

Agenda

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Tuesday 22 July 2025**

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

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

Membership

Chairperson	Councillor Toni Fagan
Vice-chairperson	Councillor Ben Proctor

Councillor Frank Cornthwaite
Councillor Clare Davies
Councillor Dave Davies
Councillor Robert Highfield
Councillor David Hitchiner

Co-opted	Jan Frances	(Families' Representative)
Members	Stuart Mitchell	(Parent Governor Secondary)

Agenda

	Pages
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive apologies for absence.	
2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES To receive details of members nominated to attend the meeting in place of a member of the committee.	
3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive declarations of interests from members of the committee in respect of items on the agenda.	
4. MINUTES To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2025.	9 - 16
HOW TO SUBMIT QUESTIONS The deadline for the submission of questions for this meeting is 5pm on Wednesday 16 July 2025. Questions must be submitted to councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk . Questions sent to any other address may not be accepted. Accepted questions and the responses will be published as a supplement to the agenda papers prior to the meeting. Further information and guidance is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/getinvolved	
5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC To receive any written questions from members of the public.	
6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL To receive any written questions from members of the council.	
7. HEREFORDSHIRE CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT PLAN To scrutinise the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 3 and Quality Assurance Framework. [Appendix C – papers to follow].	17 - 88
8. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUALITY ASSURANCE BRIEFING To brief the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the development, management and learning from complaints and compliments. [Appendix A - papers to follow].	89 - 100
9. EARLY HELP TASK AND FINISH GROUP Terms of reference.	

[Papers to follow].

10. WORK PROGRAMME

To consider the work programme for the committee.

[Papers to follow].

11. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 16 September 2025, 2pm

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

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

The seven principles of public life

(Nolan Principles)

1. Selflessness

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

2. Integrity

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

3. Objectivity

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

4. Accountability

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

5. Openness

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

6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership

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

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 27 May 2025 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Toni Fagan (chairperson)
Councillor Ben Proctor (vice chairperson)

Councillors: Frank Cornthwaite, Clare Davies, Dave Davies and Robert Highfield.

In attendance: Councillor Liz Harvey (substitute for Councillor David Hitchiner), Councillor Ivan Powell (Cabinet Member Children and Young People), Chief Inspector Ross Jones (West Mercia Police), Rob Thomas (CEO Vennture).

Officers: Rachel Gillott (Service Director, Early Help, Children in Need and Safeguarding), Alfie Rees Glinos (Governance Support Assistant), Lianne Rees (Specialist Safeguarding Nurse Advisor MASH), Donna Thornton (Governance Support Assistant), Danial Webb Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Christine Wellington (Head of Service Vulnerable Children in Need of Support and Assessment).

Remote attendees Niall Crawford (Lead Officer for Education Safeguarding Social Inclusion and Elective Home Education), Lindsay MacHardy (Public Health Principal), Bronwen McCarthy (Head of Service Delivery West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre), Lorna Tilley (Head of Service West Mercia Youth Justice Service).

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Cllr David Hitchiner and from Jan Frances (Co-opted representative for families).

65. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

The committee heard that Cllr Liz Harvey had stepped down from her role as vice chair of the committee and as being a member of the committee. Cllr David Hitchiner would be joining the committee as a member.

Cllr Harvey was the named substitute for Cllr Hitchiner.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

67. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

68. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There had been two questions received from members of the public, which had been published, along with responses, as a supplement to the meeting agenda on the Herefordshire Council website

A record of a supplementary question and a verbal response provided during the meeting, are attached at Appendix 1 to these minutes.

69. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There had been no questions received from members of the council.

70. CHILD EXPLOITATION

The Service Director, Early Help, CIN and Safeguarding provided a brief overview of the report and then the Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police and the Head of Service Vulnerable Children in Need of Support and Assessment delivered a short presentation on the topic. The Key points were:

The Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police provided the committee with broad definitions of child exploitation including: child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE). Data and trends demonstrated that there was a relatively low prevalence of child exploitation in Herefordshire compared to other counties, which was largely due to the county's proactive safeguarding work.

It was pointed out that county lines was the most common form of CCE in Herefordshire and that children were often trafficked in from larger cities such as Birmingham and Wolverhampton to distribute drugs.

A breakdown of the strategic framework in place to tackle child exploitation explained that multi agency child exploitation (MACE) meetings were held regularly:

- MACE 1 meetings focused on individual children and direct support.
- MACE 2 meetings identified themes, hotspots and recurring risks.
- An exploitation and missing subgroup was in place to provide strategic oversight and to escalate systemic needs.

The Head of Service Vulnerable Children in Need of Support and Assessment explained the role of the Safe Team in providing targeted interventions for at-risk and missing children. It was explained that:

- The process for return home interviews had been increased beyond the existing 72-hour timeframe.
- A new protocol with Ofsted was in place for early intelligence sharing around online exploitation.
- A collaboration with health partners meant a unique alert system within medical records was in place to flag exploitation risk across health settings.

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. The committee asked about the current extent of child criminal and sexual exploitation in Herefordshire.
 - The Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police explained that Herefordshire reported low levels of organized CCE and CSE relative to other areas. However, local agencies remained vigilant and exploitation was actively monitored through MACE processes and safeguarding referrals.
 - It was pointed out that county lines, especially from Birmingham and Wolverhampton, were the main form of CCE.
2. The committee enquired about local hotspots and trends in child criminal exploitation.
 - The Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police pointed out that most county lines activity involved children from outside of the county. Drugs were trafficked into Herefordshire and exploitation primarily occurred in private properties used as distribution hubs.
 - Local children were more likely to be involved in low-level supply and usage, with hotspots including parks, certain housing areas and colleges.
3. The committee enquired as to why Herefordshire was less impacted by child exploitation compared to other areas.
 - The Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police partially attributed the lower prevalence of child exploitation to proactive disruption, rural geography, and strong local partnerships. It was expected that ongoing reviews and force-wide and county-specific threat profiles would provide further clarification on the matter.
4. In relation to quantitative data the committee requested figures for the number of children assessed in Quarter 4 and the levels of concern involved.
 - The Service Director, Early Help, CIN and Safeguarding provided Quarter 4 figures from Get Safe assessments:
 - 73 assessments completed
 - 17: No concern
 - 35: Emerging risk
 - 15: Moderate
 - 6: Significant (3 on Child Protection Plans under contextual harm)
5. The committee enquired about the accuracy of the available data and whether it was accessible to the right agencies.
 - It was acknowledged that current data was fragmented due to lack of a distinct criminal offence for CCE. Officers were encouraged to flag concerns broadly, which resulted in some over-reporting, but national legislation was expected to improve consistency.
6. The committee asked how a 'Get Safe' plan interacted with child protection plans.
 - It was explained that Get Safe was often the child's own safety plan and could run alongside formal statutory plans. When child protection was needed, "contextual harm" was used as a category to avoid blaming parents for peer/environmental exploitation.

7. The committee enquired as to whether parents were typically aware of the exploitation.
 - The Service Director, Early Help, CIN and Safeguarding stated that often, exploitation was not recognised by parents until advanced. Children often did not identify as victims and believed they were in a relationship or friendship.
 - Significant outreach efforts had targeted parents via conferences, schools, and public campaigns. Work was ongoing and aimed to raise parental awareness and identify emerging risks early.
8. The committee asked for details regarding the red flags or early warning signs of exploitation.
 - The Early Help and Prevention Service Manager explained that red flags included:
 - Truancy
 - Sudden wealth (trainers, phones)
 - Withdrawal
 - Risky online activity
 - Social exclusion
 - Frequent missing episodes
9. The committee asked whether red flags were systematically identified across services.
 - It was explained that the Get Safe risk tool was embedded across services and offered prompts for each type of exploitation. The Safe Team and police were trained to respond to the signs of exploitation.
10. The committee discussed online exploitation and asked how agencies were responding to children being targeted online.
 - The Head of Service Vulnerable Children in Need of Support and Assessment stated that grooming, live-streaming, coercion and blackmail were common, and that new challenges were posed by artificial intelligence and encrypted platforms.
 - The police were supported by a centralised online CSE team and worked with national crime agencies, this was backed up by preventative outreach through schools and community events.
11. The committee discussed the role of community and volunteers and enquired as to how organisations and charities such as Vennture were contributing to intelligence gathering.
 - The Chief Executive Officer of Vennture explained that one area of support for detection and prevention of child exploitation came through street patrols (weekends and holidays), which involved volunteers (including sixth formers) who had been trained in safeguarding and exploitation awareness. Intelligence from the patrols was shared directly with the police and used to adjust patrols.

12. The committee considered disruption and prevention and asked how the police disrupted exploitation before children were criminalised
 - The Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police stated that the partnership focused on early help, not criminalisation. Criminalisation was only used when children posed a risk to others (recruiting other children for example). Individual children were monitored and supported through targeted plans.
13. The committee discussed schools and social inclusion and asked what was being done to support children who appeared socially isolated but attended school.
 - The Head of Service Vulnerable Children in Need of Support and Assessment explained that social exclusion was treated as a red flag and that Get Safe assessments and school engagement helped identify children at risk and intervene early. Home-educated and part-time-attending children were also monitored.
14. The committee looked at the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and enquired how the Modern Slavery Act applied to exploited children committing offences.
 - The Head of Service West Mercia Youth Justice Service explained that the Youth Justice Service screened for eligibility for NRM and if exploitation was suspected, a referral would be made and considered during court proceedings. The aim was to ensure there was a contextual understanding of offending behaviour so that outcomes could be adjusted accordingly.
15. In relation to separated and unaccompanied children the committee enquired about how children arriving through the National Transfer Scheme were being safeguarded.
 - The Head of Service Vulnerable Children in Need of Support and Assessment, explained that age assessments, health screening and exploitation risk assessments were completed post-arrival. Materials were translated and support provided to aid understanding, and weekly visits and oversight continued even when a child was placed out-of-county.
16. The committee raised concerns about apparent gaps in data being provided, which made it difficult to identify longitudinal trends and outcomes. It was suggested that it would be useful for the committee to be given an explanation of 'what good looks like' along with relevant key data, so that it could determine whether or not children in the county were safer.
 - The Cabinet Member Children and Young People, and the Service Director, Early Help, CIN and Safeguarding provided an explanation for the lack of data and suggested that a discussion/briefing to establish what data the committee would like to be provided with could be held outside of the meeting.

Action: Meeting around data dissemination to be arranged with the committee chairs, statutory scrutiny officer, corporate director and cabinet member for children young people.

17. The committee enquired if an update could be provided on the implementation of recommendations made by the task and finish group who had previously carried out an inquiry into child exploitation in the county.

Action: Copy of the historic task and finish group report on child exploitation in the county to be forwarded on to Service Director, Early Help, CIN and Safeguarding for comment.

18. The committee noted that there wasn't adequate time left to formulate any recommendations on the item during the meeting and it was proposed that any recommendations on the item be discussed and compiled ahead of the next committee meeting.

Resolved That:

The committee discuss and compile any recommendations it might have before the next meeting, where they could be presented and voted on.

71. WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered and agreed the work programme as set out in the agenda. It was also agreed that the committee would meet before its next meeting to discuss what it could bring to the programme and how it would work for the rest of the year.

The committee considered the work programme included at item 8 of the agenda and unanimously approved the following recommendation:

Resolved that:

- 1. The committee agree the work programme for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee contained in the work programme report attached as Appendix 1.**

72. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 24th June 2025, 2pm

73. APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION AND RESPONSE

Supplementary questions from members of the public – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, 27 May 2025

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary Question	Question to
SPQ 1	Ms Reid Hereford	The Constitution states: “An answer to a supplementary question will be provided by the member to whom the question was put ... [4.1.56].” I would like the Chairperson to answer. The response to my public question mentions	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

		scrutiny of Herefordshire Children's Services by Ofsted, the Children's Commissioner and the Improvement Board but it does NOT mention accountability for past wrongdoing. The website - www.families4change.org.uk - of the Families' Alliance for Change (Herefordshire) - gives rigorous and comprehensive information about past and current wrongdoing. I consider that only a statutory public inquiry would fully investigate the wrongdoing so that lessons are learnt, recommendations made and implemented. This would ensure that the council's resources would be focused on optimising expenditure by Herefordshire Children's Services. Would you, Councillor Fagan, support a statutory public inquiry into Herefordshire Children's Services? If not, why not?	
Record of verbal response from CYPSC Chair provided during the meeting: <i>Thank you for the question Miss Reid. I would like to say that I have enormous sympathy for the experiences of families in the past that have suffered at the hands of Herefordshire's children's services. However, I am not convinced that a public inquiry is the way to go. I think that that would be a decision that would be made by the Minister for Education and as we are aware the Department of Education has invested significant resources in the improvement journey in Herefordshire. My concern is that in a public environment, where finances are extremely tight, any diversion of resources to looking at historic injustices will prevent us from actually moving forward to a position where children's services are fit for current and future generations. In my time as Chair I've spent a lot of time with councillors from other authorities and I do not believe that Herefordshire's problems have been particular only to our county. I think a lot of the problems have been structural with social care for children in the UK. I think that we are going a long way in Herefordshire to improve the situation through restorative practice having been embedded in the service and a renewed focus on early help and the acknowledgment that families need support. While we cannot undo the wrongs of the past we have had a family's commission look at the historic complaints and we've had the previous director and the current director look at historic cases in detail, and I think that we've gone a long way to actually try to address the issues that have plagued the service in the past and I feel that we need to really look forward and make sure that the service is in a much better position to deliver for the children of Herefordshire. Thank you.</i>			

The meeting ended at 14:50

Chairperson



Title of Report: Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 22nd July 2025

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Classification

Open

Decision Type

This is not an executive decision

Wards Affected

All wards

Purpose

To scrutinise the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 3 and Quality Assurance Framework.

Recommendation

That the committee scrutinise the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 3 and the service approach to Quality Assurance and make any recommendations to the service that they believe will support the improvement of services.

Alternative Options

The committee agreed to carry out the monitoring of the improvement plan as part of its annual programme.

Key Considerations

1. Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.

2. The inspection report was published on 21 September 2022 and is available at <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50192875>
3. The Secretary of State issued a Statutory Direction (<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50192875>) to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022, and appointed a Commissioner for Children's Services.
4. The overall judgement was that Herefordshire Children's Service was 'inadequate'. The judgements contributing to this outcome are as follows:

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

5. During Phase 2 of the improvement journey three Ofsted monitoring visits have taken place.
6. October 2024 Ofsted Monitoring Visit focused on The protection of vulnerable children at risk from extra familial risk. The outcome letter headline reads "Since the last monitoring visit in February 24 a new *interim director of children's services has been appointed who has brought renewed focus to areas of the service which needed to improve. A refreshed improvement plan is being implemented and there are some early signs of improvement*" The full report which is at Appendix A provides a detailed summary of the monitoring visit which includes findings that most children vulnerable to exploitation risks who come to the attention of children's services are promptly identified with timely information sharing between partners and that the Get Safe Team work effectively to reduce risks for many children. It finds most work is timely and well-structured with staff forming lasting and trusting relationships and that a collaborative approach across the partnership to risk management leads to reliable decisions.
7. February 2025 Ofsted monitoring visit focused on **Children subject to child protection enquiries such as strategy discussions and section 47 emergency action, including liaison with police use of police powers of protection and emergency Protection Orders, Child in need assessments and decisions to accommodate during initial assessment and Step up and Step down to early help.** The outcome letter headline findings state "*since the last monitoring visit in October 24 the local authority has started to build some momentum in the pace of progress to improve services for vulnerable children. Strategic leaders are beginning to establish the foundations for stronger practice and are achieving greater consistency and the quality of practice by the assessment teams. The implementation of the Herefordshire children's services and partnership improvement plan is making progress.*" The full report found at Appendix B is a very positive report confirming the services are providing timely, comprehensive assessments and that thresholds are appropriately applied and informed decisions about the level of intervention made.
8. June 2025 the 7th and final Ofsted monitoring visit took place with a focus on **The quality of matching placements and decision making for children in care and the Experiences and progress of children in care.** The outcome letter findings state "*The quality of practice for children in care in Herefordshire has improved at pace since the last monitoring visit which focused on children in care in early 2024 where little progress was found. Over the last year, following the appointment of a new interim director of children's services, leaders and senior managers have worked with fresh momentum and conviction to create the conditions for social work to flourish.*"

This is having a positive impact for children in care. Consistently stronger child focused practice is improving the experience and outcomes for children in care in Herefordshire”.

9. The Ofsted Monitoring visits are the independent inspection that provides oversight, challenge and assurance as to the progress of the improvement plan and the difference it's making to the quality of services to children and families. We are pleased that we have now received three consecutive positive Ofsted Monitoring visit reports. The service is now awaiting its full re inspection which will take place before the end of 2025

Development of the Plan Phase 3

10. The Phase 3 Improvement Plan has been developed in line with what has been an effective Phase 2 plan approach and aims to sustain focus and pace to our improvement work.
11. The plan sets out highlights of what has been achieved in the last 12 months and retains the “plan on a page”.
12. Phase 3 incorporates the development and implementation of the Families First programme which is part of the Government's Welfare Reforms. The Families First programme has a local authority lead with a multi-agency steering group and will report independently to the Children Young People Strategic Partnership and the Children's Safeguarding Partnership on its implementation and progress.
13. Phase 3 also sets out our engagement with the region and our contribution to the regional key priorities under the West Midlands Regional Improvement Alliance. It is important for Herefordshire that we have strong representation and engagement in the delivery against these priorities to ensure the Herefordshire voice is heard and taken into account and that we maximise on all regional learning and investment opportunities.
14. During 24/25 the service introduced its new Quality Assurance Programme. The Quality Assurance Programme enables us to:
 - **know ourselves well**, our strengths and our areas for improvement so we can take timely action to improve
 - **understand the experience and impact our services make to the children and families** so we can be sure we are “**making a difference**”
 - understand how it feels to be part of the children workforce, so we are an **employer of choice** giving our children and young people stability and consistency in good quality help, support and protection
15. Our Quality Assurance Framework is made up of three complementary components: Case practice Auditing, Service User Feedback and Key Performance Indicator analysis. The Quality Assurance Framework document can be found at Appendix 4
16. Case Audit – This Is a programme of monthly auditing of random sample cases across the service. Each case is audited by two separate managers, one manager who is case responsible and an independent manager. The audit outcomes are then compared and moderated by a senior manager. The audits are divided into 5 domains to assess the quality of practice in:
 - voice of the child being present in assessment and planning
 - quality of assessment
 - quality of plan
 - quality of partnership working

- provision of supervision and management oversight
- recognition and inclusion of diversity

17. The grade descriptors document provides guidance for auditors as to what constitutes: Outstanding / Good / Requires Improvement or Inadequate practice. This is located at Appendix 5
18. In addition to this monthly programme of case file auditing there is a wide range of targeted auditing that takes place in each service area. The targeted audits are undertaken as a result of service user feedback, KPI analysis, implementation or compliance with policies or practice standards.

Feedback from Children and Families

19. is the second crucial part of our quality assurance framework and it enables us to understand how children and their families are experiencing our services and the impact they make.
20. Introduced in September 24 we send via closure letters a survey to all parents at the end of an intervention providing each family with the ability to complete this survey online. However we also put in place a regular programme of calls made directly to parents and your people at the point of closure, and we have found this approach to be far more productive in terms of take up.
21. Throughout 24/25 through this method, we obtained the feedback from 109 different parents. In Q1 of 25/26 we have received an addition 52 responses. An analysis report on the feedback is provided each quarter as part of the improvement plan progress reporting.
22. In addition, we also seek parental, and children young people feedback for each of the case audits that we undertake monthly. Again, we developed our process where we contact parents/young people as soon as the case for audit is identified and agree a time slot for them to feedback to the auditor. We have again found that this has increased contribution. In Q4 we received 17 contributions and in Q1 of this year we have received 33 contributions.
23. A third method of receiving feedback from children and families is through our compliments and complaints processes. These are incorporated into our quarterly and annual Complaints and Compliments reports and learning bulletins
24. The above mechanisms for seeking feedback from parents, carer and children and young people is separate from the individual engagement of these parties in our case work assessments and planning.

Analysis of Key Performance Indicators

25. Key performance indicators (KPI) is the third part of our Quality Assurance framework. This enables us to monitor workload, workflow, demand and timeliness. An Improvement Board KPI Dashboard was developed under Phase 2, and this has been updated to reflect phase 3 of our improvement plan.
26. The Dashboard consists of approximately 60 key indicators that are individually and collectively analysed and cross referenced with England, Statistical Neighbour and Regional averages, where these are available, to give us an understanding of the Herefordshire position.

27. It is however always important that we understand our own pattern and trends within these KPI's and have an ability to respond dynamically to what they tell us. For example, a drop in Social Work Assessments completed in timescales cross referenced with the leaving of three staff at a similar time at the beginning of last year was identified. This led to swift action by the services manager to seek support from colleagues across the services to re-allocate assessments to prevent drift and delay and snr managers reviewed additional data to seek assurance there was no "backlog" of open assessments.
28. The Phase 3 plan sets out the quality assurance measures within each domain against the Ofsted Recommendations.
29. The remaining part of the Phase 3 plan updates the list of activity that will take place to implement the plan through 25/26. Governance remains under the improvement board there will be reporting progress reports and quality assurance reports on a regular basis. The full Phase 3 plan is available at Appendix 6.

Community Impact

30. The Ofsted inspection judgement of 'Inadequate' has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
31. Effective scrutiny enables the committee to reflect community concern, one of the four purposes of scrutiny as outlined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

Environmental Impact

32. There are no direct environmental impacts resulting from scrutinising this report.

Equality Duty

33. 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. There are no direct equality impacts in scrutinising this report. However, any recommendations made by the committee may have an equalities impact if agreed by Cabinet or the portfolio holder. These risks will need to be evaluated and if necessary mitigated before any recommendation is accepted.

Resource Implications

34. This report constitutes part of the typical function of this committee. Similarly, a programme of work undertaken by committee is an integral part of the council's 'business as usual'. Therefore, there is no resource implication in setting or agreeing a work programme. However, any recommendations made by the committee may have a resource implication if agreed by Cabinet or the portfolio holder. These risks will need to be evaluated and if necessary mitigated before any recommendation is accepted.

Legal Implications

35. The remit of the scrutiny committee is set out in part 3 section 4 of the constitution and the role of the scrutiny committee is set out in part 2 article 6 of the constitution.
36. The Local Government Act 2000 requires the council to deliver the scrutiny function.

Risk Management

1. In producing the plan, the Director or Children's Services has considered and mitigated the following risks.

Risk / Opportunity	Mitigation
Partnership buy in to the plan – recognising a joint responsibility to deliver an improved childrens services.	Extensive partnership engagement activity and involvement, focus groups with children and young people and key stakeholders. Quartely partnership summits.
Plan is not adopted or endorsed.	Continuous engagement throughout the development of the plan and the governance process. Engagement with Corporate Leadership Team, Department Leadership Team, the Improvement Board, the Commissioner and the Department for Education.

Consultees

40. There have no consultations required to produce this report.

Appendices

Appendix A Ofsted Monitoring visit October 24
 Appendix B Ofsted Monitoring visit letter March 2025
 Appendix C Ofsted Monitoring visit letter July 2025 (to be publicly available 17th July)
 Appendix D Quality Assurance and Learning Framework
 Appendix E Audit Grading Descriptors August 2024
 Appendix F Improvement Plan Phase 3

Background Papers

None

4 December 2024

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

Dear Tina

Monitoring visit to Herefordshire children's services

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

Areas covered by the visit

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

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

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

Headline findings

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

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

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

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

Findings and evaluation of progress

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Alison Smale
His Majesty's Inspector

20 March 2025

Tina Russell
Corporate Director of Children's Services (Interim)
Children's Services
Plough Lane
Hereford
HR4 OLE

Dear Tina

Monitoring visit to Herefordshire children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Herefordshire County Council children's services on 18 to 19 February 2025. This is the sixth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in July 2022. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Alison Smale and Rebecca Quested.

Areas covered by the visit

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

- child protection enquiries, such as strategy discussions or section 47 enquiries
- emergency action – liaison with police to use powers of protection or applications for an emergency protection order
- child-in-need assessments
- decisions to accommodate children during an initial assessment
- step-up from and step-down to early help.

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

Headline findings

Since the last monitoring visit in October 2024, the local authority has started to build up some pace in the improvement of services for vulnerable children. Strategically, leaders are beginning to establish the foundations for stronger practice and are achieving greater consistency in the quality of practice of their assessment teams. The implementation of the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan is making progress. A move to locality-based working has been successfully initiated, and this is showing early signs of the benefits of improved working with families and children, as well as partnership working. The teams whose

members undertake assessments following referral to children's social care and provide support for children in need have recently moved to three localities within the county. This is the first phase of the implementation of the Families First Partnership programme.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Timely completion of assessments and support provided by social workers and family support workers in the assessment and support teams have a positive impact, which enables the majority of children and their families to progress in having their needs met. Re-referral rates have recently increased. A small cohort, particularly of older children with more complex needs, have been referred previously to the local authority. Opportunities have been missed to identify and understand their needs at the earliest opportunity.

Thresholds are appropriately applied, and this informs decisions about the level of intervention. Most assessments are comprehensive and provide an evaluation of children's needs. Written assessments are not usually addressed to children. Many assessments are unnecessarily lengthy and repetitive. This means they can be quite difficult to read. Leaders accept the need to review the assessment format and develop the way social workers write to children and families to ensure they are easier for them to understand.

Decisions and recommendations to meet the needs of children are clearly thought through with a clear rationale. Family history and patterns of intervention are considered in assessments.

Social workers understand the authority's social work model to work with families, and they are cognisant of issues such as disguised compliance when working with parents who may appear to cooperate but who behave in ways which undermine the effectiveness of this work. Children's ethnicity is considered to help understand their lived experiences and needs. However, family identities are not consistently recorded, which leads to some misleading ethnicity records, particularly for mixed heritage and Romany children.

The views of partner agencies are captured in addition to those of parents and children in most assessments. A range of professionals and agencies are involved, and they make an important contribution to assessments as well as provide the support which families need. This includes the constructive use of the edge of care service to support families where relationships are strained, as well as other targeted and specialist services. Family support workers in assessment teams play a valuable role with families, which both contributes towards the completion of the assessment and supports families.

Safeguarding concerns that emerge during an assessment are responded to with timely strategy meetings, which are appropriately held to consider the risk of harm to children. They are well attended by multi-agency partners. This ensures information

is shared effectively and decisions are made together by those who know the family and child, to protect children. For the very small number of children who become looked after during assessments, this is done in their best interests and to protect them from further harm.

Social workers undertake thorough section 47 enquires to fully understand the risks to children. Parents and children are seen quickly so that initial safety planning can be agreed. Safety plans are written down and shared with families, which ensures that there is a shared understanding of how children's needs can be safely met. While partnership working for many families is improving their circumstances, some barriers to partnership are still evident in a small proportion of cases. This slows progress for a minority of children, such as children who miss education for too long, without assessment of their learning needs, which is critical to their needs being met. Leaders have addressed the issue that police do not always give sufficient priority to joint section 47 child protection investigations or are not sufficiently forthcoming to assist in some instances, for example where their help might ensure the safety of social work staff. However, the results of leaders' management of this issue have not yet had an impact.

Many social workers develop relationships with parents and children in a skilled way. As a result, parents are supported to understand the concerns about their children. Social workers themselves, or family support workers in their teams, use the period of assessment to undertake direct work with children and families to improve their understanding and to start to support parents to address their children's needs or risks.

Leaders have strengthened the approach to pre-birth assessment and decision-making. This follows a focused audit of this area of work and the implementation of awareness raising to improve practice and stronger management oversight. Practice in relation to pre-birth assessments had been inconsistent over recent months, but more recently practice is more effective, with more thorough assessments, timely decision-making and support to ensure that these very vulnerable children are supported to live with their parents where possible.

Identification of young carers has increased over the last year, and the local authority is now supporting more young carers through dedicated early help workers. These assessments are comprehensive and child focused. They advocate and support young carers to get the right services and they support families to understand their needs. There is a group for young carers in Hereford, which provides them with social activities and support. Other young carer groups have been closed, which means many of these children are unable able to attend.

Leaders are now making some tangible progress to improve the quality and consistency of practice within their assessment teams. The Chief Executive has established a Partnership Executive Group, which is beginning to deliver increased commitment from health and the police. A stronger understanding and commitment

across the council to children who need the support of children's social care is reflected in corporate plans and priorities.

Senior leaders are learning more meaningfully from external peers, which is leading to demonstrable changes, such as a commitment to being a child-friendly Hereford and the start of the long-awaited management development programme. Nearly all managers are now permanent, providing a firmer foundation to achieve consistent practice. While a greater and increasing proportion of the workforce are now permanent, this remains a significant challenge to embedding changes in order to achieve sustained improvement.

Changes to the structure, revised policies and procedures, and the strengthening of quality assurance have been well implemented by the interim director of children's services (DCS) and the leadership team. Social workers are positive about the changes implemented by leaders in recent months to the structure, and they have valued the consultation and opportunities to influence these changes ahead of their implementation. Prior to these changes, there was a period of instability within the assessment teams, with higher caseloads and a backlog of assessments due to staff vacancies. Since the restructure, and the recruitment of new staff, this has stabilised. The newness of these changes means there has not yet been sufficient time to test their sustainability.

A wider breadth of quality assurance activity gives leaders a stronger line of sight on the quality of practice. This includes a broader range of targeted audits on areas of service or cohorts of children who are more vulnerable. Feedback from children and parents is much more embedded into audits, which provides more meaningful insight into the experience and impact of practice for those who receive support from children's services. Audits identify issues to improve the service as well as more practice improvement, but some are lengthy and not sufficiently clear about the key findings. A minority of audits are over optimistic in their evaluation of practice, and the moderation process is not fully effective.

The Management and Leadership programme for Service Managers is currently underway but at an early stage of implementation. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure that front line team managers have this training without delay, and implementation plans are in development. Most social workers in the assessment teams receive regular supervision, and mechanisms have been put in place to track the completion of assessments and ensure regular management oversight. The quality of supervision in this part of the service continues to vary, but, overall, a higher proportion of supervision provides some critical reflection and direction that progresses work with the children and their families.

Social workers are positive about the learning offer. It provides a range of training opportunities which supports their practice with children and families but does not include specific assessment training, which is a gap. Newly qualified social workers are well supported, which enables them to develop their confidence in their social work practice. Social workers enjoy working in Herefordshire. While there remains a

high proportion of agency social workers, reliance on agency staff has reduced and increasingly they work in Herefordshire for a longer time. Social workers feel well supported by their immediate line managers, their colleagues and leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Alison Smale
His Majesty's Inspector

Quality Assurance and Learning Framework

Herefordshire Council Children and Young People Services



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Foreword

Welcome to our updated Quality Assurance Framework. Working with children, young people and their families is hugely complex and we need ensure that our work is effective and that we continually evaluate and learn from our practice.

Successful children's social work and family support is about effecting change through relationships. Herefordshire has adopted restorative practice, working alongside children and families and in partnership with a range of colleagues and professionals. Our Quality Assurance activity challenges us to look at our practice strengths and also where we need to develop.

We are committed to achieving excellence through continuous improvement, where children and young people are at the heart of everything we do, and have the opportunity to influence and shape the services they receive.

Our Quality Assurance programme has three domains and each are important if we are to understand our practice and the difference its making to the children, young people and families we work with.

This framework also sets out the mechanisms we will use across our services to assess the quality of our practice, systems and processes, and use the learning to make improvements in practice and outcomes.

Dylan Harrison – Head of Service for Safeguarding & Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker

Our model of practice

At Herefordshire Children's Services we are adopting Restorative Practice as our practice model. Restorative practice is a term used to describe behaviours, interactions and approaches which help to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict.

Restorative practices enable those who work with children and families to focus upon building relationships that create and inspire positive change. Creating change sometimes requires challenge as well as support. Through implementing restorative approaches we aim to work alongside children, families and partners to remove barriers, promote a sense of community and share accountability.

In Herefordshire, we are working with Leeds Restorative Practice Centre to implement and embed this new approach. Working with staff, partners and families to improve the way in which we work alongside families and, most importantly to improve outcomes for children.

Our Quality Assurance Approach

Our Quality Assurance Framework is made up of three complementary components:

The Components are:

- Case Audit – including regular case audits and targeted audits giving us evidence on the quality of work and compliance with our practice standards
- Feedback from children and families to understand how they are receiving our services
- Analysis of key performance indicators that enable us to monitor workload, workflow, demand and timeliness

Through this programme, we can understand the impact of what we do, the quality of our practice and our service performance against statutory and internal indicators.

The framework seeks to:

- Ensure the right level of support is offered at the right time to children and families as we full fill our duties and responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people as paramount in our work.
- Improve the quality of services by identifying strengths in practice that can be shared and built upon.
- Improve outcomes for children and families by identifying areas of development within practice and services offered which can be addressed through service planning, training and commissioning.
- Ensure that all staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities for Quality Assurance, and that improving quality of practice is part of “business as usual” for all staff within Children’s Services.
- Ensure staff are supported in carrying out their roles both safely and effectively and that they are compliant with our policies and practice standards.

- Foster a culture of “high support, high challenge” that sits within a work cycle that drives a culture of continuous improvement, tackling problems openly and honestly and leading to visible change.
- Embed the voice of children and young people in practice and improvement activity.

There is an overarching Quality Assurance programme for Children’s Social Care consisting of monthly case audits, service user feedback at the end of each intervention to families, an overarching set of Performance Indicators for the Improvement Plan and a Children’s Service set of Performance Indicators reporting to Chief Executive and the council plan and the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA)

Service Area Quality Assurance Activity

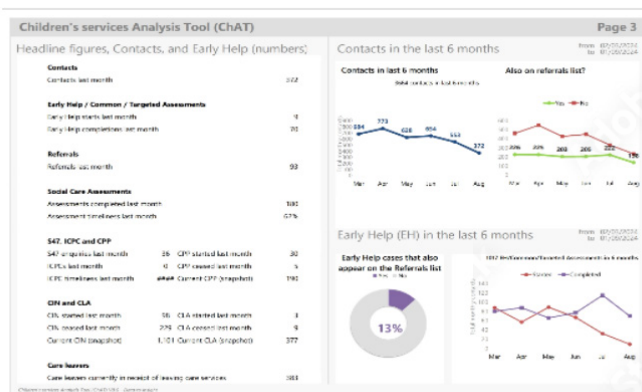
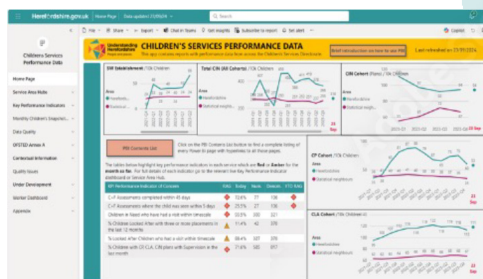
To support the overarching programme each Service Manager has developed a Service Area Quality Assurance Programme which for each quarter which includes targeted audit activity, service user feedback collected within their teams and specific Key Performance Indicators where there is an identified need for improvement.

These quarterly overview report are then fed into the Senior Leadership Team and taken into account in the service overview reports presented to All Member Briefings, Improvement Board, Safeguarding Partnership Scrutiny and other forums as required.

Our Quality Assurance Framework described - Component One - Qualitative Data

Quantitative data tells us how much we are doing in our provision of services to children and their families and whether we are meeting statutory timescales in managing demand and timeliness.

- PowerBi – Case Management Dashboard – ‘live’ performance data for managers and practitioners to track of progress on their individual case work and that of teams they are responsible for. It is also a tool to alert managers to any issues before they develop into wider concerns
- Analysis of performance data is a core function of managers and senior leaders and informs other methods of scrutiny, for example thematic audits, and will contribute to wider organisational learning, planning, development and delivery.



- ChAT - The Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) transforms child-level data and benchmarking statistics into a visual report that covers all areas of Children's Social Care. It enables managers, service managers and our senior leadership team to understand trends so that we can see how Herefordshire compares nationally and to our statistical neighbouring authorities.
- Further investigation through auditing and review can be undertaken based on the ChAT data and any corrective action taken.



Component Two - Audit Activity

Our audit activity tells us how well we are doing in our practice and provision of services to children and their families. We monitor, review and learn about our practice and leadership through the following methods:

Case Audits

- Monthly Looped audits consisting of peer and lead case audits with moderations
- Thematic Audits – delivered in service areas
- Multi-agency Audits – delivered through MASH and the Safeguarding partnership

Monthly Collaborative Case File Audits

In Herefordshire, our Early Help, MASH, Assessment Teams, Safeguarding Teams, Get Safe Team, Children in Care and Care Leavers Service undertake monthly peer case file audits. This provides an overview of the quality of case work and supports issue specific analysis. Audits are structured around our Practice Standards which are informed by legislation, regulation, our restorative practice framework and policies and procedures. They embed a culture of learning, confident practice and feedback, and provides assurance that intervention supports positive outcomes for children and their families. Audits encourage continuous improvement and development in practice.

The audit tool is structured into 6 domains:

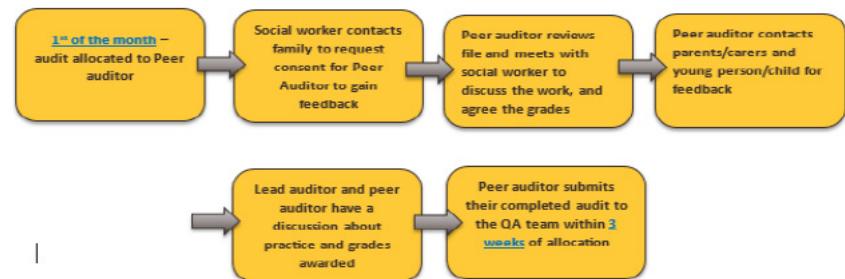
- Voice of the Child
- Assessments
- Quality of plans
- Management Oversight
- Effectiveness of Partnership Working
- Embracing Diversity

The QA team randomly identify children's case files to audit and these are allocated to managers on the 1st of each month. The audit is conducted by two auditors, the Lead Auditor is the case responsible Team Manager. The Peer Auditor and will be a member of the wider Quality Assurance Team, and Service Managers. The Peer Auditor will complete the audit tool alongside the allocated worker, facilitating a reflective discussion about practice and impact of our involvement. The Peer Auditor will also seek the views of the child or young person and their parent or carer(s) when completing a case file audit unless this is not possible.

Lead Auditor – Team Manager of allocated case



Peer Auditor – IRO/CP chair/Service Managers/QA practitioners

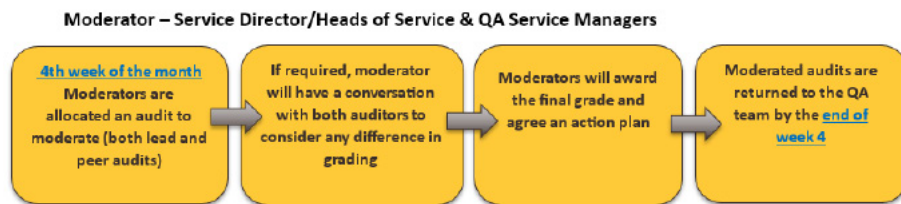


Grade descriptors have been developed to ensure accurate and consistent grades are applied. A copy of our grade descriptors can be found here– [add link to grade descriptors here](#)

The completed audit is uploaded onto Mosaic by the QA team and alerts are sent to all relevant staff and managers involved with the case to highlight the findings and any consequent actions.

Audit Moderation

Audit moderations will take place for any audit where there is a difference in the grade given by the Lead and Peer auditors, and also any audits where there are discrepancies in any domain grades. Moderators are drawn from the senior management team, including Service Directors, Heads of Service and the Principal Social Worker will be responsible for agreeing the final outcome grade and an action plan based on the audit findings. This will ensure quality and consistency across our auditing activity and will enable senior leaders to have robust oversight of the quality of practice in Herefordshire. Wider practice and organisational findings are also captured as part of the audit process and these are discussed in monthly meetings and an appropriate plan of action timetabled.



Inadequate Audits

Any case audit that has been graded 'Inadequate' is alerted to the Head of Service for oversight and comment. Inadequate audits are reviewed at 6 weeks and a senior manager will re-audit 3 months after the initial audit to satisfy themselves that all actions have been completed and there has been an improvement in the service the child and family receives.

Tracking audit outcomes and 'closing the loop' activity

Case file audits are tracked by the Quality Assurance team and senior managers to ensure any actions are completed and reflective discussions about the findings take place within supervision to support the development of the practitioner and improve service delivery and outcomes for children. Tracking of audit outcomes at overall and domain level takes place at a department, service, team and practitioner level allowing us to quickly identify any practice that needs to be challenged. This enables managers to initiate immediate changes to case management to positively impact on children and young people. We routinely record audit grades for each domain within the audit, as well as overall grade and use this data in our reporting to demonstrate trajectory of improvement and target areas for development.

Learning from audit

Learning from collaborative audits is collated and presented in a monthly managers' briefing and quarterly Quality Assurance reports. These provide analysis that identifies overall themes, and data for individual service areas and teams, to enable managers to focus on particular areas of practice. Managers review findings from audit with the practitioner within supervision, and any support or learning is identified.

Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs Challenge and Escalation

In Herefordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and Child Protection Chairs (CPC) form part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. A key aspect of their role is to provide oversight and if required, challenge of practice, independent to the operational service. IROs and CPCs have a duty to monitor how Herefordshire Children's Services carries out its statutory duties towards children who are looked after by the Local Authority or subject to the statutory child protection process. Where an IRO or CPC does not believe the expected practice or quality of service has been provided, or where they have safeguarding concerns for a child, the IRO/ CPC will seek to discuss the concerns with the social worker and their manager as part of the escalation process. If no resolution has been achieved, the concern is escalated through the Dispute Resolution Process, which can be found [here ...add link](#)

The Service Manager for the IRO service produces an annual report detailing their activity together with learning and recommendations for the wider service.

Component Three - Children, Family and Carer Feedback

Feedback from children and families is an integral part of our quality assurance activity. Along with the evaluation of data and audit findings, this helps us understand the experiences of children, their families and carers who receive our services. Feedback also enables us to measure the impact of practice and service delivery and the analysis used to determine actions to improve the quality of our services and also the experience of children and families receiving our services. We gather feedback at different points in time in the following ways:

- Surveys of children and young people at specific points in their journey through our services. These are undertaken through the use of structured questionnaires both service wide (such as when cases close) and within service areas (such as after a Child Protection Conference).
- Complaints and compliments
- Feedback from independent advocates
- Placement Review Meetings
- Children's feedback from Children Looked After reviews
- Herefordshire Young Voices Group and other activity led by the Participation Officer
- And through a range of feedback opportunities in the service area QA programmes



How we use the Learning from Quality Assurance

Themes from the quality assurance activity is shared in the following ways:

- Practice briefings and a rolling programme of targeted practice development workshops delivered by the Quality Assurance Team and Social Care Academy.
- A monthly briefing to the Managers' Meeting by the Quality Assurance Team to reflect the previous month's case file audit activity. This will include information on compliance, overview of grades, audit themes, good practice and areas for development.
- A quarterly Quality Assurance report to the Improvement Board will summarise the previous 3 months overall case file audit activity, an overview of learning from complaints, feedback from those using the service, Rapid Reviews, multi-agency audit and any other quality assurance activity.
- Presentation of the findings from Quality Assurance at the Staff Conferences and Principal Social Worker Forums.
- A monthly newsletter from the Social Care Academy will bring together key audit findings, areas for development and impact for children and young people and training and development opportunities.
- Significant learning from quality assurance activity is published as briefing notes and also posters for the locality bases.
- The Complaints Team will continue to provide quarterly and annual reports to CLT and DLT and a summary of the quarterly report will be shared with the Quality Assurance Team in order to incorporate into the quarterly report.
- A library of good practice exemplars is held and updated by the Quality Assurance team.
- Team Managers are responsible for sharing audit findings at Team Meetings and for supporting individual Social Workers with any individual feedback. This ensures any outstanding practice is celebrated, but also that any practice identified as Inadequate is challenged at the earliest opportunity to improve outcomes for children and families.

Learning from Compliments and Complaints

We take a positive approach to complaints and value them as an important form of feedback on our services. We use the lessons learnt from complaints to continuously improve our practice and we aim to work collaboratively with families to ensure we provide a high standard of service that meets their expectations. Taking a restorative approach we offer children, young people and families an early resolution conversation as an alternative to the formal process. Formal complaints are dealt with under the Herefordshire Complaints Procedure – **Get involved – Herefordshire Council** and first stage complaints are handled by the Quality Assurance Team to offer families or professionals an independent review of their complaint. Quarterly and annual reports to senior leaders provides information about any complaint received by Children's Services.

Our other methods of Quality Assurance

Staff Feedback

- Annual Social Work Health Check
- Annual colleague Health Check
- Collaborative audit
- Exit interviews
- Supervision
- Ofsted Annual Conversation

Practice Leadership

- Restorative Practice Framework & Expectations
- Management oversight on case records
- Learning Reviews
- Practice observations
- Supervision
- Child Protection Conference Consultations

- CP chair and IRO Midway reviews
- Escalations: Child Protection Conference Chairs, Children Looked After Independent Reviewing Officers

Multi-agency Quality Assurance Activity

- Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) multi-agency audit activity
- Multi agency partner feedback
- Escalations from partner agencies

A multi-agency audit is an opportunity to consider cases involving more than one agency where there are areas for potential learning and future multi-agency practice improvement. Selection and prioritisation of these audits are determined by the Quality and Effectiveness (Q&E) sub-group of the Herefordshire Children's Safeguarding Partnership. Multi-agency audits are led and facilitated by senior officers nominated by the Q&E sub group. The focus of practice will inform the agencies responsible for the audit team but can include colleagues from Health, Education, the Police and any other agency that may be relevant to the nature of the practice being reviewed.

Inspections & Reviews

- Ofsted ILACS inspection and Monitoring Visits
- Ofsted and CQC SEND Inspection
- DfE Commissioner reports to the Minister for Children and Families
- Skills for Care Audits
- Local Authority Peer Reviews

Workforce Development

A Learning & Development

An essential part of our Quality Assurance Framework is taking the learning from the range of activity to drive practice improvement. This is achieved through a variety of methods, including manager oversight and guidance, training and development opportunities, refreshed policies and processes, practitioner forums, reports and publications. We know that well trained, well supported staff are key to delivering best practice and achieving better outcomes for children and their families, and practitioners in Herefordshire are supported to grow, develop and progress, whatever stage they are at within their career. We are committed to developing a learning culture that is response to the needs of our staff and training opportunities are regularly advertised – see **SCA Learning Offer 1st April 2024 v2.pdf** for our current learning & development offer.

Our workforce improvement plan is refreshed periodically and monitored through our Workforce Delivery Board. Through a skilled, engaged and flexible workforce, we aim to develop our Children's and Young People's Services to be consistently 'Good' and ensure that our children and young people receive the best possible services from us. We have different methods and forums to capture staff feedback and we use this feedback to ensure we create a culture of support and learning, where staff have the skills and tools to deliver high quality practice. See <http://hcintranet.herefordshire.gov.uk/Id/Shared Documents/Workforce strategy FINAL 2024-2028 Accessible Word Version.docx> for the workforce strategy. (need a better link)



Grade Descriptors

The following descriptors should be considered as general guidance and understood in the context of the wider organisational, professional and statutory processes. Auditors will use both evidence and their professional judgement to award the overall grade. Auditors will consider the last 6 months of practice. To support your own professional judgment please consider this tool in the context of:

Herefordshire Practice Standards [practice-standards.docx \(live.com\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/practice-standards.docx)

Herefordshire Manual [Procedures \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/proceduresonline.com)

Please refer to the separate case audit guidance for details on how to complete the audit and template to record your findings.

VOICE OF THE CHILD

Practice Standards: Practitioners are confident in using direct work approaches appropriate to the child's age, understanding and preferences; and understand that "direct work" includes both play materials/ creative engagement tools and relationship building conversations. Direct work means both observations and talking to the child.

Children and families will be placed at the heart of everything we do. They will be involved in shaping the plans and decisions made about them. We will spend time listening to children and they will be helped by professionals who have the skills and tools to directly work with them taking account of their learning needs. We deliver relationship-based practice with children and families. We will involve them in a genuine partnership when developing plans

OFSTED Descriptor: Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers. They are consistently seen and seen alone by social workers if it is in the best interests of the child. Practice is based on understanding each child's day-to-day lived experience. Children are safer as a result of the help they receive.

Children and young people are listened to. Practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate. Feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive informs practice and service development. Children are seen regularly and seen alone by their social worker and children understand what is happening to them.

O- Outstanding	G- Good	RI- Requires improvement	I- Inadequate
The child's voice is seen and heard throughout the file. The child is seen regularly and in accordance with statutory guidelines. Visits are purposeful and the child has been seen alone where appropriate to do so. Language used reflects and upholds the ethos of <u>Language That Cares</u> The lived experience is understood and acted on, clearly informing decision making, planning and intervention. Direct work with the child is creative and purposeful. The child's wishes and feelings are clearly recorded, and all steps have been taken to promote participation and engagement. Advocacy Services are encouraged when appropriate.	The child is consistently seen and seen alone by social workers if it is in the best interests of the child and in accordance with statutory guidelines. There is evidence that direct work with the child includes creative methods of ensuring age-appropriate interaction. The child views are recorded and listened to. Case records provide a good understanding of the child's lived experience in the context of presenting issues. Intervention and interaction is sensitive to the needs of the child and developmentally appropriate. Information on Advocacy Services are provided.	The child is consistently seen and seen alone by social workers. Statutory timescale may not always have been met but child has been seen regularly. There is some evidence of meaningful direct work and the child's views are recorded. Case records provide some understanding of the child's lived experience however this could be strengthened.	The child has not been seen regularly and not seen alone without reasonable explanation. There is little or no record of the views of the child. There is little or no evidence of meaningful direct work. Case records do not reflect the child's lived experience.
ASSESSMENT (In most cases, the assessment will be a Child & Family statutory assessment under s.17 or s.47, or a Pathway Plan Needs Assessment. However, in some cases the most recent assessment details may be recorded in the allocated worker's report for a CLA planning/ review meeting or a CP conference). Practice Standards: Every child will have an assessment of their individual needs which reflects how their life experiences, wishes, feelings and any risks to them are known and understood. Assessments will take full account of family histories, parents' and wider family's views and those of other agencies involved with the family. Assessments will be regularly updated to take into account changes to the child and their family and to help to plan for their future. Every child will have an assessment which reflects the strengths and assets within themselves and their family and community alongside any worries and risk. A detailed genogram will be included with all assessments with an ecomap where possible. Safety planning will be clear in the assessment.			

OFSTED Descriptor: Assessments and plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks. Assessments (including early help assessments) are timely and proportionate to risk. They are informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child. They result in direct help for families if needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children. Help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific, effective and lawful.

O- Outstanding	G- Good	RI- Requires improvement	I- Inadequate
The child is the focus of the assessment and clearly incorporates the views of the child, their understanding of children's services involvement, presenting concerns, their lived experience, worries and aspirations. Wider needs of siblings in and out of the household are identified and taken into account when looking at the subject child's needs and safety Historical risks are referenced and taken into account The assessment identifies and involves significant adults and family members. Their views and understanding of presenting needs and concerns are clearly recorded. There is evidence of a restorative approach being used to develop the assessment. The assessment is evidence-based, strength-based and rooted in child development. The assessment is holistic, exploring all assessment domains and the contextual impact on the child. The assessment focuses on the individual needs and safety of the children. Safety planning tools are utilised to assess risk.	The assessment focuses on the individual needs and safety of the child. Safety planning tools are utilised to assess risk. Immediate risk is addressed in a timely manner. Safety plans and risk assessments are evidenced on child's file when required. There is good use of information from relevant professionals to evidence the general well-being, development, risk and history of the child and family. The views of parents and significant family members are included and considered. Throughout the case there is evidence that the child has remained the focus of assessment and planning. There is clear analysis that picks up all the issues of risk, need and protective factors identified in the assessment	The assessment is limited to largely presenting needs and risk to the subject child without clear reference to other children in the family. There is some use of information from professionals but is limited to some key professionals. There is limited detail of the history of the child and family. The child does not always remain the focus of the assessment, parental needs eclipsing those of the child. Some evidence specific areas arising from diversity needs have been considered. Analysis is present but could be strengthened to better reflect needs and risk identified. Evidence of some drift and delay completing the assessment however this has not adversely impacted the child.	The assessment lacks detail on presenting risks and safety planning. The child has not been seen. The child's views are not evident within the assessment. None or very limited information from professionals evidenced. No evidence of engagement or other family views obtained where it is clear this would have been valuable i.e. a grandparent in regular contact/care of the child / network. The history of the family has not been explored fully. Analysis of information obtained does not draw on the details of the assessment.

Key risks identified in the assessments have been indicated on the assessment documentation. Any appropriate “warning marker flags” are against the child. Specific areas of need arising from diversity are recognised and addressed. There is good use of information from relevant professionals to evidence the general well-being, development, risk and history of the child and family. There is clear analysis, the assessment outlines strengths, vulnerabilities risk and impact of harm. Decision making is proportionate and appropriate to presenting needs. The Chronology, Genogram and Eco Map is up to date. These have been used as analytical tools to help understand the impact, both immediate and cumulative, of key events and changes in a child or young person’s developmental progress. The assessment was completed in a timely way and within statutory timescales. Evidence the assessment has been shared with the child and family.	There is good use of information from relevant professionals, history of the child and family included. Specific areas of need arising from diversity are recognised. Chronology is up to date and has been used as an analytical tool to inform the assessment. The assessment was completed in a timely way and within statutory timescales. Evidence that the assessment has been shared with child and family.	Chronology is present but requires updating to be meaningful. Evidence the assessment has been shared with the family.	Drift and delay has created barriers to achieving timely intervention. Diversity needs have not been considered within the assessment.
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QUALITY OF PLANS (Please refer to Herefordshire Procedures Manual for relevant guidance depending on legislative mandate [Procedures \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com))

Practice Standards: All children’s plans will explain what needs to happen by when; by whom; what outcomes we are all working towards together as a multi-agency team. We will be clear what the contingency plan is.

In reviewed plans, the progress in meeting outcomes is clear and evidenced. Plans are reviewed at agreed intervals. If there are significant changes in the family circumstances, there is clear record decision making on whether an early review consideration should take place. Staff will use strength-based approaches to resolve problems and improve children's lives; working with children and families as opposed to doing things 'to' them.

We will acknowledge the risks and what we are worried about and help to find ways to keep children safe through thoughtful, considered and clear multi-agency plans which children and families can relate to and which will support them to achieve positive changes.

OFSTED Descriptors: Children in need of help and/ or protection have a plan setting out how they will be helped, how their needs are going to be met and how risk will be reduced within the timescales appropriate for the child. If families refuse to engage, clear contingency plans are in place. These are based on the assessment of need and risks to the child. Action is taken to avoid drift and delay. Plans and decisions are reviewed. Alternative decisive action is taken if children's circumstances do not change and the help provided does not meet their needs, or the risk of harm or actual harm remains or intensifies.

Children's looked after care plans comprehensively address their needs and experiences, including the need for timely permanence. Children's plans are thoroughly and independently reviewed with the involvement, as appropriate, of parents, carers, residential staff and other adults who know them. Plans for their futures continue to be appropriate and ambitious and consider how they will be supported and prepared for the experience of leaving care.

O- Outstanding	G- Good	RI- Requires improvement	I- Inadequate
The plan has been developed restoratively with the child and family. The views of the child and family are thoroughly incorporated into the plan. The plan is child centred and has SMART actions. The plan is understood by the child/ family i.e. no jargon. The plan is strengths-based, robustly identifying protective factors, needs, risk and vulnerabilities. Safeguarding needs are responded to accordingly and the right risk management plans to support the primary plan, are in place e.g. Get Safe / Neglect tool.	The views of the child and family have been sought and recorded. The plan is child centred and has SMART actions. The plan is strength based, identifying protective factors, needs, risk and vulnerabilities. Safeguarding needs are responded to accordingly and the right risk management plans to support the primary plan are in place. There is evidence of contingency planning.	The views of the child and family are limited within the plan. Limited evidence of SMART planning with the potential for uncertainty, drift or delay. Limited evidence of strength-based practice, protective factors, needs, risk and vulnerability being defined. Safeguarding needs are responded to, however risk management plans and tools not clearly defined.	The Plan is not SMART or child centred. The views of the child and family are not recorded. The plan is not multidisciplinary in approach and partnership accountability is not clear. Safeguarding concerns are not responded to with the appropriate risk management plans and tools.

There is clear a contingency plan. The plan is multi-disciplinary in approach; with accountability clear for the partnership working. There is strong evidence professionals are working collaboratively and clear of individual roles and responsibilities. Actions and intended outcomes are defined. The plan has been distributed to involved parties within agreed timescales.	The plan is multi-disciplinary in approach; with accountability clear for the partnership working. Actions and intended outcomes are defined. The plan has been distributed to involved parties within timescales.	Contingency plans are not developed. Limited evidence of effective partnership working to progress the plan. Some delay in distributing the plan to involved parties within timescales.	Needs, risks and protective factors, are not sufficiently identified. There is insufficient contingency planning. The plan has not been written and/ or distributed to relevant parties.
<u>QUALITY OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING</u> Practice Standards: There is multi-disciplinary input, used to triangulate social work views and those of the child, parents and other family members, with evidence from professionals involved with the child and family. It is clear which agency provided which information. OFSTED Descriptors: Children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements. Key participants attend multi-agency meetings. These meetings are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring. Actions happen within agreed timescales and the help and protection provided reduce risk and meet need. Professionals understand thresholds. This leads to children and families receiving effective, proportionate and timely interventions, which improve their situation.			
O- Outstanding	G- Good	RI- Requires improvement	I- Inadequate
The contact details of key professionals are recorded on the file and relevant documents. The professional group working together with the family has a shared vision, working together to achieve these goals, leading to positive outcomes for the child. The child's holistic needs are met through robust partnership working.	The contact details of key professionals are recorded on the file and relevant documents. Partnership engagement is proactive and collaborative. The child's needs are met through effective partnership working.	Incomplete contact details recorded on file for key professionals. Some evidence of effective and collaborative partnership working. Roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined.	No contact details recorded on file for key professionals. Little or no evidence of collaborative partnership working. Poor partnership attendance at key meetings.

Individual roles, remits and responsibilities are clearly defined. Meetings are well attended by the multi-agency network. Interagency information sharing is timely, recorded and considered within the context of decision making. Professional differences are recorded. There is evidence of challenge/ agreed resolution or escalation.	Meetings are well attended, and individual roles and responsibilities are defined. Evidence of timely interagency information sharing on the file. This information is considered within the context of decision making. Professional differences are recorded. There is evidence of challenge/ agreed resolution or escalation.	The child's holistic needs are only partially met through the partnership. Inconsistencies in attendance at partnership meetings. Some evidence of effective information sharing. Where professional differences are recorded, there is limited evidence of challenge/ agreed resolution or escalation.	The child's holistic needs are not met. Little or no evidence of information sharing. Where professional differences are recorded, there is no evidence of challenge/ agreed resolution or escalation.
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SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Practice Standards: All children's case records will be clear, using language that is easy to understand, analytical, and timely, so that everyone can understand significant events that have happened.

Every child's case must be supported by regular, timely, recorded management oversight of the work.

Supervision demonstrates evidence of reflection, impact of intervention and management oversight. It includes clear case direction from the point of allocation, through to any transfers or closure. Management oversight ensures timescales are understood as being 'outside boundaries' i.e. the last date for completion. These are not targets to work to; timescales are driven by the child's situation and plan.

OFSTED Descriptor: Decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers. Actions are clearly recorded. Systematic and high-quality management oversight of frontline practice drives child-centred plans and actions within the timescales appropriate for the child. Effective and timely planning, support and decision-making takes place during pre-proceedings work.

O- Outstanding	G- Good	RI- Requires improvement	I- Inadequate
Management oversight is regular and proactive, responding to the child's changing needs and circumstances and is clearly recorded on the file. Case discussions are reflective and restorative. There is evidence a high challenge/ high support ethos.	Management decision making and rationale is clearly recorded on the child's file in line with significant events in the child's journey. Supervision is regular, effective and reflective.	Limited management oversight recorded on the file. Supervision is regular but not always within timescales. The effectiveness of supervision is limited, with little evidence of	Little evidence of management oversight recorded on the child's file. Supervision is not taking place regularly.

Supervision is regular, reflective with clear actions. The impact on, and the experience of the child is at the forefront of decision making. Supervision records demonstrate evaluation and impact of intervention. Decision-making is based on clearly defined thresholds. Analysis leads to specific actions based on what needs to change and how. Actions are regularly reviewed to prevent drift and delay. Assessments and plans have manager comment and sign off.	Supervision records demonstrate evaluation and impact of intervention. The impact on the child is clearly considered within decision making. Agreed actions are revisited and addressed in a timely way. Assessments and plans have manager comment and sign off.	reflection and evaluation. Supervision tends to be task orientated. Limited evidence of previous actions being reviewed, resulting in some drift and delay. Limited evidence of manager sign off on assessments and plans.	Supervision is ineffective with no evidence of reflection and a lack of robust analysis. Rationale for decision making is unclear and there is a lack of clear management direction. No actions recorded, or previous actions have not been revisited / progressed leading to clear drift and delay. No evidence of manager comment and sign off on assessments and plans.
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EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Practice Standards: Diversity is considered in the context of the individual, their environment and family network. Age; disability; ethnicity; faith or belief; identify; language; race; gender; and sexual orientation are considered and respected and will not be treated different or unfairly because of these characteristics. Reports and case records are written in plain language, free from acronyms and jargon, so they can be understood by the child and their family.

OFSTED Descriptors: Social workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor their interventions appropriately. This includes, but is not limited to, disabled children, children who are privately fostered, children not attending school, vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of radicalisation or exploitation or becoming involved in gangs. Decisions about care leavers consider any needs related to their specific circumstances, including whether they are an unaccompanied asylum seeker, a young parent or have had contact with the criminal justice system.

O- Outstanding	G- Good	RI- Requires improvement	I- Inadequate
Commitment to anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice is strong and clearly evidenced throughout the file. Diversity data is clearly captured and recorded correctly on file. Diversity has been considered in the context of the individual and their environment and family network. Protected characteristics: age; disability; ethnicity; faith or belief; identify; language; race; gender; and sexual orientation have been considered and informed assessment and planning. Communication needs – sensory impairment, learning disability, or individual language needs are clearly defined. The potential impact is considered in assessment, planning and intervention. Interpreter and advocacy services have been used where appropriate.	Diversity has been considered in the context of the individual and their environment and family network. Diversity data is clearly captured and recorded correctly on file. Protected characteristics: age; disability; ethnicity; faith or belief; identify; language; race; gender; and sexual orientation have been considered and informed assessment and planning. Communication needs – sensory impairment, learning disability, or individual language needs are clearly defined. The potential impact is considered in assessment, planning and intervention. Interpreter and advocacy services have been used where appropriate.	Diversity has been considered at times in the context of the individual and their environment and family network. Protected characteristics: age; disability; ethnicity; faith or belief; identify; language; race; gender; and sexual orientation have been considered and informed assessment and planning but could be strengthened. Communication needs – sensory impairment, learning disability, or individual language needs are somewhat defined but are not always clearly considered in the assessment, planning and intervention. Interpreter and advocacy services have been used where appropriate.	Little or no evidence to inform diversity needs have been considered and explored. Protected characteristics: age; disability; ethnicity; faith or belief; identify; language; race; gender; and sexual orientation have not been considered and has not informed assessment and planning. Communication needs – sensory impairment, learning disability, or individual language needs are not considered in the assessment, planning and intervention. Interpreter and advocacy services have not been used where it would have been appropriate.

Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan

Phase 3

“ We hope this plan assures our children, young people and our families that Herefordshire Council, its Children's Services and the associated partnership remain fully committed to making the improvements required to ensure our children, young people and family get the help, support and protection they need.

I want to thank them for their past and future engagement with us, our staff and our services.”

Welcome to Herefordshire's Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan.

This plan is in response to the inadequate judgment arising from the Ofsted *Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services* (ILACS)

framework in July 2022. It builds on the developments and progress of the Children's Services Improvement Plan Phase 2 July 24 – April 25.

Our Shared Vision

We believe that children and young people thrive best in their **family care**, within **highly effective schools** and in **flourishing communities**. Our plans have focused on putting into place the conditions for good practice to thrive. This Phase 3 plan reflects our collective drive and commitment to continue the pace of improvement seen during 24/25 with a focus on delivery against our Quality Assurance Programme to ensure;

- **we know ourselves well**, our strengths and our areas for improvement so we can take timely action to improve
- **we understand the experience and impact our services make to the children and their families**, so we can be sure we are “making a difference” and are supporting them at the earliest opportunity
- **we understand how it feels to be part of the children workforce, so we are an employer of choice** giving our children and young people stability and consistency in good quality help, support and protection

We understand the pressures of parenting and life that many of our families face as they strive to care for their children well. Through our restorative approach we will recognise their strengths and support them in the challenges they face. We hope this plan assures them of our united commitment to deliver timely and high quality Children's Services.

We want to help children, young people and their families achieve the best in life.

Our Improvement plan recognises the importance of Partnership Working required to deliver good quality help, support and protection. Each of our partner agencies will have their own priorities, strengths, changes and challenges. We will recognise, support and coordinate these as we work together to achieve good services for children and their families across Herefordshire. We thank our partners for their continued prioritisation and commitment to this plan.

Herefordshire a National Context

Our plan also recognises that “good quality” services are those that reflect the latest legalisation, statutory guidance and policy as defined by DfE. During 24/25 we have completed the work to comply with Working Together 2023 and we have taken the developing work from the Children’s Services Care Review and the government published ‘Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive’ policy into consideration.

As a result, we are in a strong place to develop and implement the Families First programme designed to achieve the following Outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- **Outcome 2:** children and young people are supported by their family network
- **Outcome 3:** children and young people are safe in and outside of their home
- **Outcome 4:** children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

We have a lead officer for this implementation programme, supported by a multi agency steering group, who will ensure Herefordshire have the following “enablers” in place which will provide foundations required for the Families First programme to be effective :

- Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- The workforce is equipped and effective

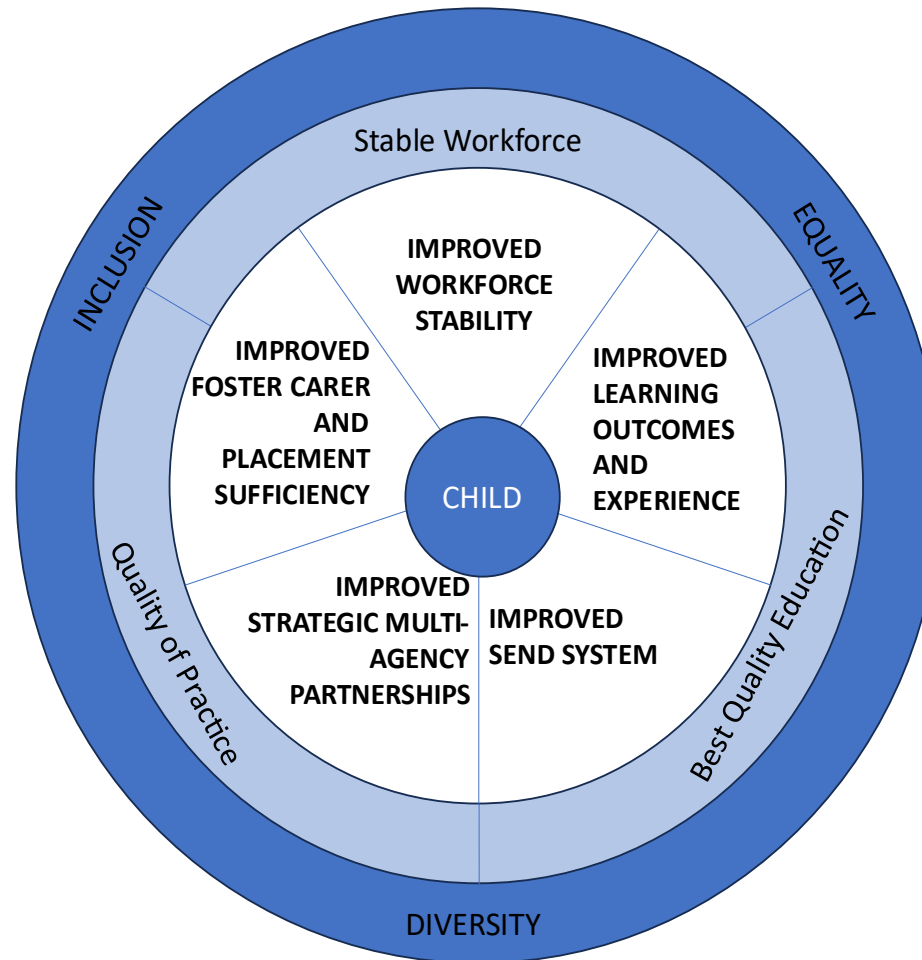
Herefordshire a Regional Context

As a member of the West Midlands Regional Local Authority group, we also work in partnership with the other West Midlands Local Authorities and Trusts and as part of the national programme of Regional Improvement Investment Alliance (RIIA).

The 25/26 regional priorities have been agreed as below. **We have strong representation and engagement in the delivery against those priorities to ensure Herefordshire voice is heard and taken into account and that we maximise on all regional learning and investment opportunities.** These include the regional Frameworks for commissioning Residential Care placements and Fostering placements, Leadership and Management training, Agency workforce management and Peer Reviews.

To develop a sustainable strategy that delivers
IMPROVED FOSTER CARER AND PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY,
 and ensures children are placed in settings that meet all of their needs.
 Which provides sector leading support for the regions in-house carers and that delivers best value for the region's taxpayers.

To use the collective strength of the region's DCS Network to ensure
IMPROVED STRATEGIC MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS,
 including health, police and probation to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people.



IMPROVED WORKFORCE STABILITY
 across disciplines of the sector and that continues to promote the West Midlands as the “go to” region for children’s services professionals.

IMPROVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXPERIENCE
 for all children and young people across an inclusive and high-performing schools system, promoted through positive partnerships with all schools and sector partners

To collectively influence the national conversation regarding an
IMPROVED SEND SYSTEM,
 so as to be able develop effective services that meet the realistic needs of children, young people and their families.

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Key documents



The Herefordshire Council Plan
2024-2028



hfdscouncil

[herefordshire.gov.uk](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk)



Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 - 2024



hfdscouncil

[herefordshire.gov.uk](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk)

Ofsted Recommendations – ILACS July 2022

- Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care and care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships.
- The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service.
- The timely and robust identification and multi-agency response to children and young people who are at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care.
- The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need.

- Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements to ensure children are protected and enter care when required.
- Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes.
- The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation.
- Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.
- Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.



Staff at Fun Day for care-experienced children and young people



Social care staff celebrating world social work week

Governance and monitoring of the Improvement plan

Improvement Board The Improvement board is the key partnership body with ownership of the improvement plan and responsibility for oversight of its delivery	The Partnerships The improvement plan has identified key partnership forums to carry out and oversee aspects of the plan relevant to their forums. These forums are set out below:	The Monitoring Partnership forums that will oversee, monitor and support progress reflecting Children's Services as a priority.
The Improvement Board is made up of strategic representation from partner agencies, working together to agreed terms of reference. The Improvement Board is chaired by the DfE appointed Children's Commissioner. Progress against the Improvement plan will be reported to the improvement board on a six weekly basis. Reporting will include reports on the three dimension of our quality assurance programme that tell us, what we are doing, how well we are doing it and what difference it is making. Reports will include: • A performance DASH board of key indicators linked to the Improvement Plan. • Audit activity reports including multi-agency audits. Service User feedback reports	Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Co-ordinates safeguarding across the partnership through the statutory partners as set out in Working Together 2023. Partnership Executive Group Created with Senior Leaders membership of the three safeguarding partners, LA, Police and Health for the purpose of ensuring any barriers identified in partnership work are removed to ensure delivery of the improvement plan at pace. Corporate Parenting Board Statutory responsibility to ensure looked after children and young people grow up having the same opportunities as their peers and to support children leaving care to live successful independent lives. Children & Young people Strategic Partnership (CYPP) This multi-agency strategic partnership will oversee the delivery of the Herefordshire CYPP supporting, challenging and resolving partnership barriers to delivering good quality services. SEND Partnership – working specifically to ensure children with additional needs are recognised and engaged in service improvement and development.	Herefordshire Council Directorate and Political Leadership Teams undertakes shared ownership for the coordination and delivery of the council's plan. The Children's Improvement Plan is a HCC priority. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Undertakes the scrutiny of all Children and Young People services in Herefordshire including monitoring and challenging the progress and implementation of the improvement Plan. Health and Well Being Board and Children and Young People Partnership provides leadership across the partnership to people, communities, cultures and organisations that are delivering Herefordshire's vision of <i>keeping children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life</i>. Children's Corporate Leadership Board will review the progress against the plan quarterly alongside wider children's performance and finance monitoring.



We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.

Children and Young Person's Version Improvement Plan Phase 3: May 2025

Quality Assurance - Hearing the Voice of the Children Young People and Parent/ Carers Understanding the impact of what we do

The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and the Participation Worker met with 2 groups of Care Leavers in August 2024 to share the new Improvement Plan and to get feedback on what they thought needed doing to improve Herefordshire Children's Services. Their priorities are reflected in our improvement plan. We will report back on progress against their priorities through their groups

Our Children and Young People Priorities

1. Staff stability and consistency of approach.
2. Children and Young People should contribute to their Plans.
3. Improved management and supervision of workers.
4. Better housing options for care leavers.
5. Workers need better training to be trauma informed.

How it feels

Biggest issue is the changes in worker
Having to tell my story over and over
Handover between workers is poor
Seems like a tick box exercise, you don't really care
Never seen my Pathway Plan

What we need

Listen to us
Follow through with what you say you will do
Show us respect
Tell us the truth

Direct quote #1

'Get to know me? Read my file, don't make me repeat my story over and over.'

Progress is built on partnerships: partnership activities will be delivered through:

Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership: Herefordshire Council Corporate Parenting Board: SEND Partnership

Oversight and coordination of this plan is through the Improvement Board Evidencing our progress and outcomes will be shared through regular Ofsted monitoring visits

Quality Assurance - Audit Activity
Understanding quality of practice

Quality Assurance - KPIs
Timelines of workload and workflow/Careers Understanding the impact of what we do

Phase 2 Outcomes Achieved

Ofsted Recommendation

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

- Ofsted found that there was a “***stronger understanding and commitment across the council to children who need the support of children's social care and that this was reflected in its corporate plans, priorities and the commitment to developing “Child Friendly Herefordshire”*** and the workforce reported feeling well supported by line managers, colleagues and leaders
- **Your Voice Matters: We Say They Do”** group re-launched for children in care and care experienced young people. YP undertook a ‘take over’ of the Corporate Parenting Board April.25.
- **Complaints have reduced from 102 (23/24) down to 75 (24/25) and we have received 126 external compliments (now recorded)**
- **Assessment locality teams received 51 families feedback** to evaluate service standards. Feedback indicates that children and families appreciate the support received and understand the reasons for our involvement. As a service we are benefitting from ongoing encouragement the social workers are receiving in this process.
- **Safeguarding locality received 20 families** feedback - All the families said their plan was right one for them, child in need or child protection
- **Support, Benefits and Opportunities for our Foster Carers** - Herefordshire foster carers receive a wide range of support, benefits, include a financial incentive for successful referrals of new foster carers, council tax relief, and new funded Specialist Foster Carer programme launched

Ofsted Recommendation

The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service

- **Permanency for Social Work Managers** Managers 85% (from 70%) **Social Workers** 42% from 29%
- **Associated reduction in the number of agency staff** 81 (January 2024) down to 41 (February 2025)
- **Allocation stability for children in care** 43% from 31% through 24/25
- **Allocation stability index Child Protection** 36% from 29% through 24/25
- **8 new approved mainstream carers.** 12 in assessment. This growth is in contrast to national trends.
- **478 fostering training courses completed through our new provider in three months** compared to 229 in the prior eight months. Feedback new provider course more accessible
- **Children in FC placements 73.2% above SN**
- **Recommissioned Short Breaks.** Evaluation Panel, including young people, considered 24 applications received (for over £250k worth of funds). 7 successful applications awarded funds.
- **In 2024-25, 121 fostering enquiries** compared to 50 enquiries the year before. We have improved advertising and better use of digital platforms radio, cinema, social media, Google, YouTube, and electronic billboards.
- **9 young people gave feedback regarding placement moves** and to gain their views on their experiences. Themes that emerged were that they shared 6/9 felt safe in their placement, with 3 expressing they felt unsure at the time of the feedback. All shared they felt supported in their moves and that professionals were working well together

Ofsted Recommendation

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

- Timeliness in management of Contacts 97%, Referrals 95% Strategy Discussions 91% – sustained through 24/25
- Ofsted found that “a range of professionals and agencies are involved and make an important contribution to assessments as well as provide the support which families need” and Child protection “strategy meetings are well attended by multi agency partners”.
- We have increased the number of children we see for welfare return interviews after missing episodes from home to 196 from 139 the previous year and missing from Care to 176 from 130. Timeliness in completing these also improved to 80% (home) and 74% (care)
- Repeat referrals have reduced from 23.5% (EoY 23/24) to 22.4% (EoY 24/25)
- Strategy discussion and timeliness has been sustained above 93% year average an improvement on 90% year average in 23/24
- There are stronger working relationships at Pre-Birth Panel which involves timely sharing of information and strengthening support plans for unborn children to care experienced parents
- Repeat Child Protection has reduced in year from 27% down to 21%
- Child Protection Conferences Feedback: 22x parents said they knew what to expect; had received and understood the Social Worker report; spoken to the Chair; felt listened to and were treated with respect. Participants had a good understanding of the Child Protection Plan and how the Plan could end.

Ofsted Recommendation

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

- In year audit evidences improvement in case audit judgements: Good rising to 43% from 27%, Requires Improvement dropping from 65% to 45% and Inadequate dropping from 9% to 6%
- Ofsted found that “*many social workers developed relationships with parents and children in a skilled way*”
- Ofsted found good quality and timeliness in our social work assessments. *Feb 25*
- Timeliness of visits to children subject of Child protection sustained above 95% through 24/25
- Timeliness of ICPC a concern mid year and improved under new management Q3/4.
- Timeliness of RCPC sustained average through year at 94%
- 99.5% children on Child Protection with an up to date plan in place through 24/2

Ofsted Recommendation

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

- Feb 25 Ofsted found: “*Children received into care appropriately to protect from further harm*”
- Timeliness of visits to Children in Care sustained 80%
- Timeliness of Child in Care Reviews at 98.9%
- 100% of children in care with an up to date care plan
- C&YP participated in some way within their Child Looked After Review meeting 100% time.
- Repeat social work Assessments have reduced from 28% to 23% which evidences the quality of support is improving and children and families are receiving the right plan of support upon closure.
- Child Looked After Review meetings, C&YP Feedback 14x children and young people said they knew what to expect; had spoken to the IRO and knew how to contact their IRO. Shared that they were able to share their views; felt respected, listened to and understood their care plan. All respondents shared positive comments about having choice about their review meeting with regard to venue, time, attendees
- Tracking of multi-agency escalations shows that the multi-agency professional differences policy is being followed, and more escalations are being resolved at earlier stages, and within expected timescales.
- Of 99 families asked 44.5 % said professionals worked “very well” together and 37.5% said “fairly well” Only 18% said not well

Ofsted Recommendation

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

- Care Proceedings timeliness is in top quartile - Improved timeliness of Care proceedings in 26 weeks : Herefordshire averages 24 weeks against national average of 36 weeks
- Restorative Practice has reduced our PLO/ Care Proceedings: 21 new cases issued 24/25 compared to 41 the previous year.
- Six young people placed during the year in an unregistered setting through 24/25 – all short term

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

- SEND inspectors found 'children and young people with SEND known to early help services access swift support from education, health and social care teams where appropriate'.
- SEND inspectors described effective and appropriate support for disabled young people who are leaving care. 'Appropriate support to develop their independence skills for when they reach adulthood, and they are involved in preparing their pathway plan. and 'Disabled children and young people who receive a service from social care are well supported into adulthood.'
- For kinship carers, most placement losses were due to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being granted. While this reduces the number of fostering households, it represents a positive outcome for our children and young people, offering greater permanency within their family networks.
- Our overall number of children placed in a family-based setting is 73% above national average 71%.
- The percentage of dental checks has remained stable at 56% on review we have gathered child/young person feedback and understand many as having a reluctance or phobia which prevents them accessing checks. Support to address this is being provided via a joined-up approach by carers, looked nurses and social workers.

Ofsted Recommendation

Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.

- Staff told Ofsted they benefitted from regular and reflective supervision that provides helpful reflection and direction
- KPI timeliness of supervision up from 52% - 82% across the Safeguarding services
- Service Manager Leadership and Management programme delivered to all our Service Managers
- The partnership has established a new multi-agency dataset and auditing schedule with findings regularly reviewed with a focus on action and impact// local and national lens.
- The National Panel has agreed with the recommendations from all Herefordshire Rapid Reviews completed in 2024/25.

Ofsted Recommendation

Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.

- Feb 25 Ofsted found: A wider breadth of quality assurance activity gives leaders a stronger line of sight on the quality of practice. This includes a broader range of targeted audits on areas of service or cohorts of children who are more vulnerable. Feedback from children and parents is much more embedded into audits, which provides more meaningful insight into the experience and impact of practice for those who receive support from children's services. Audits identify issues to improve the service as well as more practice improvement
- 109 families have given us direct feedback since we introduced service user feedback Sept 24. Overall this is consistently positive feedback with 87% reporting able to share their views, 80% understanding why they had a social worker and 80% feeling the intervention met all or most of their needs and 80% reporting professionals worked well or "really well" together
- We have revised our audit processes and tools: Grade descriptors, moderation and case audit forms.
- We have developed our overarching QA Framework and embedded into practice an overarching programme and our Service Area QA programmes.
- We can see that we have increased the number of cases overall graded as in Good Q1- Q3 and for the first time this year seen Outstanding practice in Q4.
- Review of our complaint management completed with now all stage 1 complaints being investigated by a QA officer who is independent of the case and each investigation starts with a mtg with the complainant.
- In Early Help we collect regular SU feedback to understand impact; In 2024/25 174 evaluations from parents and 234 evaluations from children. The average increase in score comparing the beginning and end scores was 2.3.

Quality Assurance – Hearing the Voice of the Children Young People and Parent / Carers

Understanding the impact of what we do

Quality Assurance – Audit Activity <i>Understanding quality of practice</i>	Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care / care leavers, so this is prioritised and embedded across the council and partnerships	Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes	The timely and robust identification of a multi-agency response to children & young people at risk of harm, including, but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care	The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs, including timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life-story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation	The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having the service
	Our corporate responsibility to children will be evident in our council priorities, policies and development plans Children and Families will tell us that they believe Herefordshire is a good place to live	Our care proceedings will be completed in 26 weeks or we will know why not achieved We will visit children in care in timescales to meet need and see how they live. They will tell us they feel happy and safe with carers We will have timely and robust managerial oversight and clear best interest decision making for children subject to DoLS and those in unregistered placements. Children subject to SGO will have good support to promote long term permanence	Our contacts, referrals, strategy and assessments will be completed in timescales with full partnership contributions Visits and assessments to 16/17yr will be completed within timelines and they have made informed decisions about their welfare & accommodation	Our children in care will have up-to-date Health Assessments and Dental Checks They will tell us they have support with their emotional well being Audit will show we have good quality life story work and letters in place CYP will tell us they know why they are in care and that they have contributed and understand their plans	Our workforce data will show an improving picture on permanency and stability in agency staff Children will have fewer changes in social workers More children will be in family care and their placements stable Children will tell us they feel happy and safe in care and that they know how to raise their worries and make complaints
	Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision Audits will show an improving picture on the quality and timeliness of managerial decisions Staff will tell us they benefit from regular and reflective supervision Practice standards will be in place to guide best practice within and across the services	Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements ensuring children are protected receive care if required Repeat Social Work Assessments, children on requiring repeat CP plans will be lower than national Our protection and care planning meetings and reviews will show timeliness and good multi-agency attendance Partnership concerns will be addressed through a timely escalation process to resolution	The partnership will ensure early sharing of information on unborns in need/at risk and assessments and appropriate plans will be in place by birth. Those in care proceedings will have timely progression to permanency, including foster to adopt placements CYP will have told us why they went missing and we will address this in their plans	The quality of practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need Visits & Assessments will be timely and our QA audits will show an increasing positive trend on the quality of visits and plans and evidence appropriate step up and down as plans progress CYP and parents will tell us they can access their workers, have contributed to and understand the plans in place for them or their children	Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements. QA activity embedded across all services areas A range of opportunities for Children & Young People and Parents to tell us how they have experienced and benefited from our services will be in place Learning from both shared and developed practices identified
	Progress is built on partnerships: partnership activities will be delivered through: Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership: Herefordshire Council Corporate Parenting Board: SEND Partnership				

Quality Assurance – KPIs
Timeliness of workload and workflow

Quality Assurance Measure of Success

The above plan on a page is designed as a visual to remind us of what Ofsted recommendations were and how we will know when we have achieved against them.

Our Quality Assurance Framework is made up of three complementary components:

- **Case Audit** – including regular case audits and targeted audits giving us evidence on the quality of work and compliance with our practice standards
- **Feedback from children and families** to understand how they are receiving our services and the impact they make
- **Analysis of key performance indicators** that enable us to monitor workload, workflow, demand and timeliness

Our Quality Assurance Programme enables us to

- **know ourselves well**, our strengths and our areas for improvement so we can take timely action to improve
- **understand the experience and impact our services make to the children and families** so we can be sure we are “**making a difference**”
- understand how it feels to be part of the children workforce, so we are an **employer of choice** giving our children and young people stability and consistency in good quality help, support and protection

There is an overarching Quality Assurance programme for Children’s Social Care and each service area has a focused QA programme that reports quarterly into the senior managers forum.

In addition, there are Children’s Service Performance Indicators reporting to Chief Executive and the council plan and a set of Key Performance Indicators to the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA), so we have some comparator data within regional, national and statistical neighbours.

For our Phase 3 plan we have further developed the range of QA measures for each Ofsted recommendation incorporating a range of; Key Performance Indicators, Audit activity and Service User feedback

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
Recommendation 1 Corporate responsibility for the help and protection of children and those in care/care leavers, so this is embedded across the council and partnerships	Permanency in the overall Children's Services workforce Learning and Development data on multi agency training	Corporate Delivery plan Corporate Parent Strategy and delivery plan Participation plan 25/26 Co-production documents and CYP engagement activities	Workforce will tell us they feel valued as employees of Herefordshire Children and Young People will tell us they know where to access safe spaces and support within Herefordshire The partnership will tell us they understand and apply a Restorative Practice approach
Recommendation 2 Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes monitoring and tracking of children in the Public Law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those place in unregistered children's homes	Care Proceedings completed with 26 weeks Timeliness of statutory visits to children in care Children u16yrs in unregistered settings Timeliness of children achieving permanency in 12-	LFJB sub group review of cases not meeting 26 weeks DCS/SD decision making on placements in Unregistered and timely visit to children Managerial Oversight on care proceedings cases meet practice standards Legal proceedings training for social work	Children subject to DOLS will tell us they feel safe and supported in their care placements Children in unregistered setting will tell us they feel safe and supported in their care placement

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
	24 months after reception into care	staff Public and Private proceedings	
Recommendation 3 The timely and robust identification of a multiagency response to children and young people at risk of harm, including but not limited to, the response to pre-birth children and babies, 16 and 17 year olds who present as homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children who go missing from home and care	Contacts managed in 24hrs Referral managed in 24hrs Strategy Discussion in 24hrs Social Work Assessment in 45 days with proportionate mix Timeliness in care proceedings for babies under 3months Take up of Welfare Return interview for children missing from Home and Care Timeliness of welfare Return interviews for CYP missing	Contact / Referral and Strategy decisions will reflect consistency in HCSP thresholds Assessment of CYP presenting as homeless will be timely and evidence the offer of care and choice decision making of the young person Missing from Home and Care analysis reports will identify the push / pull factors affecting our Children and Young People Looked After Reviews will address "missing" push /pull factors identified	Welfare Return Interviews will capture the voice of the child/young person informing our understanding of county risks and informing individual care planning Children and young people will tell us they have contributed their views to their assessments and understand the purpose of their Child Protection plans 16/17yrs olds presenting as homeless will tell us they have contributed to their assessment, understand the offer of care and are happy with their accommodation
Recommendation 4 The availability of support and services to meet children and young people's needs including	Children in Care Health Checks meet timeliness standards	Children in care will have life letters and life story work in place Children leaving care and transitioning to	Care experienced children and young people will tell us their carers support them with their Emotional Wellbeing and they have a Trusted Adult to talk to.

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
timely access to therapeutic interventions, access to dentistry, life story work, emotional and mental health support, help for young people to support transitions into independence and sufficient suitable accommodation	Children in Care Dental Checks meet timeliness standards The majority of Care Leavers will be in "suitable accommodation"	independent accommodation will have the financial assistance to set up home and an up to date Pathway Plan Training for staff on life story work completed	Care experienced children and young people living in supported and independent living will tell us they feel safe and supported.
Recommendation 5 The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, sufficient number of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having the service.	Permanency of qualified Social Workers in children's workforce Permanency of Children's wider Social Care workforce Stability of SW for children open to Children's Social Care for 12 months Children in care placed in a family based placement - in line or better than Eng/SN averages Children subject to Child Protection and Care plans will have	Foster Care assessment and Approvals will be completed in a timely way meeting best practice standards Our Foster Carers will have an allocated fostering worker and monthly supervision from approval Our Foster carers will have timely annual reviews Fostering ADM decision making will be timely to ensure no child is left in an unregistered foster care arrangement	Children and Young people will tell us they feel safe and supported in their care placements Foster Carer annual reviews will seek feedback from children previously placed within the year

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
	an allocated qualified social worker at all times		
Recommendation 6 Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision	Monthly supervision for case holding social workers and social care staff	Case file audits will evidence that the majority of cases have timely and good quality managerial oversight Specific Training programme for first and second line managers will have been delivered	Our workforce surveys will tell us staff feel: • Valued at work • Understand the Vision and Improvement plans • Have manageable case loads • Good access to front line managerial advise and support • Regular and reflective supervision • Good working environments • Understand and apply Restorative Practice
Recommendation 7 Timely and effective multi-agency arrangements ensuring children are protected and receive care if required	Repeat Social Work assessment within 12 months Repeat Child Protection Plans Repeat reception into care following a care exit. Timeliness of Child Protection Case	Audit and data on use and outcome of the Safeguarding partnership escalation process Audit on children in care decision making will evidence all new receptions into care considered by a Service Director	Families will tell us the right agencies were invited to contribute to their child protection assessment and plans At the end of a Child Protection intervention families will tell us their strengths were recognised through our Restorative Practice approach

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
	Conferences ICPC/RCPC Participation in Child Protection case conferences – including attendance for those over 12years	Children and Young People will tell us they contributed their views and feelings to the children protection S47 assessments	
Recommendation 8 The quality and practice including assessments, plans, planning and purposeful visits that are responsive to risk and need	Improvement Board Phase 3 dashboard Regional RIIA dashboard National CHAT dashboard	Our monthly Case file auditing programme will evidence links to our Learning and Development work and impact on improvement in practice in the following seven domains. Our Learning and Development programmes will reach the workforce providing regular learning and development	Through our case file audit we seek feedback from parents/carers and young people so we will understand their experience Staff will tell us they have up to date accessible practice standards to guide them in front line practice
Recommendation 9 Performance and Quality Assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements		Through our Quality Assurance Programs we will undertake a regular and targeted programme of audit including service user feedback and KPI's data to inform the programme	During our case file audits and at the end of Assessments and Interventions we will seek feedback from the services users on how they have experienced our intervention – From Family Help to Care .

Ofsted Recommendations	Key Performance Indicators	Audit/ Documentation	Service User Feedback
		We will develop our council wide co-production and child participation programme	

Delivery - Actions and Measures of Progress and Success

Ofsted Recommendation 1

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

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale – progress reporting quarterly
Develop Child Friendly Herefordshire – learning from the Leeds initiative develop Herefordshire council plan priorities: People/Place/Growth/Transformation for children and young people.	Council Leader & Lead Member for Children's / CEO / DCS - Leeds Partner	25/26
Confirm appropriate funding to support children services improvement against a four year plan	Herefordshire Council	25 - 27
Complete the apprenticeship programme for Care Leavers within Herefordshire Council – starting within children's services and extending apprenticeships opportunities in all areas and major contracts. Target 12 apprenticeship	Tori Lynch Children's Directorate Leadership Team	25/26
Capture the voices of Children and Young people across Herefordshire and use this to inform partnership priorities and strategic development.	Safeguarding Partnership Scrutiny Officer	
Implement and report on the council wide Voice of the Child Engagement and Participation programme	Rosie Thomas-Easton	25/26
Secure new funding and appoint a Service Manager with responsibility for Children and Young People participation to lead and develop our participation strategy	DCS / HoS QA	April/May 25
Complete the Herefordshire Children and Young People Plan	CYPSP – Cllr Powell	25/26
Support local providers including foster carers to meet the cultural, religious and social needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) • Review placement of UASC by type and location	Stacie Edwards Zoe Richards	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale – progress reporting quarterly
• Develop and implement a communication and engagement plan with UASC in relation to commissioned services. • Develop options to improve the offer of Herefordshire support and inclusivity to UASC locally	Participation Manager	
Develop child and parent friendly information on complaints, child protection and care proceeding processes accessible via media links	Suzie Simms	Q2/3

Ofsted Recommendation 2

The sufficiency and stability of staff across the workforce, including sufficient numbers of Foster Carers, so children receive a timely response to having their needs identified and met across the service

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Undertake a voice of the Children's workforce survey – measure progress against 2024/25 council workforce and SW Health check feedback	Dylan Harrison (PSW)	June/July 25
Launch a new Welcome and Retention offer for qualified social workers	Rachel Gillott	April 25
Further develop performance reporting from Mosaic / PBi to provide both self-service and provided performance reports to individual and managers to enable effective workload management	Claire Peet	2025/56 Reporting qrtly
Engage with the regional bid for Regional Fostering Hub	Tori Lynch	Q1/2
Implement a targeted recruitment programme for foster carers and promotion of the specialist foster carer scheme	Natasha Newton	25/26
Ensure sufficiency of local care placements • Mobilise 4 new Residential Children Home (RCH) beds • Undertake market engagement events locally/regionally with Independent Fostering Agencies to promote working relationships and their acceptance of our referrals	Tori Lynch Lisa Dufield Zoe Richards	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Develop a continuous programme for Restorative Practice multi agency briefings and regular workshop for CSC to bring for case reflection lead by RP champions	Dylan Harrison and Leeds	25/26
Complete refurbishment of locality work spaces	Anthony Oliver (E&E)	Q1/2
Complete SGO support and finance offer review and business case to increase number of SGO carers and children receiving permanency via this route	Natasha Newton	Q1
Undertake annual programme of Fostering recruitment and pay review	Natasha Newton / Finance	Q2
Complete and Launch Fostering Hand book and Website	Natasha Newton	Q1
Develop a training, development and career pathway programme for Family Support workers	Katy Straughan	Q1/3

Ofsted Recommendation 3

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

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Develop a joint Herefordshire / Worcestershire levels of need bring consistency of language to our shared partners	HSCP / WSCP	Sept 25
Develop an annual programme for Private Fostering awareness raising across the partnership and compliance audit programme	Natasha Newton	June 25
Complete a further audit to review impact on practice and compliance against 16/17yrs homelessness standards	Christine Wellington	Q1 25/26
Produce a quarterly report on "Push/Pull" factors, patterns, and trends identified from Welfare Return Interviews for children and young people missing from home and care.	Christine Wellington / Ruby Card	Q1/2/3/4
Develop the Missing from Home and Care Welfare Return Interviews reporting mechanisms and information / data sharing within services to ensure SW and IRO /CP chairs understand	Christine Wellington	Q1

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
and can take into account within a child plan and ensure as a partnership we understand the push pull factors		
Undertake an annual community launch of Get Safe across Herefordshire to raise awareness amongst children, young people and the community of signs of concern and support services available	Holly Powell CSE Partnership	Annual – 2025
Provide a consultation, support and training package to the voluntary and community sector to enable them to build skills and confidence in managing presenting needs and risks. • Develop training materials and programmes tailored to the needs of the VCSE sector. • Deliver the training across VSCE and universal Early Help workforce. • Evaluate the impact of the training and identify next steps for ongoing support.	Dawn Knight Talk Community	Q1/2/3
Embed partnership working within the Joint Commissioning HCC and ICB to jointly address health and care needs of children and young people with an initial focus on children and young people with Special Educational Needs • Review and refresh S75 arrangements for joint funding across Health, Education and Social Care • Review arrangements for commissioned services across therapy and promote commissioned solutions for enhanced capacity, quality and value where possible	Rachel Gillott Tori Lynch Jade Brooks ICB Zoe Richards	25/26

Ofsted Recommendation 4

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

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Deliver against the Leeds sector led improvement programme – embedding relational practice	Dylan Harrison / Leeds	2025/26
Implement the service specific QA programme on a quarterly basis – incorporating Audit, KPI review and Service User feedback to inform each quarterly programme	Service Managers	25/26
Develop a range of opportunities to hear the voice of the child in our work using Surveys, Audit, feedback/learning through compliments and complaints and create a regular Voice of the Child report as a measure of success against the improvement plan	Service Manager QA and Participation	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Implement Families First Programme – Family Help	Lead Dawn Knight	25/26 Q1/2/3
Merge the strengths of targeted early help and section 17 (Child in Need) work, to enable families to experience one assessment and to have flexibility on who leads the work to support relationship building.	Steering Group Ruby Card - MASH	
Utilize multi-disciplinary teams, delivering support out of local community-based settings so children and families can more easily access support	Dylan Harrison PSW Andrea Busk - CP	
Establish the Family Help Lead Practitioner role across the partnership giving families some choice as to who leads their plan of intervention	Nicola Stroud - Talk C Angela Wilson HSCP	
Through our Think Family approach create new Family Help plans to identify what and who is impacting on good parenting – who can help and who needs help?	Leanne Lowe WMP Wye Valley HC Trust Lyndsey McCurdy PH	
Develop our work with the wider family network of children to maximise the support and safety planning wider family can offer as we support parents to care for their own children.		

Ofsted Recommendation 5

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

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Auditing decision making on contact and referrals to identify patterns and trends that lead to repeat referral/assessment/plans for children and sharing targeted learning to effect change	Ruby Card	Q1
Develop further the Multi Agency audit activity across the partnership and within children social care to ensure we have maximum opportunity to understand the multi agency delivery ultimately and impact and to coordinate and share learning as a partnership	Ruth Coles Christine Wellington	April – Dec 25

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Develop reporting mechanism on Multi Agency contributions to child protection processes and children Strategy discussions through to Child Protection conferences	Claire Peet Amanda Sherrard	Q2/3
Monitor use of the new multi-agency Professional Differences Escalation processes for effective and timely outcomes for children	Safeguarding Partnership	25/26
Implement the Families First Programme with development and piloting of the specialist social worker role to ensure our experienced social workers are providing consistent advice and direction to our child protection interventions	Dawn Knight Dylan Harrison	Q4
Implement the quality of practice sector lead improvement plan with Leeds Relational Practice in Practice' Develop: • local champions group as facilitators and trainers • Joint workshop programme in summer • Incorporating formulation approach in key decision-making points, e.g. core groups, care planning meetings and professionals meetings	Dylan Harrison John Maynard	Q1-3

Ofsted Recommendation 6

Monitoring and tracking to prevent drift and delay. This includes the monitoring and tracking of children in the Public Law Outline (PLO), permanence planning, children subject to deprivation of liberty orders and those placed in unregistered children's homes.

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
Identify and audit cases where PLO timeliness is at risk or not achieved to identify actions to retrieve timeliness or identify patterns and trends for learning and practice improvement. Reporting to LFJB and CSC Exec	LFJB sub Tess Burgess / Rachel Gillott	Quarterly
Confirm the Special Guardianship offer to promote permanency through SGO in a timely way with an offer that provides a strong practical, emotional and financial support in permanency	Natasha Newton	Q1/2

Actions we will take	Person/Forums	Timescale
A quarterly court data report using the Legal Tracker will provide us with outcome and timeliness data for PLO and Care proceedings. This will enable us to identify patterns and trends of concern in practice and or teams Develop ways to engage great young persons aged 12+ in participation in children protection conferences to ensure they understand the purpose of them and feel safer as a result	Tess Burgess / Rachel Gillott Andrea Busk IRO and CP chairs	Q1/2/3/4
Deliver training programme to staff on Private and Public Law proceedings including statement and giving evidence over three modules – Public Law, Court Skills and Private Law	Tess Burgess / Cahomie Richards	Q1/2/3 – by Dec 25

Ofsted Recommendation 7

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

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
Deliver and evaluate the 25/26 Community Safety funded projects that deliver Early Help and Support to identify those for future long term funding - informing 25/26 commissioning	Rachel Gillott Zoe Richardson Anthony Price PCC	25/26
Provide training in Life Story work and be skilled to deliver this for children in care.	Dorine Rai Katy Straughan	Q1/2
Audit the quality of "Later life letters" to inform practice development Undertake a practice workshop and develop tools for practice	Dorine Rai	Q1 Q2
We will confirm data on our children registered with dental practice and Dental checks and raise findings with ICB and in service to ensure all children have these in place and up to date.	Tori Lynch CSC Jade Brooks ICB	
Engage in the regional Care Leavers forums to ensure HCC Care Leavers have best practice in suitable accommodation, access to education/employment, finances and wellbeing support to independence	Tori Lynch & Corporate Parenting Board	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
Undertake an emotional well being / trusted adult survey with care experienced children and young people	Stacie Edwards Dorine Rai	Q1
Further develop short break sufficiency with increased capacity and choice • Develop a communication strategy with Parent Carer Voice (PCV) and the Children with Disability (CWD) team to ensure wider take up of the existing short break offer • Develop options to deliver a commissioned framework for daytime community based short breaks in the County • Undertake feasibility scoping of potential to deliver in County residential overnight short breaks alongside Strategic Housing • Review the targeted allowance scheme for short breaks to inform future planning	Jess Davies Zoe Richards	

Ofsted Recommendation 8

Management oversight and grip across the service to include clear structures and service pathways, and regular and effective supervision.

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
Complete development of our practice standards for managers on recording decisions in the interests of children with rationale and reference to threshold and outcomes so these decisions are auditable, provide guidance to staff and accountability for practice decisions.	Tori Lynch Christine Wellington	24/25
Complete an evaluation of the new Complaints policy, process and culture to ensure we are getting the best learning from complaints, have processes that provide assurance on quality and timeliness and in which our service users have confidence and assurance	Tilly Page Suzie Simms	Q2
Provide a consultation, support and training package to the voluntary and community sector to enable them to build skills and confidence in managing presenting needs and risks. • Develop training materials and programmes tailored to the needs of the VCSE sector. • Deliver the training across VSCE and universal Early Help workforce.	Dawn Knight Emily Lowe Talk Community Children's	Q1/2/3

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescales
Evaluate the impact of the training and identify next steps for ongoing support.		
Deliver a bespoke Management and Leadership programme to Team Managers supported by our own Service Managers	Dylan Harrison / Leeds SLIP	Q1/Q2
Increase student social workers in training “grow our own” - Attend regional skills show and recruitment events - Create links and a programme of sessions with Sixth Form and FE colleges to promote career options with children social care, early years and SEND - Collaborate with local University providers to promote Herefordshire student and AYSE offer	Learning & Development	25/26
Access the regional training, development and career pathway programme for Personal Advisors	Stacie Edwards Regional Network	Q2/3

Ofsted Recommendation 9

Performance and quality assurance arrangements to support and test service improvements.

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescale
Continue the review and development of the use of Mosaic and Power Bi to ensure permanence data is both self-service and pushed out to managers to enable them to have timely performance information on which to manage workflow and timeliness of practice – providing a headline for deep dive	Clare Peet Rachel Gillott / Tori Lynch	Summer 24
Embed the implementation of the quality assurance programme in each service area ensuring there is a mix of KPI, Audit and Children and Young People Service user feedback informing our understanding of quality, timeliness and impact of work	Susie Simms And Service Managers	Q1/2/3/4
Practice standards will be in place to promote consistency and good practice across the services	Dylan Harrison Rachel Gillott Tori Lynch	25/26

Actions we will take	Person/Forums responsible	Timescale
Undertake Regional Peer Review Challenge	Rachel Gillott / Tori Lynch	Q3

Signed

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**Paul Walker - Herefordshire Council Chief Executive
(Interim)**

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Simon Trickett – Chief Executive ICB

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Tina Russell – Director of Children’s Services

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**Rachel Jones – Deputy Chief Constable –
West Mercia Constabulary**



Title of report: Children and Young People's Quality Assurance Briefing

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 22nd July 2025

Report by: Complaints Manager Tilly Page and QA Service Manager Suzie Simms

Classification

Open

This report is open but an appendix is exempt by virtue of the paragraph(s) of the Access to Information Procedure Rules set out in the constitution pursuant to Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose

To brief the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the development, management and learning arising from complaints and compliments.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) That the committee notes the content of the reports.
- b) For the committee to make any recommendations as to how compliments and complaints management within the council and children's services could be enhanced.

Alternative options

1. The committee may choose the option not to review the report, however this is not recommended as the report is provided to inform the committee of current quality assurance activity in supporting improvement work within the Children's Services directorate.

Key Considerations

2. The attached report at Appendix A from the councils complaints department provides an overview of the management data and learning and data of complaints received in quarter one of 25/26 with relative comparisons to the prior year where appropriate.
3. The attached report at Appendix 2 from the Children Services Quality Assurance manager provides an overview of the service development in the management and analysis of learning from compliments and complaints.
4. the combined reports provide assurance that the two services are working closely to ensure there is a proactive and joint approach to the management and learning of compliments and complaints within children's services

Community impact

5. A robust and reliable process for the management of complaints for Children's Services will support the improvement in the practice of the department. Ensuring children, young people and their families feel able to raise concerns and be listened to with resolution to their concerns at the earliest stage is an important part of our engagement and restorative practice approach.

Environmental Impact

6. Work detailed in this report will have minimal environmental impact.

Equality duty

7. 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.

8. 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. As this is a decision on back office functions, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty.
9. The Children's Services and Council Complaints services pay full regard to the council's responsibilities as set out in the public sector equality duty and ensures all persons are able to use the complaints process being provided with the necessary support as required to address any individual needs identified.

Resource implications

10. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

Legal implications

11. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Risk management

12. There are no specific risks arising from this report.

Consultees

Not applicable

Appendices

- Appendix A : Children's Complaints and Compliments Statutory Quarterly Report, Q1
- Appendix B: Children's Services report on development, management and learning from complaints

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	Danial Webb	Date 14/07/2025
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Communications	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Approved by	Tina Russell	Date 11/07/2025



APPENDIX B

Complaints and Compliments in Practice

Complaints process:

We have changed the way we manage our stage 1 complaints. QA Practitioners have been undertaking stage 1 complaint investigations since this was trialled in November 2024, and the process was revised in collaboration with the Complaints Department in March 2025. The new process is provided as appendix 1 to this paper.

This ensures that the complaint is allocated to an experienced social worker who is not directly involved with the case. This provides a certain level of independency from the team in which the complaint originates. Complainants have responded to the involvement of QA Practitioners positively and engaged well in the process.

Staff who are subject to a complaint are now provided with guidance on the process, the expectations of them within the complaints process and welfare information.

If children/young people raise a complaint they are offered an advocate, a face to face meeting with the QA Practitioner and we ensure that any written communication is age appropriate and understandable. They are regularly updated and given the opportunity to have the QA Practitioner meet with them to share the outcome letter, to ensure that they have fully understood.

All final response letters to complainants are quality assured by the Service Manager for QA or Service Director before being sent out to ensure a thorough investigation has been undertaken, robust rationale is included, outcomes are appropriate and proportionate, and recommendations are achievable and realistic.

Any actions or recommendations arising from the stage 1 outcome are tracked by the QA Practitioner to ensure that they are completed within an agreed timeframe. Examples may include recommendations for a reflective supervision to take place to discuss the learning from the complaint between the Team Manager and Allocated Social Worker and/or rectifying an action; so for example, ensuring meeting minutes are provided.

Complaint outcomes

The 24/25 complaints annual report provides an overview of complaint outcomes and learning.

As of 25/26 the service will be producing a Quarterly analysis report which will also be used to understand complaints within our service.

Summary of Learning from Q1 compliments and complaints

- A Quarterly Learning from Complaints and Compliments bulletin is circulated to all staff in children's services. This celebrates our external compliments and raises awareness of our key learning areas for improvement and development from complaints. The quarter 2 report is included as appendix 2 to this paper.
- This report highlights good practice and any learning from our complaints to be addressed through training and development.

- Our current programme of workshops mirror the key learning themes from complaints.
- Workshops are held by the QA Practitioners and are bite size sessions to ensure staff have availability and capacity to attend. Workshops currently on offer:

-Voice of the Child and Purposeful Visits
 -Engaging Fathers and Men
 -Threshold Training
 -SMART Planning and Safety Plans
 -Chronology, Genogram and Case Summaries
 -Confirmatory Bias
 -Professional Curiosity

- Feedback from staff around the workshops has been positive and we report on this separately.
- Bi-monthly meetings are held with the QA Team and the Academy to share learning from complaints and audits to ensure that our training package is robust and we are working collaboratively to develop our Training Needs Analysis.
- We ensure that any actions or recommendations arising from complaints are completed, the Complaints Department track and alert the service to actions outstanding to ensure that we are closing the loop on actions/recommendations.

Financial payments:

- The complaints process is not the route to financial compensation. A claim for this applies only when families believe that the LA has failed to protect a child or convened a child's human rights. However, in some instances, we will make a nominal payment through the complaints process where we think there is a specific financial way to address something to achieve a satisfactory complaint outcome. An example of this is a young requesting that she would like to receive a financial payment for her negative experience, which included not being supported to have her 18th birthday celebration in the way that she wanted to. This was due to the challenge the service faced in providing her with appropriate accommodation to start her young adult life. We acknowledged that we didn't work well with her to agree a positive plan of support as she left our care.

Next Steps:

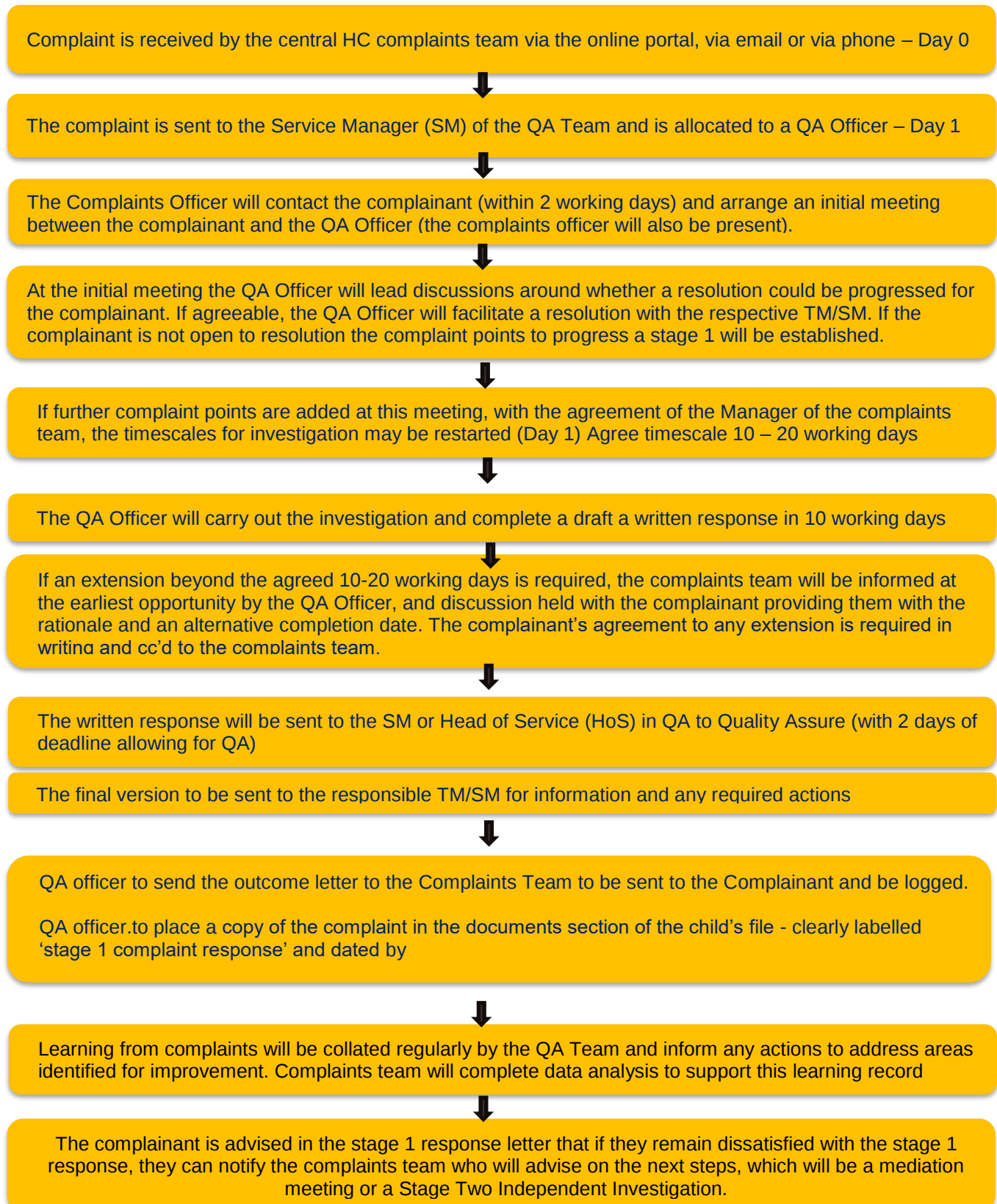
-We will be ensuring that we closely monitor our compliments through the development of categories information, to better understand what parents and young people are finding valuable and positive about the way that we work with them.

-The service user feedback we receive from the monthly case file audits includes compliments and complaints. Complaints we address through the audit process however compliments received also need to be recognised for balance, and these need to be recorded, shared with individual staff and celebrated.

- The complaints service record overall complaint outcomes however complaints can contain several elements which have different outcomes. We will be working with the complaints team to ensure that we are able to track the category of each complaint point so we can better understand the quality of our service.
- The QA Service will continue to produce Quarterly Complaints and Compliments Bulletins for staff to keep momentum of learning and improvement.
- Workshops and training will continue to be informed by complaint outcomes and tailored accordingly.

Appendix 1

Children's Services: Complaints Flow Chart (March 2025)



Appendix 2



Learning from Complaints: Quarterly Bulletin

This bulletin is for **quarter 1 (1st April 2025 – 30th June 2025)** and provides a summary of good practice and learning identified from our complaint investigations at stage 1.

😊 Good Practice Identified:

- Assessments are accurate and interpretation of information is well documented through analysis.
- Phone calls and emails have been recorded and easily located on case files.
- We have seen an appropriate and proportionate response to concerns around domestic abuse.
- There is good evidence of information sharing and joined up working with our partner agencies.
- Work undertaken with partners/fathers is undertaken within realistic timeframes, demonstrating inclusiveness.
- The correct procedures and thresholds have been correctly identified, when responding to referrals (MASH)
- The level of professionalism of our staff can be clearly seen within the complaints process.
- There is evidence of analysis and reflection around children's lived experience, demonstrating impact.

Learning from Complaints:

- Ensuring that we consistently demonstrate professional curiosity.
- To ensure that there is a clear timeframe for children in, or leaving care, to have their belongings provided to them.
- Ensuring that in our assessments/reports we distinguish between facts and allegations.
- Making sure we record how questions from a parent have been responded to
- Consistently engaging fathers/partners throughout our involvement.
- To increase the involvement of multi-agency partners in discussions around housing and sharing information about risks in the local community.
- Ensuring that the language we use is clear and understandable for children and families.
- Making sure that we routinely triangulate information to be clear about its authenticity.
- Ensuring that we are timely in completing our assessments.
- To make sure that we are translating documents when an interpreter is required so that the young person has a written record to refer to that they understand.

- Quality assuring our assessments and reports to avoid factual inaccuracies and typing/grammar errors.
- Making sure managerial oversight is recorded on the case file in a timely way.

Compliments

Our compliments evidence our good practice. We have received 31 external compliments in Q1. Examples of these are:

“I would just like to thank you for the lovely CLA meeting letter for Martha. Its really well written up in a way that Martha can understand whilst still being factual”.
(compliment for Bonnie Tasker; IRO)

“Louise is the best social worker so far because “she listens” and “doesn’t criticise me”.
(Compliment for Louise Welsby from a young person)

“I look forward to a closure of all proceedings and just being able to enjoy family time with my children as brilliant as children services in Hereford have been I have thoroughly enjoyed working with all staff and have felt supported at all times so I just wanted to say thank you again you have been brilliant” (Compliment received from a parent)

“Amazing; always available when I needed to speak with her; professional but approachable; included our wishes and feelings in the assessment; was able to build a positive relationship with me and the child quickly; always did what she said she would do; was always reliable with appointments and visits & made a positive difference to our family.” (Compliment for Claire Hargest; Social Worker)

Resources and Training:

We have a number of workshops which are useful for staff, which address the learning themes identified, and we would encourage practitioners to access these for their own learning and development (CPD) and to ensure that we are continually improving our practice.

15/7/2025 10-12	Safety & SMART Planning	• Understanding what makes a good outcome focussed, child centred SMART plan and developing that plan for families. • Contingency planning • What is a safety plan • Formulating a safety plan
29/7/2025 10-12	Confirmatory Bias	• Understanding the impact of fixed thinking and confirmatory bias in practice, how to recognise and prevent this.
5/8/2025 10-12	Voice of the Child & Purposeful Visits	• As above
7/8/2025 10-12	Chronology, G and CC	• To confirm practice expectations about content and use of chronologies, Genograms and Case Summaries • Learning from audits – what good looks like

26/8/2025 10-12	Threshold training	• Understanding Thresholds • Applying the Levels of Need using case scenarios • Complex cases/neglect and threshold
28/8/2025 10-12	Professional Curiosity	• To strengthen our understanding of what professional curiosity is. • To explore the barriers and enablers to professional curiosity in practice.

Please book through the CYPQA@herefordshire.gov.uk.

‘The Restorative Practice Approach’ is being implemented across our service and will also support practice. Make sure you have completed the training available and consider how you are embedding this approach in practice. Training can be booked on here: [Herefordshire Safeguarding Partnership - Learning Management System](#)

“The relationship between the social worker and the family is the most powerful tool for change. Never underestimate the empowering effect of human connection. All you need is that one person, who understands you completely, believes in you and makes you feel loved for what you are, to enable you to thrive”



