

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Hereford Town Hall, St Owen Street, Hereford, HR1 2PJ on Tuesday 1 June 2021 at 10.15 am

Present: Councillor Phillip Howells (chairperson)
Councillor Jennie Hewitt (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Elizabeth Foxton, Helen I'Anson

Co-optees: Mr Andy James

In attendance: Councillors Felicity Norman, cabinet member young people's education and attainment and Diana Toynbee, cabinet member children's services, safeguarding and corporate parenting.

Officers: Interim Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Family support, Interim Head of Legal Services, Assistant Director Childrens Safeguarding Quality and Improvement, Interim director of children and families and Assistant Director Education Development and Skills

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Andrews, Councillor Kath Hey, Councillor Toni Fagan and Councillor Mike Jones.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Elizabeth Foxton acted as a substitute for Councillor Kath Hey.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from members of the Council.

7. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The committee received a report on the children's services improvement plan, including the non statutory Improvement Notice received from the Department for Education and establishment of an Improvement Board.

The committee heard from the Interim Director of Children and Families, supported by the Interim Head of Legal Services.

The committee discussed the various element of the improvement process and heard about steps taken to review all currently open cases.

In addition the committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the chairperson of the committee taking a seat on the improvement board.

Committee members highlighted the need for training in relevant areas to support scrutiny activity and the committee's role in the improvement process.

The recommendations below were proposed by Councillor Phillip Howells, seconded by Councillor Helen l'Anson and approved by the committee.

RESOLVED: the committee recommends:

- a) That the improvement notice is noted;
- b) That Jane Ellis, Director of Healthwatch Herefordshire be invited to join the improvement board;
- c) That the chairperson of the children and young people scrutiny committee attend the first meeting of the improvement board and that a decision be taken at a future meeting as to whether they should be a permanent member of the board, considering advice from the improvement advisor;
- d) That additional meetings of the committee be added to the work programme to deal with improvement board matters;
- e) That details be provided to the committee of other authorities who could act as examples of good practice;
- f) That the improvement advisor be invited to attend a future meeting of the committee.

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PERFORMANCE REPORT

The committee received a report about progress in relation to the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Duties, presented by the interim assistant director safeguarding and family support.

Committee members heard that:

- The number of children in care in the county was slightly higher than in statistical neighbours but there could be many different reasons for this;
- Further work was taking place to drill into the data and a more detailed analysis could be brought to a future meeting;
- Placement stability was not very good at present and work was taking place to understand why this was the case;
- Work was also taking place to understand the reasons why children in the county came into care and what resources were in place to tackle the common factors;
- Officers were anticipating an influx of cases following the return to school after covid closures and were in discussion with CAMHS regarding capacity.

The committee encouraged officers to proactively identify challenges and areas for improvement that could be brought to the scrutiny committee. It was suggested that two such areas of work could be a review of corporate parenting, including the role of councillors as corporate parents, and a review of the independent reviewing service.

The committee welcomed the detailed analysis and suggested that the heat map data should be shared with all councillors so that links could be made to corporate parenting.

The recommendations below were proposed by Councillor Jennie Hewitt, seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Foxton and approved by the committee.

RESOLVED: the committee recommends:

- a) That the work programme be updated to include a report on corporate parenting and a report on the independent reviewing service and that these should be included in training.**

The committee adjourned at 11:51 and resumed at 12:03.

Mr Andy James left the meeting during the adjournment.

9. UPDATE ON PEER ON PEER ABUSE RECOMMENDATIONS

The interim director children and families introduced the item and explained that the guidance issued to schools was still in draft and should not have been published. The guidance would be formally signed off through the safeguarding partnership and a final version published once it had been approved. The interim director apologised to the committee and stated her commitment to ensure that the guidance was fit for purpose.

The committee received an update from the assistant director children's safeguarding quality and improvement, supported by the assistant director education development and skills. The committee heard about progress in the following areas:

- Since the report had been published a provider had been identified for a family mediation council but the contractual arrangements were still being worked through;
- An online training module was being drafted for use in staff induction which could be used for temporary staff;
- the wider issue of contextual safeguarding needed to be considered, as peer on peer abuse was not just a schools issue;
- A community forum would be established which would be a forum for consultation with the public and bring peer on peer abuse into the community so it could be managed as a whole.

During the course of the debate and questioning of officers the committee noted the following principal points:

- The reconciliation process needed to deal with truth and reconciliation for those families where failures had occurred;
- The mediation process was open to anyone who was a victim of any abuse;
- An investigation was under way into why the CSO report in 2017 was not shared with councillors;
- The terms of reference for the investigation had been drafted by officers then shared with and approved by the investigator, the commissioning officer was the acting deputy chief executive – chief finance officer;
- As an officer commissioned investigation the terms of reference had not been approved by Cabinet;
- The interim head of legal services would provide a written update on timescales and the terms of reference for the investigation;
- It was important to start with the victims in any process;
- It was important to factor in the Equalities Act and the Human Rights Act and how they applied to the children involved, both victim and perpetrator.

With the chairperson's discretion a member of the public in attendance spoke to highlight their experiences and the need for consultation with affected families to ensure the mediation service would meet their needs. Officers confirmed that the community forum would be a forum for such consultation and that they were happy to have ideas from the committee or members of the public as preparation for the establishment of that forum.

The recommendations below were proposed by Councillor Jennie Hewitt, seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Foxton and unanimously approved by the committee.

RESOLVED: the committee recommends:

- a) An update on the investigation into the historic lack of sharing by the council, including the terms of reference, be shared with the committee by the July meeting;
- b) That consultation take place with families ahead of the signature of the contract for the mediation service;
- c) A quarterly update on peer on peer abuse be shared with the committee, ahead of the July meeting if possible;
- d) A list of consultees and approvals be included in the final guidance to schools;
- e) That the offer from a member of the public to share their understand of the Human Rights Act be reviewed at the next committee meeting.

10. REPORT OF WORK OF PREVENT AND DISRUPT GROUP TO ADDRESS CHILD EXPLOITATION AND THE CURRENT RISK OF EXPLOITATION IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The report was introduced by the assistant director, safeguarding quality and improvement, supported by the head of service safeguarding and review.

Following the presentation, the following key points were highlighted in the debate:

- The proposed safeguarding database would be a tool to map out hot spots and this approach had been successful in other councils, officers offered to provide an update once the database was in operation;
- The use of soft intelligence to lead to gathering hard intelligence and how to appropriately share information about a child that may be at risk;
- The ability of other settings such as youth provision to provide a source of additional information and the lack of such settings at the current time;
- A joint multi-agency conference on child exploitation had been held with colleagues from Worcestershire shortly before the committee meeting at which powerful testimonies had been heard, there had been good feedback and the outcomes of the conference would be shared.

It was queried that no serious case reviews had been published on the safeguarding board website for some time. Some reviews had been paused due to the pandemic but the assistant director undertook to clarify where and when reports were published.

The recommendations below were proposed by Councillor Jennie Hewitt, seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Foxton and unanimously approved by the committee.

RESOLVED: The committee recommends that arrangements for future meetings and sessions of the prevent and disrupt group that committee members could attend should be advised to the committee.

11. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The committee noted the work programme 2021/22 subject to the addition of: a report on corporate parenting and a report on the independent reviewing service.

It was noted that a work programming session would be arranged once the new membership of the committee was confirmed. The chairman suggested that additional meetings of the committee, possibly interspersed between existing calendar dates, should be considered as being likely be required to deal with reports from the improvement board as they arose. It was agreed that the clerk would explore possible dates for consideration at the next meeting.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next currently scheduled meeting was noted as 27 July 2021.

The meeting ended at 1.57 pm

Chairperson

