

Agenda item	Actions and notes	Actions completed / comment									
<p>Questions from Councillors</p>	<p>1. To provide a written response to Cllr Matthews' supplementary question:</p> <p><i>How many members of staff had left the authority in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 financial years and what costs were incurred by the Council. What plans were in place to recruit to existing vacancies and when would all staff be replaced?</i></p>	<p>The number of employees leaving the council in the requested financial years and the costs incurred can be found in the table below.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="936 312 1841 517"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="936 312 1238 376">Financial year</th> <th data-bbox="1238 312 1541 376">Number of leavers</th> <th data-bbox="1541 312 1841 376">Cost to council</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="936 376 1238 440">2019/2020</td> <td data-bbox="1238 376 1541 440">170</td> <td data-bbox="1541 376 1841 440">19,138.27</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="936 440 1238 517">2020/2021</td> <td data-bbox="1238 440 1541 517">134</td> <td data-bbox="1541 440 1841 517">62, 694.07</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Redundancy costs and only costs above contractual entitlement are included.</p> <p>The rate at which staff leave the council has remained relatively stable overall and the council's current staff turnover rate is 12.3 %. This rate compares favourably with the median rate for local government which is 13.5%¹.</p> <p>The council continues to work hard to attract the best candidates to the council and make the council a great place to work so that staff want to stay. This work is targeted when needed and includes retention interviews to identify staff thinking of leaving and exit interviews to understand why people have left.</p> <p>Not all staff who have left will be replaced. When staff leave we take the opportunity to review whether we need to fill the post and if we do, plans are made to recruit as soon as possible. If necessary agency workers are used to fill short term gaps. Although having 100% of vacancies filled would be an ideal situation, this is realistically not achievable for any local authority.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>^[1] Local Government Association Workforce Summary Data published March 2021</p>	Financial year	Number of leavers	Cost to council	2019/2020	170	19,138.27	2020/2021	134	62, 694.07
Financial year	Number of leavers	Cost to council									
2019/2020	170	19,138.27									
2020/2021	134	62, 694.07									
<p>Update on the improvement programme within the children and families directorate following Ofsted focused visit July 2021</p>	<p>2. To talk to Cllr Summers regarding the middle management support that existed between the legal team and front line social workers.</p> <p>3. A written response to Cllr Symonds be provided on progress made with the</p>	<p><i>Response: Darryl to contact Cllr Summers and offer a meeting with relevant officers</i></p> <p><i>Response: We are unable to insist that staff leaving us have an exit interview. It is therefore not a 'requirement'. We do routinely offer informal meetings to staff who are thinking of leaving and feedback</i></p>									

resolution agreed at the April 2021 extraordinary meeting, as below. To include detail of interdepartmental arrangements for exit interviews.

All staff resigning from Herefordshire children's services are required to undertake an exit interview conducted by a children's social care specialist outside Herefordshire Council, to understand the reasons for their resignation. This process to be implemented no later than 1st July 2021 with the outcome of all such exit interviews reported to the Children & Young People Scrutiny committee.

4. A written response to Cllr Kenyon be provided and information in a further update to full Council including detail of the following:

- An overview of the legal department resources in relation to children's social care;
- A breakdown of the numbers of social workers in preference to the use of %;
- An overview of the structure of legal and children's services with details of the resource at each level;
- The caseloads for social workers;
- Initiatives to develop in-house training to 'grow-our-own' social workers.

trends to operational leaders and where possible persuade staff to stay and to be part of our improvement. Senior Managers also offer to meet with colleagues who may be thinking of leaving or have made that decision.

Relatively few staff take up the offer of an exit interview. Where they do, the responses are gathered by Business Intelligence and reports sent to HR who review them and feedback themes and concerns to operational managers.

Response:

- 1) *An Assurance Protocol has been jointly agreed regarding the joint handling of Issues of Concern/Notable Cases in Children Services.*
- 2) *All cases of concern are discussed at a fortnightly Legal Update meeting chaired by the Director of Children Services/Solicitor to the Council attended by lead social workers and lead solicitors for each case, the Joint Heads of Law and the Interim Head of Legal/Solicitor to the Council to provide update on cases, agree instructions for continued case management, manage and monitor court directions and agree way forward on other issues of concern in the Children's Service.*
- 3) *Legal gateway takes place on a weekly basis. The frontline workers seek approval from their team manager to present a case. If permission is granted, the case is given a time-slot in the following weeks' agenda. A legal representative sits on the panel and gives legal advice, including whether threshold is met.*
- 4) *Legal advice is also provided on an adhoc basis using the duty solicitor system (telephone or email) or direct communication to a team member or Head of Law. The duty solicitor inbox is manned every day.*

- 5) *Urgent legal planning meetings take place outside of legal gateway in order to take decisions in respect of the relevant legal course of action*
- 6) *Compliance meetings take place on a weekly basis to ensure court timetables are being followed. These are chaired by Head of Service and a member of the legal team attends these meetings.*
- 7) *Pre-proceedings and care proceedings panel take place which a member of the legal team attends along with member of Children Services.*
- 8) *IPPMs (Initial permanency planning meetings) and RPPMs (review permanency planning meetings) take place to ensure that matters are planned in an appropriate manners. A member of the legal team attends these meetings with member of Children Services/Social Worker.*
- 9) *An out of hours service is provided by Weightmans Solicitors to EDT (Emergency Duty Team)*

Are there sufficient resources and funding within the legal department?

The resource implications in the Childrens Legal Team for supporting the Improvement Plan work are not included in the legal base budget. The current additional resource allocation to support this work has been provided from the additional corporate resource of £5.2m.

Caseloads for our social workers vary considerably. The reported average caseload is currently 15 but this masks a broad variance with some workers having just one or two cases (they are Newly Qualified Social Workers who should have a low caseload which increases gradually during their first year in employment) to others who have caseloads in the late 20s. Managers in the service are working hard to significantly and quickly reduce the number of colleagues who have higher and much less manageable caseloads; making sure that children's cases are where they should be in the service (team type); and to ensure that in the future, the spread of caseloads is much more narrow, with all case holding workers having a manageable workload based on the type of work, and their skills /experience.

With our HR colleagues, and with input from our workforce, we are developing a significantly revised Workforce Strategy which addresses retention and recruitment, career progression, and how we will 'grow our own'. This piece of work is expected to be concluded by the end of this year.

There are 206 posts requiring a social worker degree in Children's Services. Future reports to Council and its committees will provide a breakdown of data regarding social workers as actual numbers in addition to reflecting the proportion of the workforce, for clarity.

5. A written response to Cllr Hey to provide an update on the care concerns helpline.

Cases for Concern- Briefing

Following the Chief Executives statement, inviting members of the public to contact the council via email or web form if they had any concerns about the way they or their family have been treated by Herefordshire Children's Social Care Services, the Independent Assurance Team (IAT) developed a framework and process for collating, reviewing and responding to submissions made via 'Concerns about Care' channels.

Process

- Communications team send through email and web responses to Independent Assurance Team ,via Executive Assistant to Interim DCS
- All concerns are logged on a confidential spreadsheet
- Responses are sent to people submitting concerns, either answering their query, requesting further information or advising of next steps
- Submissions are triaged with the Access to Information Team, and where they appear to meet formal complaints criteria respondents are offered the opportunity to have their concerns dealt with via that process
- Submissions are triaged with Legal Services who will advice if legal proceedings are in progress or recently closed and add comments to the learning review as appropriate
- Where submissions would not meet formal complaints criteria (e.g. one year time limit is passed, complaint has already been dealt with at all stages of the procedure) a learning review is undertaken by a member of IAT and any concerns arising from that review escalated appropriately. As part of the review all available case recording is interrogated and staff, if still in the employ of the council, and those expressing concerns are interviewed.
- Outcomes of learning reviews are sent through to Interim DCS, together with suggested wording for a response to the person raising the concerns. Once authorised, each response is transferred to letter headed format by via Executive Assistant, signed by Interim DCS and sent to respondent.
- Should the respondent not be happy with the outcome, the Interim DCS would offer an appointment to meet with her and further action taken as appropriate.

As to date there have been 63* contacts regarding 45 individuals via the Concerns about Care Channels. 20 of the Contacts were dealt with outside of the Care for Concerns Framework. Learning reviews have been completed on all other cases.

*7 respondents made multiple contacts and 6 children/ young people were the subject of more than one person's contact. Cases span from involvement with Herefordshire Council from one year to 25 years ago.

6. A written response to Cllr Swinglehurst to provide details of any additional funding identified for early help services to assist the improvement programme.

Initially we were receiving daily contacts however in September and October 2021 only 3 concerns were received and of those 2 are being managed through the formal complaints procedure by the Access to Information Team and 1 has been resolved by a discussion between the member of the public and IAT.

A more detailed briefing will be presented to Children’s Scrutiny Committee in November.

Response: Right Help, Right Time is one of the five work streams of our strategic Improvement Plan and includes the development of our prevention and early help activity. The core work programme for this work stream will not commence until April 2022 (Phase 2) although scoping work is already underway. Part of the scoping activity includes consideration of any additional resources required. A bid for a grant from the Department of Education to support this is currently under consideration.

7. A written response to Cllr Phillips to provide details of the vacancy rates in children’s services and whether the situation was improving.

Response:

Number of qualified or front-facing posts in S&FS establishment (FTE)	206
Number of agency workers in qualified or front-facing S&FS posts (FTE)	20 (9.71%)
Number of employees in qualified or front-facing S&FS posts (FTE)	161.6 (78.45%)
Number unfilled qualified or front-facing S&FS posts (FTE)	24.4 (11.84%)

NB, this is based on figures for w/c 12 October, more agency staff are or have joined pending permanent recruitment

UPDATED - More specifically - In August we were informed at an online seminar that there were 24 vacancies out of 84 with 9 agency staff - has that figure increased or decreased ?

Response: As at 19th November, in Safeguarding and Family Support, the vacancy rate was 27.66% and 12.35% of posts were filled by agency workers.

This compares to a vacancy rate of 28.57% quoted by Cllr Phillips and 10.71% of posts being filled by agency workers.

	<p>8. A clear timetable of dates for reports concerning the improvement programme would be completed and circulated to all members.</p> <p>9. There would be consideration of the hosting of children's performance challenge sessions in the evening or a facility to record the sessions and make available to all members.</p> <p>10. A written response to Cllr Stark to explain how social workers would feel that they had a stake in or ownership of the improvement plan would be included in the next update report to Council.</p> <p>11. To provide clarification around paragraph 31 in the report, reproduced below:</p>	<p><i>Response: Below are the current scheduled dates for meetings that will provide an update for members on the improvement programme; further dates will be scheduled with our colleagues in democratic services and will be shared with all members.</i></p> <table data-bbox="981 316 1989 730"> <tr> <td><i>20 October at 6.00 pm</i></td> <td><i>All members' briefing</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>21 October at 2.30 pm</i></td> <td><i>All members' briefing</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>28 October at 2.30pm</i></td> <td><i>Cabinet [endorsement of the strategic improvement plan]</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>5 November at 9.30 am</i></td> <td><i>Children's Performance Challenge</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>8 November</i></td> <td><i>Improvement Board [DfE 6 monthly progress update meeting]</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>11 November at 6.00 pm</i></td> <td><i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>19 November at 2.30 pm</i></td> <td><i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>23 November at 2.30 pm</i></td> <td><i>Children and Young People's Scrutiny meeting</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>13 December</i></td> <td><i>Improvement Board</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>17 January</i></td> <td><i>Improvement Board</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>18 January at 2.30 pm</i></td> <td><i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>19 January at 6.00 pm</i></td> <td><i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>27 January at 6.00pm</i></td> <td><i>Cabinet</i></td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Response: The Service is happy to accommodate both options, recording and sharing sessions is already an option, and we will work with Democratic Services to consider the scheduling of meetings going forward.</i></p> <p><i>Response: A survey of frontline workers is currently being planned and a staff reference group has recently been organised. The Staff Reference Group present reports to the Improvement Board and will be asked to co-ordinate a response for the next update report to Council.</i></p> <p><i>Response: The cohort of frontline managers in our children's service include a number of first-time managers who are relatively inexperienced, as well as some with more experience. Similarly, among our social worker workforce, we have a significant proportion who are either Newly Qualified Social Workers</i></p>	<i>20 October at 6.00 pm</i>	<i>All members' briefing</i>	<i>21 October at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>All members' briefing</i>	<i>28 October at 2.30pm</i>	<i>Cabinet [endorsement of the strategic improvement plan]</i>	<i>5 November at 9.30 am</i>	<i>Children's Performance Challenge</i>	<i>8 November</i>	<i>Improvement Board [DfE 6 monthly progress update meeting]</i>	<i>11 November at 6.00 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>	<i>19 November at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>	<i>23 November at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>Children and Young People's Scrutiny meeting</i>	<i>13 December</i>	<i>Improvement Board</i>	<i>17 January</i>	<i>Improvement Board</i>	<i>18 January at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>	<i>19 January at 6.00 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>	<i>27 January at 6.00pm</i>	<i>Cabinet</i>
<i>20 October at 6.00 pm</i>	<i>All members' briefing</i>																											
<i>21 October at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>All members' briefing</i>																											
<i>28 October at 2.30pm</i>	<i>Cabinet [endorsement of the strategic improvement plan]</i>																											
<i>5 November at 9.30 am</i>	<i>Children's Performance Challenge</i>																											
<i>8 November</i>	<i>Improvement Board [DfE 6 monthly progress update meeting]</i>																											
<i>11 November at 6.00 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>																											
<i>19 November at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>																											
<i>23 November at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>Children and Young People's Scrutiny meeting</i>																											
<i>13 December</i>	<i>Improvement Board</i>																											
<i>17 January</i>	<i>Improvement Board</i>																											
<i>18 January at 2.30 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>																											
<i>19 January at 6.00 pm</i>	<i>PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing</i>																											
<i>27 January at 6.00pm</i>	<i>Cabinet</i>																											

	<p>It is evident from the inspection focus visit, diagnostic and audit work that has been undertaken that the skill base of managers and some social workers is not at a level required to drive forward such a challenging improvement agenda, at the pace needed, to satisfy external scrutiny from the DfE and Ofsted. Although part of the strategy is rightly to develop and support all managers, the concern around current practice issues, cannot wait for this to be fully implemented.</p>	<p><i>(NQSWs) who are in their first year of practice since qualifying (their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)), or who are in only their second year post-qualifying. This means that there is a relative lack of experience, this has a detrimental effect on the speed at which we can bring about service improvement.</i></p> <p><i>The priority in this instance is to support and develop the frontline workers and managers to develop more skills and experience in a supportive environment, so that in turn they are better able to contribute to the broader service improvement. Whilst this activity is undertaken, it has been necessary too to bring in some external support bringing additional capacity and management oversight so that the pace of improvement is also realised.</i></p>
<p>Revision of capital programme budget for priority flood works</p>	<p>12. In response to Cllr Marsh's question, to provide an update on the flood risk strategy to all members.</p> <p>13. In response to Cllr Stark's question to consider a strategic overview of weight restrictions.</p> <p>14. In response to Cllr Watson's question the cabinet member transport and infrastructure would discuss Daycroft Lane with the member for Kerne Bridge.</p>	<p><i>Response:</i></p> <p><i>The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) was adopted by Cabinet in September 2017. It is accompanied by an action plan which was presented to General Scrutiny Committee and updated earlier this year. As part of the 2021/22 annual plan for the public realm services contract with BBLP, we are commencing a review/refresh of the LFRMS.</i></p> <p><i>The Executive Response To The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy Action Plan Review By General Scrutiny Committee can be found at https://hc-modgov.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=8358</i></p> <p><i>Currently being considered</i></p>
<p>Leader's report</p>	<p>15. To provide a written response to Cllr Matthews's question: <i>are businesses</i></p>	<p><i>Response: The list of Covid grants is being updated and will be sent shortly; we are making sure it has the most up-to-date information included.</i></p>

	<p><i>seeking the support offered through the covid recovery plan.</i></p> <p>16. To provide a written response to Cllr Bowes's question to clarify if the Council purchased the Maylords centre below market value.</p> <p>17. To provide a written response to Cllr James's question: <i>have the staff who have left children's services over the previous 6 months or those leaving now been required to sign a confidentiality agreement and what have been the cost implications to the council?</i></p> <p>18. To investigate the use of lists of businesses held by business rates department for use in publicity for the business summits to be held in the market towns.</p> <p>19. To provide a written response to all members with the latest calculation in response to Cllr Hewitt's question: <i>please can we have a separate piece of accounting that takes into account that many of the council's decisions are in response to the climate emergency. See 4:16:00 of the Council webcast.</i></p> <p>20. In relation to the children and families improvement programme, a schedule would be circulated to all members with detail of where information can be accessed, when briefings/performance challenges are scheduled, when scrutiny</p>	<p><i>Response: I can confirm that the price paid for Maylord Shopping Centre was below the valuation price. It may be that confusion has arisen because in the Record of Officer decision published on 26 June 2020 the first line in the anticipated costs associated with the purchase are stated to be £4,250,000 but this figure includes Stamp Duty Land Tax and some other acquisition costs.</i></p> <p><i>Response:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) In the previous 6 months - April 2021 to date, no staff leaving Herefordshire Council Children Services have been required to sign a confidentiality agreement.</i> <i>2) As a result there are no cost implications to the council.</i> <p><i>Response: The lists are available.</i></p> <p><i>Response: Arrangements are being made to include this reporting in the quarterly report.</i></p> <p><i>Response: Below are the current scheduled dates for meetings that will provide an update for members on the improvement programme; further dates will be scheduled with our colleagues in democratic services and will be shared with all members.</i></p> <p><i>20 October at 6.00 pm All members' briefing</i> <i>21 October at 2.30 pm All members' briefing</i></p>
--	--	---

Council

8 October 2021

Action sheet

	<p>meetings were scheduled and where information could be located online.</p>	<p>28 October at 2.30pm improvement plan] 5 November at 9.30 am 8 November progress update meeting] 11 November at 6.00 pm 19 November at 2.30 pm 23 November at 2.30 pm 13 December 17 January 18 January at 2.30 pm 19 January at 6.00 pm 27 January at 6.00pm</p>	<p>Cabinet [endorsement of the strategic Children's Performance Challenge Improvement Board [DfE 6 monthly PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing Children and Young People's Scrutiny meeting Improvement Board Improvement Board PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing PROVISIONAL: all members' briefing Cabinet</p>
--	---	--	---