

Improving Outcomes for Children in Herefordshire

Issue 3 – January 2023

Update from Chair and DfE Improvement Advisor, Gladys Rhodes White OBE



Hello everyone,

The Improvement Board met for this first time this year on Wednesday 11 January, and it was a positive meeting. As always our multi-agency partners and our Children's Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil attended the meeting.

Through everyone's hard work we are beginning to see the early signs of improvement in Herefordshire Children's Services. It feels like we now have a much better infrastructure in place in line with the improvement plan, and although this news is encouraging, we will not rest on our laurels and will be continuing to build on this progress at pace.

The journey to creating a robust quality assurance framework has been extremely tough but we are now confident that we have a good set of performance measures in place. We have a number of critical 'measures that matter' which we will use to benchmark and track our progress, along with the invaluable qualitative evidence we receive. We are beginning to have much more confidence in our data, which brings more clarity to our improvement work and allows us to drill down and look closer at practice. This information will help us to focus on areas where there are issues that need to be addressed. It will also highlight the things that we need to be better at, such as regular visits to families, better capturing children's experiences and completing assessments in a timely way. These are measures that we know impact on our ability to ensure children and young people have better outcomes.

We will continue to push for the completion of agreed audit reports, as the information they provide is important to our improvement journey. Unfortunately we are still receiving some inadequate audits but having more insight enables us to recognise good practice where quality work is being carried out and we can also identify the teams that are working below standard and support them to improve their practice. We will also be looking at partner reports at future board meetings to see the progress of the multi-agency audit work.

I know there are some issues with some partners, including schools, not receiving copies of minutes and actions from critical meetings. We will be doing some work to tighten up on our processes. This will ensure essential information is cascaded promptly with those that require it.

I've also been made aware that the trauma informed training has been well received and there has been a request for the training to be extended across the partnership, so we will look at this for the future.

Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Plan

The revised [Herefordshire Children's Services Improvement Plan](#) was approved by the [council's cabinet on 15 December 2022](#) and was submitted to Ofsted on 20 December 2022.

Progress reports

The first improvement 'progress update' report was presented at the board and the statistics are showing that we are moving in the right direction. The summary report shows that we need to look at the partnership priorities. We have a long way to go to resolve our acute recruitment and retention difficulties, and there are discussions arranged to look at these issues. We are also still receiving a high level of referrals compared to our partner local authorities and too many that do not convert into assessments or interventions.

'Jack's' referral to Herefordshire Children's Services

During the meeting we were delighted to hear from a small number of colleagues who presented a storyboard, which laid out the journey of 'Jack'.* Jack was referred to Herefordshire Children's Services following concerns about his care as a new born and the board heard about the actions that followed. The story was a great example of good practice and agencies working proactively together to provide the best support possible for Mum and baby. On behalf of the board I would like to thank Alison Barraclough and Tanisha Freeman from Herefordshire Council's, Children's Services, Assessment Team 2, and to Amy Tootel, Specialist Nurse Advisor at Wye Valley Trust and Charlotte Yeomans from West Mercia Police, for presenting the storyboard. I know that it's not easy to speak to a group but these colleagues did a fabulous job of bringing Jack's story to life and it was really well received by members of the board. It was great to hear that there's been a huge improvement in multi-agencies working together but we will not stop there and we will continue the progress with our partnership working.

We will be inviting other teams along to our future meetings to showcase some of the excellent work that goes on across the partner agencies, and as a reminder of why it's so important that we continue to improve our practices to protect vulnerable children, young people and their families.

**We have referred to the baby in the story as 'Jack' to protect the identity of mother and child.*

Staff Reference Group

We've opened up the staff reference group so that anyone can now attend and it's working really well. The dates and times of the meetings are being rotated and they are now available as hybrid meetings (face to face and online), making it easier for staff to take part.

Work Locations

Herefordshire children's services staff presence has greatly improved and currently no staff work from solely from home. However, we do need to discuss locality working at future meetings to ensure staff are working effectively and offering the best service possible to children and families across the county.

Next Improvement Board

Following a discussion about the frequency of the meetings they will now change to 6 weekly meetings. This decision has been made to ease the pressure on officers and allow them to have more time to get on with their work.

The next Improvement Board will be on Wednesday 1 March and will take place in the afternoon. The time and venue will be confirmed as soon as possible. This will be a face-to-face meeting with an option to join us virtually for those who can't make the meeting in person. We do encourage attendance as the informal networking that happens before and after the meeting is always valuable.

Thank you for your contribution to keeping children safe and improving their outcomes.