

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at The Council Chamber - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 1 October 2018 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor CA Gandy (Chairman)
Councillor FM Norman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: J Hardwick, JF Johnson, MT McEvelly and A Seldon

In attendance: Chris Baird, Director Children and Families (DCF), John Coleman, Head of Democratic Services, Liz Elgar, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support (ADS&FS), Matthew Evans, Democratic Services Officer, Lisa Fraser Assistant Director Education Development Skills, Sally Halls, Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board, Chris Jones, Strategic Business Intelligence Manager and DCI Jon Roberts, West Mercia Police.

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Burbidge, Councillor Butler, Councillor Chappell and Mr James.

21. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Hardwick acted as a substitute for Councillor Chappell.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on 17 September are approved as a correct record.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 9 - 10)

A copy of the public question and written answer is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 1.

25. REFERRALS TO THE MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB

The committee received a report from the Director Children and Families concerning referral levels to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The ADS&FS introduced the report and advised that it outlined when a referral should be made and the thresholds in place to require intervention. The outcomes of the Ofsted inspection were also raised which found that too many children were being referred to the Council. The report

showed the high level of referrals from the Police and the high proportion that were judged to require no further action. The ADS&FS explained that she would be meeting with DCI Jonathan Roberts to discuss the current situation and measures to address the high referral rate.

The Chairperson welcomed DCI Roberts to the meeting who was in attendance to address queries concerning referrals to the MASH originating from West Mercia Police.

The committee raised those points below in the discussion that followed:

- The committee queried the mobile phone application in use to assist officers to make a judgement over safeguarding concerns. *DCI Roberts explained that the application was a tool with general advice that was not specific to Herefordshire and safeguarding concerns were referred through the Harm Assessment Unit, a member of which was co-located in the MASH. DCI Roberts stated that the Police have a duty to refer every child considered to be at risk. It was recognised that the higher level of safeguarding risk was referred to the MASH and it was necessary to understand what processes were in place to report lower levels of risk. A meeting would be taking place with the ADS&FS shortly to discuss these issues.*
- It was queried whether some officers were more risk averse than others and if this had an impact on high referral rates. The committee considered whether greater levels of training and guidance could help to address such risk aversion? *DCI Roberts explained that the front line officers did not refer directly to the MASH. There was a statutory requirement to address concerns about the welfare of children. The DCF explained that a visit was arranged to the harm assessment unit at the Police in order to examine what steps could be taken to address referrals deemed unnecessary. The issue was longstanding. Signposting to early help services would help to reduce the level of referrals. Other courses of action existed to signpost concerns and a link to the WISH website could be circulated. WISH had a range of information to support agencies to signpost to early help and preventative services.*
- Sally Halls, Chair of the Herefordshire Children Safeguarding Board (HSCB), explained that there was a statutory responsibility for anyone who had a concern about the welfare of a child to make a referral if that child was likely to suffer significant harm. There had been long running discussions with the Police force who had been slow to address the issue of responding differently to children who did not meet the threshold of significant concern. There was a requirement for an early help service for children and families to ensure they received effective help in a more timely manner to help reduce the need for statutory involvement.
- The Committee stated that it was useful to understand a holistic view of the issues concerning referrals and safeguarding and it was important that the early help strategy and its implementation was reviewed.
- The Committee questioned whether there was a consistent model across the Police Force to raise safeguarding concerns and make referrals. *DCI Roberts confirmed that there are five different models across West Mercia and Warwickshire due to the number of local authorities in the region. There is no dedicated Child Protection Team in Herefordshire, accredited Child Protection staff do work within the CID Team, however there was a programme for upskilling more staff across the Force as only a small number had been trained in child protection. All members of staff in the harm assessment unit had received appropriate training.*
- It was commented that the figures relating to referrals from the Police led to a perception that referrals were being made as a box-ticking exercise. There was concern that such an approach would detract from or delay those cases in urgent need of attention being investigated. *DCI Roberts explained that the harm assessment unit did attempt to identify those cases that required referral using*

the levels of need to differentiate these from the lower level concerns, he recognised it was important in future that there was engagement between the Force and the early help work being progressed.

- The Committee commented on the importance of a youth justice review and the need for scrutiny to look at issues holistically, including safeguarding. It was suggested that the committee received an update report in 6 months time when progress had been possible with the involvement of the Police in the early help strategy. It was important for the committee to have a broad view of all those elements involved in the youth crime and contributory factors to ensure that those early help services were correctly targeted. If the committee were fully aware of the current pressures and challenges then recommendations for budgets to be adjusted now could be made rather than waiting until there was a critical need to act in 5-10 years time.
- The committee commented that the scrutiny committees were considering crime and disorder documents and reports in silos and the issues needed to be looked across the county through one combined scrutiny review. *The statutory scrutiny officer confirmed that such a review would be investigated.*

RESOLVED - That the committee notes the report and requests that an update on the level of referrals and engagement between the Police and early help service is provided to a meeting of the committee in March 2019.

26. OUTCOME OF OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS) AND ACTION PLAN

The committee received a report from the Cabinet Member young people and children's wellbeing which set out the outcomes of the recent Ofsted inspection and the action plan produced by the Council in response. The Director Children and Families and the Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Family Support introduced the report and explained that the inspection had been conducted under the new inspection framework which was focused on experience and outcomes. The inspectors had reviewed internal information such as the self-assessment and had conducted interviews with social workers.

The DCF outlined the findings of the inspection. The overall judgement was requiring improvement, but the judgement for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families was inadequate. There were a number of positive reflections on the services in Herefordshire and no child seen was at risk of significant harm and children at risk of immediate harm receive prompt and responsive intervention, ensuring they are safeguarded. The council's self-assessment had already identified areas that were reflected in Ofsted's report including capacity and caseloads of social workers. Recruitment to teams and performance management systems were also highlighted as an area of concern raised through the inspection. The action plan proposed a range of actions to address the findings of the inspection and some were already taking place. The effectiveness of the plan would be monitored and there was a need to refresh the plan every three months. It was recognised that there was a need to ensure a sustained cultural change to ensure consistent progress. The report and action plan would be presented to Cabinet for approval and a further visit by Ofsted was expected.

The committee raised the issues below in the discussion that followed:

- The committee referred to an article which contained details of the inspection framework and those elements which ensured a good outcome from an inspection.
- The money that had been dedicated by Cabinet to support the recruitment of social workers would help to support elements of the action plan. Would this funding be maintained? *The DCF confirmed that funding for capacity and staffing*

needed to be sustained to ensure improvement. The Council was in a relatively healthy financial position and a base budgeting exercise was underway to set out what was required to continue the staffing in next year's budget. There remained challenges around the recruitment of permanent and agency staff. There had been some success but recruitment was an ongoing issue and methods for the recruitment and retention of social workers were being investigated.

- The committee acknowledged that the report had some areas of concern but also contained positive elements.
- The committee requested information regarding how the concerns regarding the continuity of social workers for children would be addressed. *The ADS&FS confirmed that difficulties with recruitment of social workers had an impact upon the continuity of social workers but it was important that the service sought to ensure that the experience of newly qualified social workers who worked in Herefordshire was positive to ensure they remained with the local authority. Apprenticeship schemes were also being investigated but the problem of recruitment was a nationwide issue with 500 vacancies believed to exist across the West Midlands. It was important to offer social workers development opportunities and career development pathways to ensure that social work at the council was an attractive option and to encourage newly qualified social workers to remain with the authority. It was acknowledged that continuity was fundamental to social work to enable relationships to be developed between a family and the social worker and allow for proactive work to be undertaken.*
- It was queried whether the opportunity to be a social worker in Herefordshire had been promoted to the local university which offered relevant courses. *The ADS&FS explained that the principal social worker spoke at events at Worcester University to promote opportunities at the Council. It had been found that students tended to stay in those areas where they had undertaken placements or from which they originated. The Council could offer placements and support/facilities to students but they tended to stay closer to those establishments where they were studying.*
- The committee contemplated those reasons why recruitment of social workers was such a problem. The reasons were felt to be complex and multi-faceted including the manner in which the media reported children abuse scandals. It was remarked that the issue with recruitment had existed for a number of years and the reasons should now be understood. *The ADS&FS confirmed that problems concerning recruitment affected many parts of the country. It was acknowledged that social work was a challenging job and the coverage in the media did not help recruitment efforts but it was important that people were provided with a good experience when training and after qualifying to ensure that they returned to work for the council and remained in the long term.*
- The committee queried the outcome from the inspection concerning leadership and interaction between senior management and social workers. It was recognised that the work undertaken by social workers was very professional but problems with leadership had been highlighted. More information regarding how this would be addressed was requested particularly as it was felt that this would have an impact on the retention of social workers. *The ADS&FS confirmed that performance management information for managers would be refined and improved. Better performance management would be introduced and new performance management systems introduced which would seek to support and challenge people without being punitive. The new performance management system was designed to promote change and encourage conversations about improving the quality of practice. The DCF confirmed that the funding agreed by cabinet enabled more team managers to be employed to provide improved supervision and through the budget setting process it was intended that the additional capacity would become permanent. There remained some interim positions in the service but most were now permanent. It was important that*

social workers: had a manageable case load; felt supported; and received development and training opportunities. A new model of practice for social work, 'Signs of Safety' was being introduced with support from Doncaster where the model already existed.

- The committee queried the KPIs and action plans that were in place to realise the objectives of the action plan and requested detail of when evidence of progress against the action plan could be returned to committee. It was requested that a quarterly update report should be submitted to the committee with evidence of progress. *The ADS&FS explained that each area of the service had its own action plan which were reviewed with heads of service on a monthly basis to ensure improvement had been achieved. Quarterly reports could be provided to the committee showing progress against the action plan.*
- The role of the cabinet member children and families and her interaction with children services and director was questioned. *The DCF confirmed that there were regular briefing sessions with the cabinet member. There was a strong link between the cabinet member, the director and children services.*
- The committee raised the issue of the quality of life story work which had been a perennial area of concern. It was queried what was preventing improvement in this area. *It was explained that a different approach to life story work would be undertaken in future and work would now begin at the earliest opportunity following contact between social worker and family to improve the quality and completeness of life stories.*

RESOLVED – That the committee:

- **endorses the action plan;**
- **allocates a quarterly item to its work programme to assess progress against the action plan; and**
- **welcomes those positive elements emerging from the inspection including: safeguarding arrangements; looked after children and early help; care leavers; children with disabilities; children at risk of sexual exploitation or wider exploitation; the Council's approach to elective home education; and children who go missing.**

There was a brief adjournment at 3.20 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 3.25 p.m.

27. HEREFORDSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (HSCB) ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

The committee received a report from the Director of Children and Families which set out the Herefordshire Children Safeguarding Board (HSCB) annual report 2017/18 and the latest version of the business plan of the Board for 2017-19. The reports were introduced by Sally Halls, Chair of the HSCB who explained that the Board oversaw the safeguarding arrangements of agencies across Herefordshire. There was significant pressure across the system and the impact of organisational resources on safeguarding arrangements was acknowledged: there had been a high turnover of staff at the CCG; the Wye Valley Trust was assessed as requiring improvement and West Mercia Police's approach to serious organised crime was also found by HMIP to be requiring improvement. Attendance and engagement by some agencies in Herefordshire with the Safeguarding Children Board was reported as not being good enough, which in turn affected speed of progress with improving responses to Herefordshire children and families who may need safeguarding or early help services. Some improvement had been achieved and some children and families were receiving a good service but it was not assured that all children received a good service or that responses were sufficiently quick and effective in circumstances where there might be the risk of neglect, domestic abuse and substance misuse.

The HSCB Chair expressed concern regarding the consistency of system-level leadership and the lack of common cause across the agencies. The current situation undermined the operational strength of the system and a culture shift was required to ensure improvement was achieved and children were diverted from the child protection system by receiving effective help earlier.

The HSCB Chair outlined new legislation that would see the local authority sharing responsibility with health (the CCG) and police partners for establishing arrangements for children's safeguarding in Herefordshire. This need not consist of a Safeguarding Children Board, as previously required. It was important that the three 'safeguarding partners' began to think now how this would be structured in Herefordshire. Fresh thinking around governance and accountability was necessary to tackle the problems of domestic abuse, exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. New thinking about how to share responsibility with counterparts in the police and the NHS was also required.

The committee raised those comments below in the discussion that followed:

- The committee asked how a common cause could be enabled between the agencies. *The HSCB Chair explained that it required strong leadership by the main safeguarding agencies to have difficult conversations and to engage with voluntary and community-level groups.*
- The committee queried why the Board had struggled to engage some agencies. *The HSCB Chair explained that area-wide bodies struggled to engage with the Board itself because of reductions in their capacity which have taken place over a number of years. The Board did expect agencies to respond when challenged. Despite the new legislation this may still be a challenge. However, in relation to the delivery of effective and timely services to families, this is generally good across the partnership.*
- The committee asked what work had been attempted to engage with the agencies. *The HSCB Chair confirmed that she challenged agencies when necessary. The Board received assurance reports from agencies such as the Youth Justice Service and made specific demands as required. Regular meetings with the office of the police and crime commissioner, the chief executive of the CCG and the director for children services were also held.*
- The committee questioned whether the board was happy with the current safeguarding arrangements in Herefordshire and whether it was felt that the board was fulfilling its statutory purpose. *The HSCB Chair confirmed that there was a great deal of good work but insufficient assurance that all children got the best service or that safeguarding arrangements were working well enough at all times. The Board does fulfil its statutory requirements but there was always scope for improvement.*
- The new safeguarding arrangements that would be introduced in the 2019 were raised. *The DCF explained that there was a requirement from September 2019 to introduce more effective arrangements.*
- The early help service was raised. *The HSCB Chair explained that in past years, a government grant had enabled an expansion of early help services by the Council which had unfortunately ended with the withdrawal of funding. However, a system-wide approach to early help had not been developed at the time and this was a lost opportunity to embed a common sense of responsibility for early help across the system. This remains a focus for the Children and Young People Partnership. The DCF explained that the development of the early help service at the Council was now a key priority and consistency across all parties with safeguarding responsibilities was important.*
- The Committee was concerned about the assessment of safeguarding arrangements and monitoring as outlined by the Chair of the HSCB. It was felt that the committee should look in greater depth at the proposed new arrangements in 2019. Following the implementation of the new arrangements it

was felt that the committee should review the participation and commitment of all agencies. *The DCF confirmed that a report into possible new arrangements had been commissioned and a briefing note on the relevant element of the legislation would be provided.*

RESOLVED – that:

- **The HSCB annual report 2017/18 is noted and the committee recognises the concerns raised by the Chair of the Board;**
- **The committee receives details of proposed safeguarding monitoring arrangements in Herefordshire under new legislative provisions; and**
- **Following the implementation of new safeguarding monitoring arrangements in Herefordshire from 2019 the committee reviews the involvement and commitment of all agencies.**

28. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The committee received and noted its work programme for 2018/19. The committee agreed to rearrange the meeting on 18 February 2019 to 4 March 2019 to allow for the outcomes of the two task and finish groups currently in operation to be reported prior to the commencement of purdah.

RESOLVED – that the committee agree the rearrangement of the meeting date on 18 February 2019 to 4 March 2019.

29. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the committee would be held on Monday 12 November, at 10.15 a.m. in Committee Room 1.

The meeting ended at 4.10 pm

Chairman

Supplement – schedule of questions received for meeting of children and young people scrutiny committee – 1 October 2018

Agenda item no. 5 - Question from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Shore, Hereford	<p>Children are not routinely spoken to alone by social workers as part of their own assessments, and so subsequent plans are not informed by a child’s view of their lived experience.” Para 9, p4, the Ofsted Report.</p> <p>This must mean that assessments do not routinely include the child's voice. When this is the case, there is a risk that assessments will result in actions and plans which do not meet the child's needs. This seems to be a serious failure to ensure that the best interests of the child are central to assessments.</p> <p>As part of its scrutiny of the action plan, developed in response to the Ofsted inspection, will the committee scrutinise what steps are in place to rectify this situation and to ensure that children are spoken to alone as a matter of course in every assessment?</p>	Chairman of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Response:
 The children and families directorate acknowledge Ofsted’s findings as correct, and are determined to ensure children’s voices are heard in every assessment where this is practically possible. Since July 2018, a comprehensive development plan has been established in the assessment service to drive up the quality of assessment work, and crucial to this is the auditing of work to establish children have been seen and seen alone. This work will continue until at least the end of October, with a real focus on improving quality of practice. Scrutiny Committee have sight of the action plan that has been submitted to Ofsted and will be reviewing progress against this on a regular basis.

