

Directorate/Division: Corporate Centre
Team: Finance, Legal and Democratic Services
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Date: 17 March 2021

The Honorable Mr. Justice Keehan
Family Division
1st Mezzanine,
Queen's Building
The **Royal Courts** of Justice
Strand , London

Dear Mr. Justice Keehan

Independent Review Strategy – Herefordshire Children’s Social Care High Court Proceedings; Herefordshire Council v T (2020)

Herefordshire Council is deeply sorry that it has failed to safeguard and look after the welfare of the children and their family.

In responding to the case involving these children, their parents and their foster carers, the council recognises the need for an urgent and robust review of Herefordshire Children Services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

In the last few weeks we have recently established an assurance framework, so that all special guardianship orders (SGO) decisions will be ultimately signed off by Dr. Andy Gill Assistant Director Quality and Assurance (registered Social Worker). We have also created an independent assurance team who will work to Dr. Gill.

We will be implementing the strategy, as set out in the attached Appendix, that will undertake a fundamental examination of the needs, experience and outcomes of not just looked after children but also our social work practice across the whole of the children social care system and what is needed to make a real difference to safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

For all children who are referred to the children social care system, whether currently in our care or those who need our care in the future, we will expect the review to set out where we are failing and where we don't meet best practice and then set out ambitious, deliverable and sustainable reforms. We will do this by creating an Improvement Board, chaired by an independent Chair and we will also commission an external independent peer review to be provided by either a Local Government Association Peer Review, or a high performing local authority.

This strategy will also carry out a fundamental appraisal of our social work practice from leadership through to practitioner level to ensure they are each supported and enabled and that they are capable in delivering the best outcomes for the children in our care. In addition, it will examine the findings identified, not only in this judgement, but also in previous high court judgements (A & B (care orders and placement orders - failures) [2018] EWFC 72 (30 November 2018) ; BT & GT (Children : twins - adoption) [2018] EWFC 76 (29 November 2018) and Herefordshire Council -v- AB & CD [2018] EWFC

100) and in doing so, also consider whether there is need for improvement/different ways of working in other services that support the children's social care service.

What sets this strategy apart from any previous improvement commitments given by the council, is that a new Chief Executive, Paul Walker, and an independent chair of an improvement board and the chair of the children's safeguarding board, will monitor delivery of the required reforms within defined timescales and together drive and deliver the required performance and outcomes. This strategy is committed to finding the council's failings, and committed to improving outcomes for children and their families.

Yours sincerely

Paul Walker
Incoming Chief Executive
Officer

Claire Ward
Head of Paid Service and
Joint Acting Deputy Chief
Executive

Andrew Lovegrove
Chief Finance Officer and
Joint Acting Deputy Chief
Executive