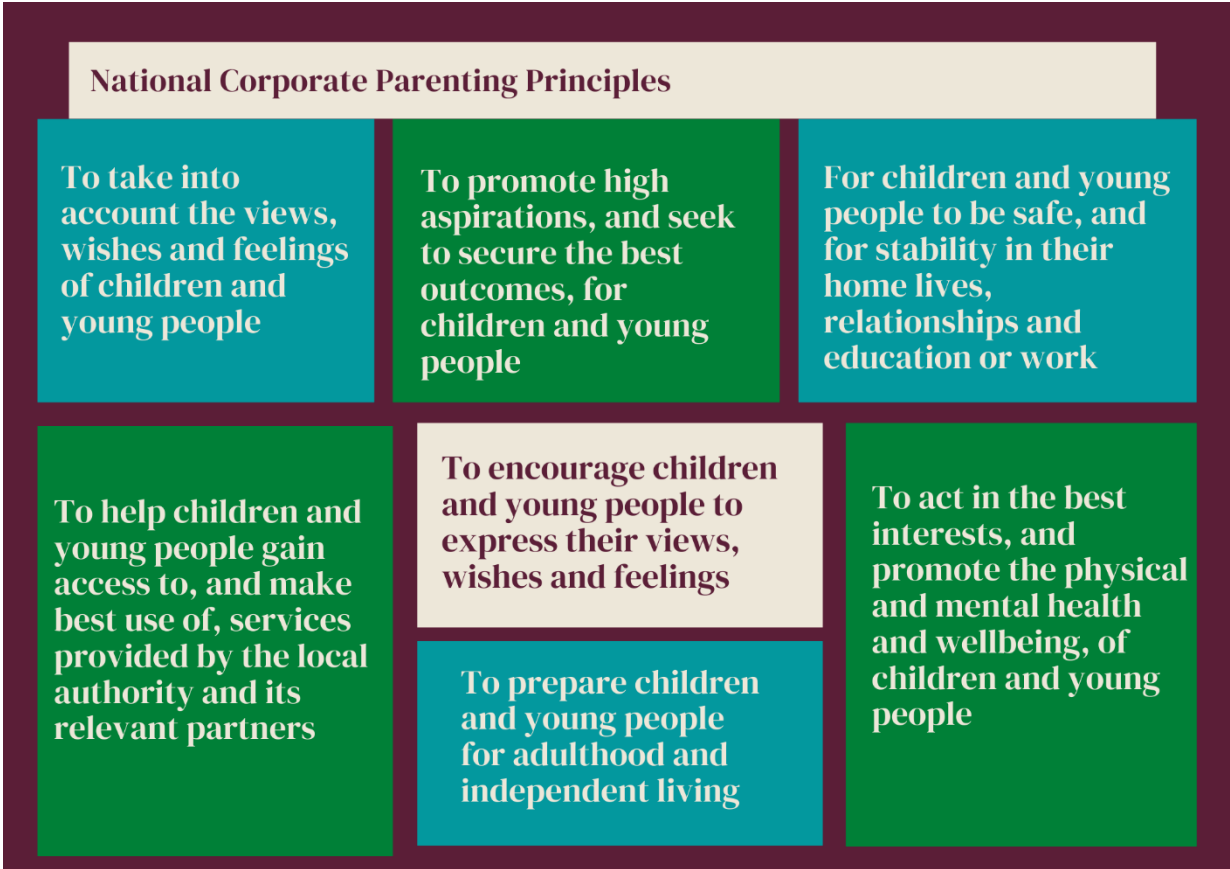
The Team are based at Belmont Abbey and are a team of experienced Nurses and Doctors who will see you throughout your time as a children or young people in care. We want you have good health and be able to get the right health support when you require it wherever you are living and whoever you are living with. We will see you for annual health reviews and support you with any health concerns or worries that you or your foster care have.

The Children in Care Health Team can be contacted by telephone on 01432 363941 or via our team email at lac.team@nhs.net.

Who are Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and what is their role?

IRO's ensure care plans meet the individual needs of children and young people in care and take into account their views, interests and experiences. As the guardian of care plans, IRO's often make suggestions about what will make the plan better and can

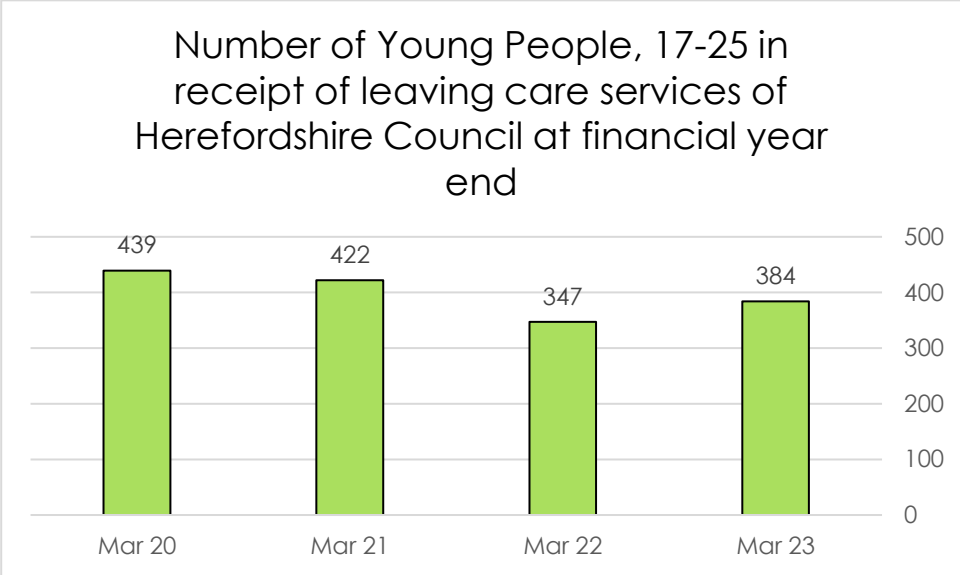
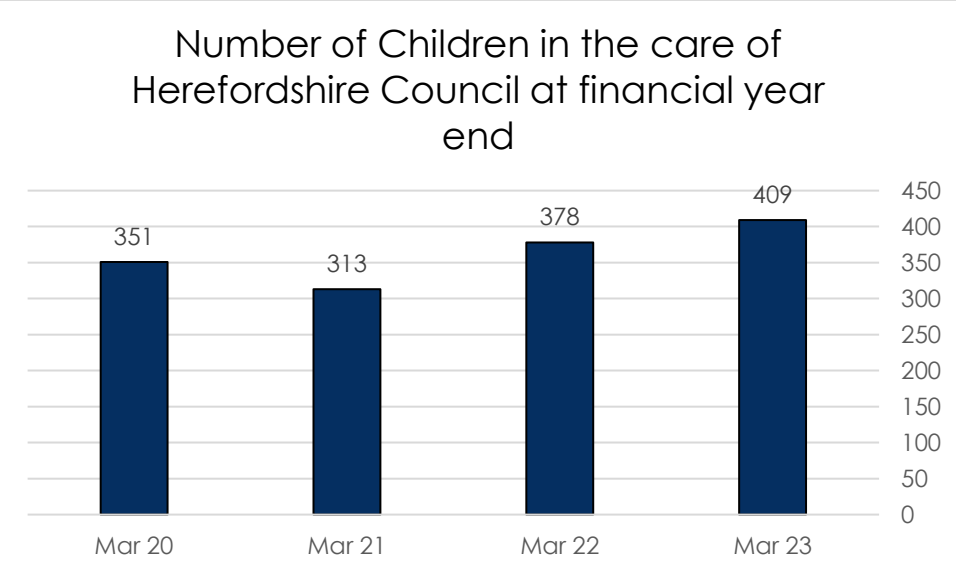
challenge professionals if promises are not being kept. The role of IRO's is also to check regularly if plans are clear, updated and being followed-up on. They also praise and celebrate when things go well.



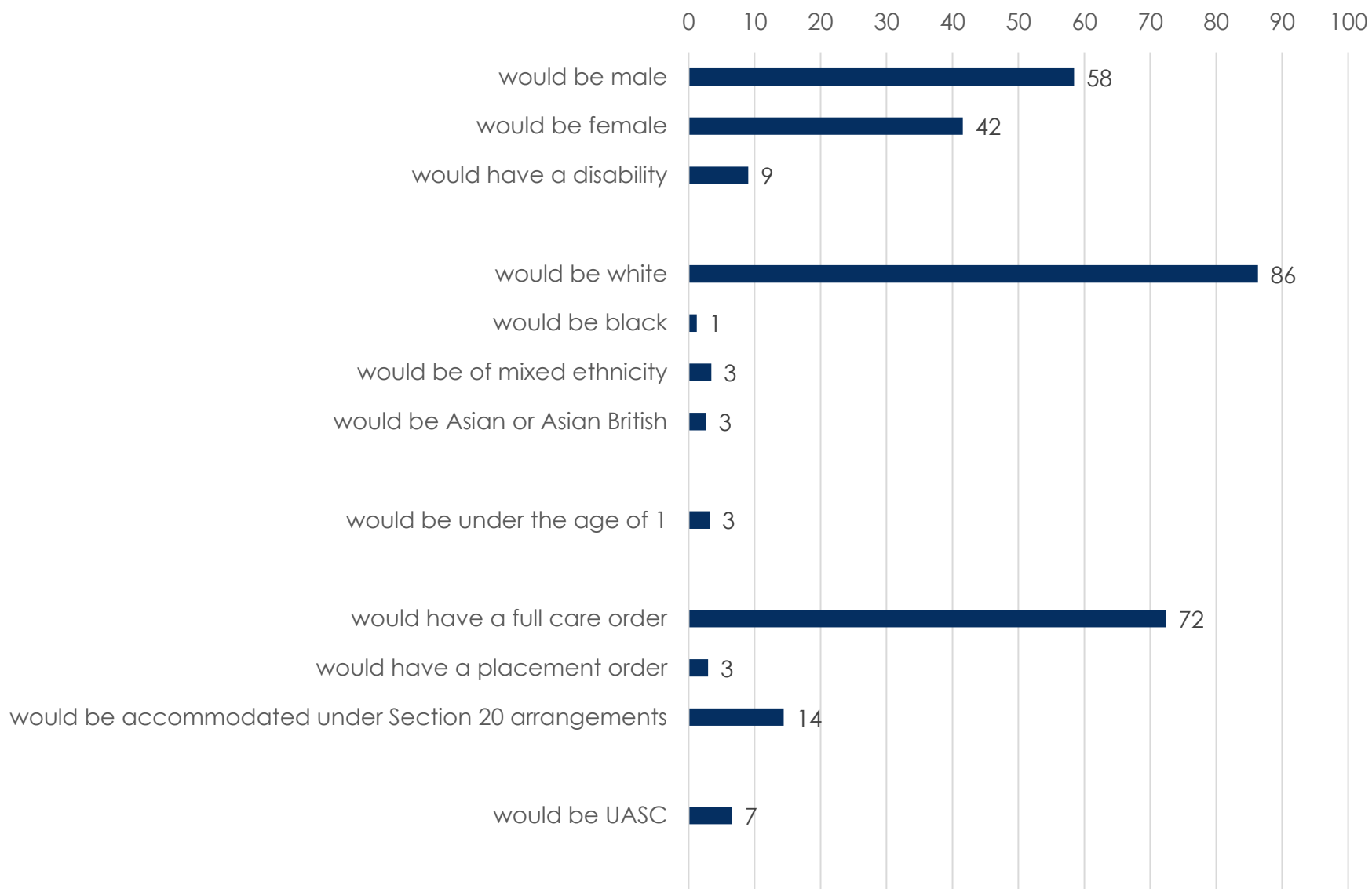
At a glance: care experience in Herefordshire

The number of children and young people in our care have risen in recent years. Between April 2021 and April 2023, there was a 30% increase. 113 children in every 10,000 under 18 year-olds in Herefordshire are now in our care.

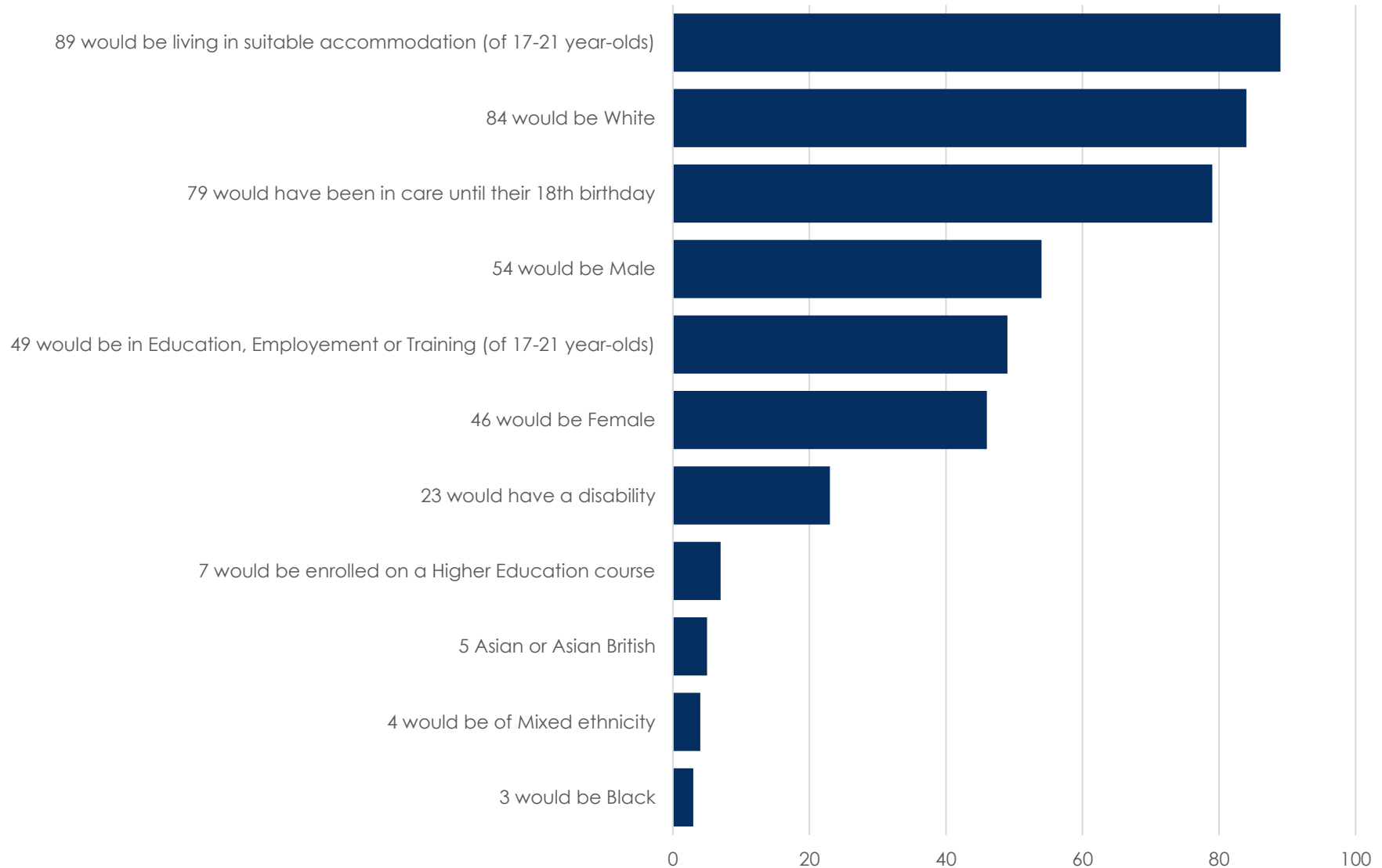
41



For every 100 Children in care in Herefordshire Council



If there were 100 young people receiving leaving care services in Herefordshire



Outcomes for children and young people with care experience

By achieving the following outcomes, children and young people will be supported to thrive and get the most out of life. Each and every aspect of a child's life relies on the other parts of their life to be as good as it possibly can be. In this way, our plan for care-experienced children and young people is far greater than the sum of its parts.



Homes and housing	Health and wellbeing	Learning, developing and having fun	Relationships, identity and belonging
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support more children and young people to return and remain safely with their families 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 	<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 	<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 extra-curricular activities 	<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	Safe and protected		Independence
<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 	<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 		<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

Homes and housing: Children and young people have safe, stable and caring places to live and call home. What children and young people tell us:

Having stable and consistent placements means that we can call those places home and be able to spread our wings

Finding suitable places to live, where we can stay as a family unit after leaving care, means we can be truly independent and better parents ourselves

The guarantor scheme is good, but is not known about enough

Social housing can be hard to get, and private rental properties are very expensive at the moment

We would like to live close to friends, family and other things we rely on

So we will:

- Focus on finding loving, lasting and stable homes for all children and young people in care – whether that be with birth families, foster carers, adoptive families or with wider family and friends
- Provide loving, caring and nurturing homes to live in while in care, wherever possible with a family and in Herefordshire, where children and young people feel safe, comfortable and able to be themselves.
- Provide more family homes for children and young people with additional needs so they can live in homes where they have what they need to be safe, well, and cared for.
- Deliver high-quality support, care and accommodation for children and young people if they are in a crisis, with the aim of achieving a smooth, swift, and lasting return home.
- Plan and prepare early for when young people leave care and help them understand what their options are.
- Work together to find suitable housing options for young people leaving care, especially if they have a young family.
- Support young people to continue living with their foster family beyond the age of 18 if they, and their former Foster Carers, would like to. We will explore opportunities to extend this beyond the age of 21 too.
- Advertise the rent guarantor scheme more widely and make sure it is consistently applied so that as many young people as possible can benefit from it if appropriate.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they are feeling safer, more stable and more cared for where they are living.
- Young people 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.
- Children and young people are moving between homes much less.
- 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 remain living with their former foster carers after leaving care, if everyone involved wants that.

Health and wellbeing: Children and young people are emotionally, physically and mentally healthy

What children and young people tell us:

We need easier access to mental health services and emotional wellbeing support when we need it

To us, resilience is about being able to bounce forwards after something difficult happens, and maybe also about learning from our mistakes

There should be some more advice, guidance and general support to help us be physically, mentally and emotionally healthy, well and resilient

It needs to be easier to carry on getting the right support after we turn 18

Being healthy can be about your physical, emotional and mental health: they are all connected

Being healthy, to me, is about being able to function normally and do anything

Mental health and wellbeing support should take into account childhood trauma and what it's like to live in care

Mental health support during pregnancy and early parenthood is really important

Going to counselling and having therapy can be quite scary

So we will:

- Promote good health and wellbeing in all aspects of children and young people's lives.
- Give young people a health passport from their 16th birthday, which outlines their health history, including what immunisations they have had and where to access health care if they require it.
- Offer children and young people the opportunity to have an individual health review annually up to the age of 18.
- Make sure that young people turning 18, who no longer require an annual health assessment, are registered with a GP and a dentist, and have their eyesight checked regularly.
- Support young people, wherever possible, to access dental care and eye tests, if they are not entitled to free treatment.
- Advocate for improved access to health services, including dental and eye care, and mental health, that takes into account the lived experience of young people.
- Help young people, and their foster carers and PA's, understand mental health and wellbeing.
- Give children and young people time to get to know the adult working with them, so getting support is less scary.
- Write to young people, before their 18th birthday, explaining how their Children in Care Nurses can support them once they turn 18.
- 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.
- Support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) early, so they can be healthy, well and achieve good health and education outcomes.
- Make sure education, health care plans (EHCP's) are up to date, aspirational and represent the voice of the child
- Offer wellbeing and resilience advice, guidance and support, including online and some face-to-face support. Social workers, PA's and health professionals will help young people access the right service at the right time.
- If young people are to become a parent, we will support their decisions, and help them access support for them and their baby. We want to be good 'corporate grandparents'.
- Be there if children and young people need us, as feeling and being unwell can be lonely

So we will:

- Make sure, wherever possible and appropriate, 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.
- 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.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they feel more emotionally, physically and mentally healthy and well.
- Children and young people tell us that they don't feel as held back by their emotional or mental health needs and that they know what to do if they are feeling 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 more joined-up, consistent and is more 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.
- More 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.
- Fewer children and young people have severe health conditions requiring inpatient care.
- 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. What children and young people tell us:

Our mental health is often what stops us from fully engaging with education

Having stability in the rest of our lives helps us to keep engaging with our education

Apprenticeships are really valuable and help us take that first step in our working lives

We like to do fun things with our friends outside of school

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

Some of us need some extra support to access our education and groups and activities in the community

So 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Help children and young people take part in sport and leisure activities, as well as extra-curricular skills-building awards.
- 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.

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, who are 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. What children and young people tell us:

53




So we will:

- Help children and young people know their life-story and understand why they are living in care if they would like to
- Support 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.
- Develop relationships with children and young people, which are built on trust and respect.
- Celebrate achievements, events and key milestones.
- Reduce the stigma that children and young people often face because they are living or have lived in care. This includes the language that we use ourselves, the actions we take, and the way that services work to support them.
- Make sure all communication is understood, especially if English is not a young person's first language and/or if they have any speech, language or communication needs.
- Make sure everyone working with children and young people has an improved understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation, so that young people feel respected, supported and empowered to be themselves.
- Take steps to make sure we have a consistent workforce so that there are fewer changes in Personal Advisors, Social Workers and other professionals. Where a change needs to happen, we will tell children and young people about this as soon as possible, and before any change happens.
- Keep in touch with children and young people, through PA's, after they leave care, if they would like this. Even if a young person moves away from Herefordshire for any reason, we will still check in with them if they would like that.
- Understand the links between young people's sense of identity and belonging, and their mental health and wellbeing and support them to love themselves.
- 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 are more likely to 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. What children and young people tell us:



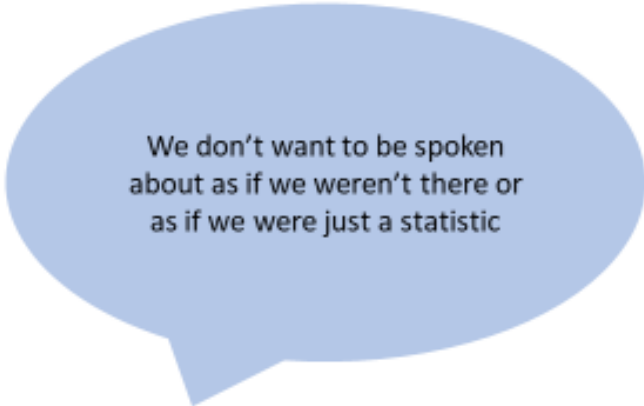
We want to make our voice heard about the things that affect us



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



We would like 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 just a statistic

So we will:

- Put the views, interests and lived experience of young people at the heart of how services are designed and delivered
- Introduce 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.
- Set up opportunities for children and young people to meet other care-experienced young people.
- Enable care-experienced young people to play an active role in staff recruitment.
- Organise opportunities for children and young people to make their voice heard directly with the people who help make the decisions.
- Be honest with children and young people about what is possible to do and what is not, and why that is.
- Support children and young people to access independent visiting and advocacy services to make sure they are fully represented in the decisions affecting their lives.
- Make sure the views, interests and lived experiences of children and young people are listened to and take into account in all individual plans and reviews.
- Proactively seek 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.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they are able to make their voice 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 show 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. What children and young people tell us:



So we will:

- Work together to protect children and young people from harm, abuse and exploitation, whether it happens inside or outside the home, or online.
- Make sure where children and young people live, study, work or have fun are safe and inclusive spaces.
- Support children and young people early to avoid criminal activity and risky behaviours.
- Continue to support children and young people and strive for their best outcomes unconditionally if they are in the youth or criminal justice system.
- Recognise young people 'as a young person first' in all interactions with the criminal justice system and police.
- Work restoratively with children and young people, if they come into contact with police officers and criminal justice system, making sure we build on their strengths, are child-centred, trauma-informed and have their voice at the heart.
- Work together to understand the risks and vulnerabilities that children and young people may experience in life, making sure we take every step possible to avoid them being criminalised unnecessarily.
- Communicate and work closely between different agencies, at all levels, to share intelligence, knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting children and young people. Wherever possible, we will work together as partner agencies to achieve solutions to complex and multi-faceted harms.
- Improve our skill, knowledge and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse and sexually harmful behaviour to better support children and young people.

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. What children and young people tell us:

We would like work and training opportunities to link in more with our own skills, interests and circumstances

Mental health needs and instability in the rest of our lives might be why we are struggling to access work and training opportunities

We should be made aware of what support we are entitled to when we turn 18

Apprenticeships and work experience are really valuable in helping us take the first step in our working lives

Financial and practical support is really important in helping us live independently

We would like some advice, guidance and support about managing money, including setting up bank accounts and renting

So 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 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.

How we will know we are making a difference:

- Children and young people tell us that they feel more 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 more achievable and that they are more 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.

Corporate Parenting Strategy cycle

Delivering on our aims, making a difference, and improving lives



This strategy is about improving the lives of children and young people who experience care. The key to this is turning words on a page into actions and outcomes.

Putting our plans into practice

We will work together to deliver a set of strategic actions, which will be outlined in the Corporate Parenting Actions 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.

Checking on progress

Checking on our progress is a vital part of the process. This is how we will know and understand what difference we are making. By doing this, it enables us to get to the bottom of why something might not be happening quite the way it should, allowing us to put it right. Checking on progress will require a combination of quantitative measures of service delivery and outcomes, as well as hearing the lived experience of children and young people.

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.

Appendices

- 1. Summaries**
- 2. Legislative context**
- 3. Local needs**
- 4. Local strategic context**
- 5. Using Language that Cares**
- 6. Participation and engagement**
- 7. The Promise**
- 8. How we will check on progress and make a difference**
- 9. Scrutiny: Corporate Parenting guide for Councillors**

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.

Jargon buster

We have put together a useful guide explaining what a lot of the different words and phrases we use mean using ‘Language that cares’

Appendix 3– Participation and engagement

Our Participation and Engagement approach will set out how we will listen, hear, and understand the children and young people we care for. We want principles and approaches of participation, engagement and co-production to be a part of all that we do in Herefordshire. This means all adults, who work with care-experienced children and young people, are skilled, knowledgeable and committed to putting their voice at the heart of both individual and strategic decision-making.

Appendix 4 – The Promise

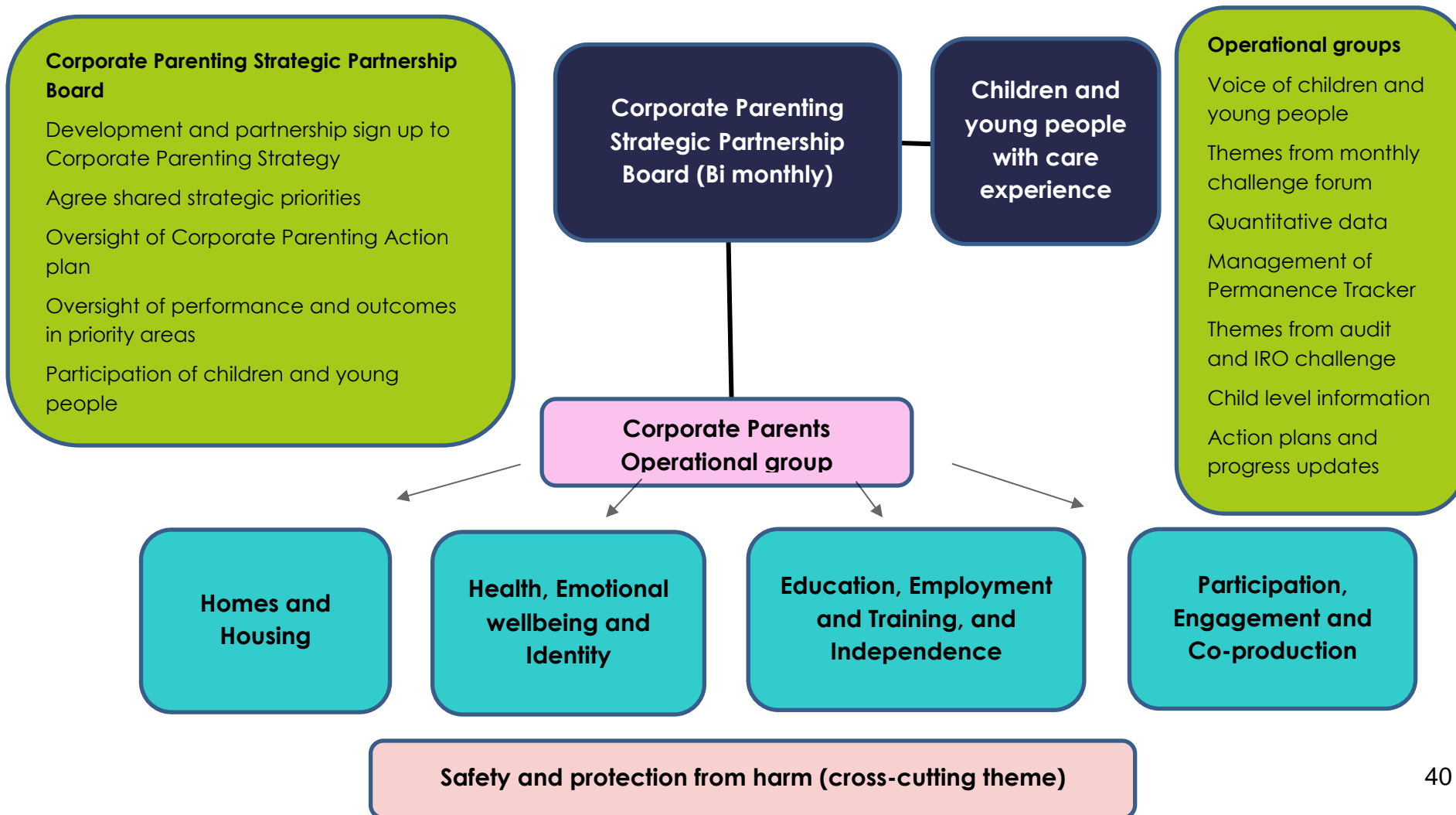
Inform me!	Involve me!	Celebrate me!	Respect me!	Support me!
<p>We will..</p> <p>Talk to you about why you are in care and help you understand more about your family.</p> <p>Help you understand what happens when you become an adult and leave care.</p> <p>Make sure you know a person you trust who you 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 <i>safely</i> 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 5– How we will check on progress and make a difference

Governance, accountability and scrutiny arrangements

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.

68



Appendix 6 – 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 Strategic Partnership 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.

