

Appendix 1 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Steel, Hereford	There have been three high profile failures by Children's Services in the last two years - the Section 20 cases, the twins adoption scandal, and the repeated failure to safeguard child victims of sexual abuse from their abusers in schools - and Ofsted continues to have significant concerns over the leadership and management of the Children's Directorate. How is the committee going to improve its own practices and processes to ensure that its scrutiny of the Children's Directorate can be more effective and useful?	Chairperson of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
<p>Response:</p> <p>The committee remains open to influence on ways in which it can continue to improve and strengthen its role to scrutinise the social care and safeguarding of all of the children in the council's care and within the county. In relation to the specific cases outlined in this question; the Children and Young People scrutiny committee has taken direct action in response to the Section 20 cases, the court judgements relating to two adoption cases and undertaken a public 'spotlight' review into all forms of peer on peer abuse, including peer on peer sexual abuse.</p> <p>In regard to the Section 20 cases a task and finish group conducted an evidence led investigation looking at section 20 orders, the processes in place to ensure their appropriate use and to conduct analysis on case samples. From their findings, the task and finish group made 8 recommendations (weblink), 1 recommendation to the children and young people scrutiny committee and 7 recommendations to the executive. All of the recommendations were accepted and actions were agreed for all of them. The executive's response can be found here (weblink).</p> <p>In the court judgements on the adoption cases a task and finish group conducted an evidence led investigation based around the rulings set out in the court judgments and the Ofsted inspection and resulting action plan. The group met on three occasions receiving expert input from officers who were intrinsically involved with the adoption. As a result of those discussions the task and finish group made 14 recommendations (weblink) in regard to the high court judgement concerning children and families. The executive responded to each of those recommendations, accepting and agreeing to action all of them. The executive's response can be found here (weblink).</p> <p>For the spotlight review concerning peer on peer abuse in schools (weblink), the committee agreed to undertake this review due to reports of increasing levels of peer on peer abuse and public concern at schools in Herefordshire. From their findings, the spotlight review made 12 recommendations, 9 were directed to the executive to respond to, 2 were directed to the scrutiny committee to respond to and 1 related to drafting a letter to the Department for Education to outline the comments of witnesses at the spotlight review concerning existing peer on peer abuse guidance for schools. The executive response is being prepared and is expected to be published in April.</p> <p>On a point of correction. The last Ofsted focused visit clearly set out areas for improvement that the service is addressing, whilst also noting some areas of strength including quality of supervision of the children with disabilities. No priority areas for action were set out in the letter following the Ofsted focused visit. There are strong areas of performance from our children and families directorate and leadership, including the work with schools and education settings to achieve a range of performance that is the best in the West Midlands and statistical neighbours, such as key stage 2 primary results. Our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities approach in Herefordshire was rated second in the country last year by IMPOWER in terms of value for money and outcomes.</p>			
Supplementary question:			

Ms Steel's supplementary question was disallowed as it risked the identification of an individual (4.5.102 (g) Herefordshire Council constitution).

PQ 2	Ms Liddle, Ledbury	It was agreed in late November 2019 that a full review of all cases of peer on peer sexual assault since October 2016 was needed to ensure that all child victims of peer on peer sexual assault had been properly safeguarded and no child was still at risk of harm. How is the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee planning to scrutinise the length of time it has taken to complete this review, the methodology and the outcomes?	Chairperson of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
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Response:

Following [the spotlight review concerning peer on peer abuse in schools](#) (weblink), it was recommended that the executive provides the outcome of the current review (including lessons learned) into cases of peer to peer abuse referred to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to the spotlight review and the children and young people scrutiny committee. It was agreed to review cases from Jan 2017 onwards, this review will be concluded by the end of March. As part of the children and young people's scrutiny work programme a report will be received on the review.

In addition, the spotlight review recommended that the children and young people scrutiny committee agree a further meeting of the spotlight review to consider a greater level of data to provide a more informed understanding of the scale and complexity of peer on peer abuse in Herefordshire; the outcomes of the review will support this objective. Once the review has been concluded and the outcomes are made available, an item will be added to the children and young people scrutiny committee work programme for consideration at a future committee meeting.

Of note is the response received from the Ofsted focussed visit which stated that *'The local authority has worked closely with schools to ensure that all have policies and procedures that both help to identify peer-on-peer abuse concerns and help to limit risks. The local authority has ensured that these issues have been the subject of practice reviews, including through a recent multi-agency spotlight review on peer-on-peer abuse'*.

Supplementary question:

Does the committee think it acceptable that four months will elapse, until the outcomes of the review of peer on peer abuse are available, before children at risk of harm are identified?

Response:

Cabinet member children and families: The review was being conducted in a thorough manner and would take time. A number of staff had been committed to the task and there had been the interruption of the Ofsted inspection in January. There was no reason to consider that children were currently at risk.

Director children and families: The review involved checking 550 records since 2017 that alleged sexual harm and required significant resource and time to complete. A written response to the supplementary question would be provided.

Chairperson children and young people scrutiny committee: The Ofsted inspection in January was satisfied that peer on peer abuse cases were being handled in a correct manner.

