

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held in Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 18 July 2023 at 2.00 pm

Board members present in person, voting:

Councillor Clare Davies
Councillor Toni Fagan (Chair)
Councillor Liz Harvey (Vice Chair)
Councillor Peter Hamblin (For Councillor Rob Williams)
Councillor Robert Highfield
Councillor Jim Kenyon
Councillor Ben Proctor

Note: Board members in attendance remotely, e.g. through video conference facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.

Other present in person:

Simon Cann	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
Nabeel Chaudhry	Interim Senior manager for Improvement	Herefordshire Council
Kevin Crompton	Independent Scrutineer	
Darryl Freeman	Corporate Director - Children & Young People	Herefordshire Council
Victoria Gibbs	Service Director - Early Help, Quality Assurance and Prevention	Herefordshire Council
Rachel Gillott	Service Director Safeguarding and Family Support	Herefordshire Council
Gail Hancock	Service Director Improvement	Herefordshire Council
Bart Popelier	Project Lead	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Ivan Powell	Cabinet Member Children and Young People	Herefordshire Council
Sam Pratley	Co-optee	Diocese of Hereford
Danial Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council

142. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Rob Williams.

143. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Peter Hamblin stood in for Councillor Rob Williams

144. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

145. MINUTES

It was noted that Darryl Freeman (Corporate Director –Children and Young People), had been incorrectly listed in the Councillor section of the attendance records for the meeting of 28 February 2023.

It was noted that a response to a public question in the minutes of the last meeting required rewording and that the amended response would be reissued and included in the minutes of the meeting of 18 July 2023.

Including noted amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

146. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 13 - 18)

Following the public questions item the committee advised that officers and members should strive to address the root questions being asked by the public and where possible (and appropriate) try and assist them in using the correct terminology required to ask clear and pertinent questions.

147. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions received from Councillors.

148. WORK PROGRAMME

The statutory scrutiny officer introduced the work programme and detailed how it had been drafted. It was explained that the corporate director, assorted service directors (within the children and young people directorate), the Cabinet and Cabinet portfolio holder, along with the independent scrutineer had all been involved and invited to provide input towards the work programme.

The statutory scrutiny officer explained that a key objective in drafting the work programme had been to create a document that highlighted priorities within the improvement programme and provided opportunities for the children and young people scrutiny committee to look at these over the coming year. The number of agenda items for each meeting had been kept intentionally low at this stage, to allow for flexibility and fluidity moving forward. At this point the committee was being asked to approve items on the agenda, identify further topics that it would like to look at and highlight where additional support, training and information could be provided, to allow members to approach topics with a good understanding of them.

The Chair suggested that a 'reality checks'-style approach of visiting and engaging with frontline services over the course of the year, would be potentially beneficial in providing committee members with greater understanding and insight as to some of the issues and challenges faced by these services.

The committee discussed the need for a wider focus on schools outside of the schools capital strategy. The committee acknowledged the need for the inclusion of an item that would look at pastoral care, schools' effectiveness, the local authority's relationship with them and the academisation of schools. It would also be helpful to look at diminished maintained sector provision and the gap in school improvement resources. It was suggested that a schools item should examine pupil attainment and progress made during the time a child is at primary and secondary school.

The statutory scrutiny officer explained to the committee that additional agenda items for the work programme could be discussed and shaped in future workshop sessions and

that the work programme was a fluid document, which the committee would be able to review, change and update at each of its meetings.

Resolved: The committee agree the draft work programme, which will be subject to periodical reviews, as the basis of their primary focus for the forthcoming municipal year.

Following discussion during the course of the meeting the committee agreed that the following items should be included on the work programme:

- **Early Help and Prevention**
- **Restorative Practice**
- **Responding to the rising level of unaccompanied asylum seekers in Herefordshire (possible dedicated workshop for this)**
- **Neglect (building on existing items)**
- **Schools: The committee should consider an item that looks at pastoral care, schools' effectiveness, the local authority's relationship with them and the academisation of schools. Also consider diminished maintained sector provision and gap in school improvement resources.**
- **Examining pupil attainment and progress made during the time a child is at primary and secondary school.**
- **Data and dashboard - monitoring source, presentation and impact.**
- **Equality Auditing**
- **When the next annual HSCP annual report is published it would be helpful to invite the police and NHS to discuss their arrangements for evaluating contractor effectiveness in more detail.**
- **A future agenda item relating to the serious abuse case reviews could look at the recommendations that came from them and how/if they were actioned.**
- **A look at the future development of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.**

149. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UPDATE

The corporate director for children and young people and interim service director for improvement introduced the report.

The interim service director provided an overview of the improvement plan progress update that had been presented to the Children's Improvement Board in June 2023.

Detail was provided on the blue, red amber, green (BRAG) scoring system in relation to progress being made regarding the 10 priority improvement areas. The BRAG system was also being used to monitor and track improvement impact, to ensure that tasks being completed as part of the plan were making a positive difference to improve outcomes for children, young people, carers, parents and family members.

It was explained that following the June meeting of the improvement board (and six months after the launch of the plan) a rationalisation exercise had been undertaken which aimed to: streamline and coordinate the improvement infrastructure, improve the accountability of reporting to the improvement board and to increase the pace of improvement.

The interim service director stated that with regards to accountability, the forthcoming July meeting of the improvement board would be the first occasion where senior responsible officers and service leads for each of the work streams would be reporting directly to the board.

A pitfall of 'feeding the beast' was identified, which highlighted the potential risks of focusing too heavily on implementing and achieving elements of the plan, whilst losing focus on the impact of implementing objectives, the 'so what?'. It was pointed out that the rationalisation exercise would ensure that those working on the plan would be able to see more clearly what the work they were engaged in was achieving and how it impacted young people and their families within the county.

The discussion was opened up to the committee for questions.

The committee asked what was being done to tackle the crucial issue of recruitment and retention, especially in relation to social workers and social work managers, within the county.

It was explained by the interim service director that the authority was promoting the point of difference in terms of what it had to offer over other authorities and that this was being achieved by:

- The development of the Spirit of Herefordshire website to promote the benefits of living in the county and working for the local authority.
- Creating competitive remuneration and bonus schemes.
- Introducing apprenticeships and career progression schemes and building on the existing 'grow your own' model to improve learning, development and recruitment at a local level.
- Ensuring caseloads were manageable and creating conditions where social workers and managers could forge trusting and confident relationships with their colleagues and other stakeholders.

The corporate director highlighted the common misconceptions about the quality of work carried out by agency and temporary staff, but pointed out that all the senior leadership roles and most of the heads of service and senior management positions were fully permanent. It was hoped that this stability would aid recruitment in a challenging market and give assurance to: young people, their families and the local community, that the directorate was in a more stable position moving forward.

It was also pointed out that two recent Ofsted monitoring visits had returned positive feedback in relation to improving staff morale.

The committee congratulated those involved in stabilising the top three layers of management within the directorate and were hopeful that having people in permanent posts would make a significant and positive difference.

The committee noted the high levels of expenditure involved in employing temporary staff and emphasised the importance in developing a robust 'grow your own' approach to running training courses locally, as this was a problem that was not going to go away. It was felt that in the long term it was vital, from a cost and quality of service perspective, that there was a readily available pool of locally trained social workers and managers available for recruitment within the county and that engagement with appropriate surrounding higher education establishments was needed to see what could be provided within Herefordshire.

The committee felt that if social workers lived locally, were trained locally and employed locally then there was less likelihood they would qualify as a social worker and then seek employment outside of the county.

The corporate director agreed that tackling recruitment issues was one of the key factors in ensuring the improvement plan was successful and noted that the authority already

had capacity for 12 new qualified social workers each year and had a business case proposal going through to increase that figure to 22-25 for the year ahead.

The committee acknowledged that there was often a need for agency/temporary staff to meet peaks in resourcing demand, but that the mix was still not right and needed to be tackled to reduce overspend within the directorate.

When asked about when identifiable savings from restructuring to a more permanent resourcing model would materialise, the corporate director explained that the Q1 report was still being finalised and that providing identifiable savings would be unlikely in the current financial year.

The corporate director also pointed out that, even after planned restructuring of the workforce, the percentage of temporary staff would stand at around 20%, which was a normal and acceptable figure nationally, even in outstanding authorities.

The committee noted that there was scope for schools and multi-academy trusts to provide a base for social workers, which might provide flexibility in linking social workers more clearly with schools.

The committee asked if the improvement board should be providing the scrutiny committee with a written report identifying what its concerns were, as this could avoid duplication of work between the scrutiny committee and the board.

The committee also noted that the improvement plan had many actions, but that it was difficult to determine what, if any, impact these were having at ground level.

The corporate director explained that regarding linking social workers more closely with schools, conversations about early help hubs and basing social workers in or around schools were taking place and that was something that needed to be exploited more. It was noted that autism hubs were due to commence operation in autumn of 2023.

The corporate director explained that the improvement board was not responsible to the scrutiny committee, but was responsible to the Department for Education. However avoiding overlap and duplication of work was important to ensure that the best value was obtained from the board. The chair of the children and young people scrutiny committee was a member of the improvement board, so this would hopefully prevent any obvious duplication of work.

The corporate director pointed out that the improvement board did more than just review the feedback report, but also challenged a number of partnership agencies on their performance and impact.

The corporate director pointed to examples of positive impacts resulting from actions in the plan. It was explained that significantly fewer children were coming into care as a result of management practice and the number of children on child protection plans had dropped by approximately 100 since last September 2022, which was as a result of improved management and multi-agency responses.

In summer 2022 there had been concerns about multi-agency response to risk, but there were now robust systems and enough capacity in place to ensure that multi-agency responses happen and happen quickly.

Some historical cases remained unresolved, but the directorate and cabinet portfolio holder were working to try to bring those to a conclusion. The work being done with and feedback from Leeds was also proving useful in ensuring actions had successful impact.

The committee enquired about whether information coming out of exit interviews of staff leaving the service could be acted on.

The corporate director stated that the interviews were optional and that much of the feedback centred on travel, infrastructure and the need to be in the office. The authority had put in place robust plans to make it easier for employees from outside of the county to tailor their attendance patterns to suit their work/life balance. Heavy caseloads and supervision issues had been identified as potential problem areas. Some colleagues from minority groups had experienced racism in Herefordshire and this was something the Council, agencies and the community needed to tackle and address.

The committee asked why fewer children were now being taken into care.

The corporate director pointed to improved quality of practice, assessments and management oversight as factors in the reduction. The growing capacity and investment in resources for family group conferences was also a factor and it was noted that further to what was stated in the June report there were now 26 conferences in place.

The corporate director noted that there had been a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers arriving in the county and that this would become an increasingly important issue over the coming months and years, and one that the scrutiny committee would be well advised to add to the work programme and monitor closely.

The committee asked about the availability of support for social workers who were suffering with stress and didn't want to let colleagues know they were struggling, as they felt they would be letting the side down.

The service director for safeguarding and family support explained that personal and professional support was available to all social workers. The employee assistance programme was a private confidential service, which was in place to ensure that staff were supported and had help in identifying and managing common occupational hazards such as burnout, compassion fatigue and trauma. Principle social workers, forums and staff reference groups were also available to help develop conditions to flourish and encourage best practice.

The committee asked what would happen once additional funding being given to the directorate to implement the improvement plan began to drop off.

The corporate director stated that care for children and young people had been and continued to be a key priority for the past and present administrations. It was explained that as practice improved, the number of children in care and high level interventions would go down, which in turn would reduce costs. Making sure public money was being spent wisely and effectively would continue to be paramount through the improvement journey.

The cabinet member for children and young people added that the improvement journey needed to happen at pace.

The committee identified neglect as key area that would need to be focused on and addressed.

The corporate director, independent scrutineer and cabinet member echoed this and agreed that the proper adoption/implementation of the neglect strategy, early help measures and restorative practice would be key to ensuring the success of the improvement plan. The importance of effective multi-agency engagement and coordination would also be of paramount importance in terms of the successful implementation of the plan.

The committee discussed and considered the quality, sources and visualisation of data contained in the reports and suggest the following actions for the directorate to consider:

Actions:

Data Presentation - Where possible the committee and officers should strive for consistency and commonality in the way data is collected, calculated and presented.

Impact Statements from Care Experienced Families – Engage with families who had been involved with the service before and after to obtain feedback as to whether or not the improvement plan is making a positive difference to service.

Data Visualisation – Present data in a way that makes it clear and easy for external and internal users to be able to establish the longitudinal direction of progress and sequential relationships of activities.

Data Visualisation – Employ a simple colour coded traffic light system for KPIs (key performance indicators).

Feedback Sources – Encourage feedback from children as well as parents.

Dashboard and data - Share the monthly dashboard in a similar way to the old performance challenge meetings and provide regular updates on the longitudinal view to keep members up-to-date on performance, with particular focus on impact data and quality auditing.

150. HEREFORDSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (HSCP) ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The independent scrutineer introduced and gave a summary of the report. It was explained that there had been a pressing need to reset the partnership and that this had been recognised and acknowledged by the partners.

It was explained that governance of the partnership had been complicated, especially with an improvement board involved. There had been significant work involving alignment between the boards and synergy between the relevant plans.

The report focused on the lived experience of families, children and young people in Herefordshire.

It was stated that there was a shared and equal responsibility between the council, care board and police constabulary to ensure safeguarding arrangements were in place.

In putting the report together various pictures of Herefordshire had emerged and there were real signs that Herefordshire was trying to change. It was noted that 82% of early health assessments were done by other partners, which was healthy in terms of the strength of partnership working.

The independent scrutineer brought the board's attention to several key areas where things had changed:

- The MASH had definitely improved and this was backed up by new data and assessments from Ofsted.
- There had been a real challenge made to the police regarding the MASH and the police had changed their practice as a result of this.

- There had been a challenge to health, particularly in relation to initial annual health assessments for looked after children

The independent scrutineer concluded that there was more to do in 2023-2024, but that green shoots of change and improvement were in evidence. The committee was invited to ask questions about the 2021-22 report and forthcoming 2022-23.

The committee lamented the closure of 'No Wrong Door' and enquired how the voices of young people in the city centre and rural communities were being captured. The question was asked whether it was possible to get the partnership to look at youth work and request that the partners invest in youth work in Herefordshire.

The independent scrutineer explained that many local authorities including Hereford had reduced/ceased funding for young people's services and that this had come back to haunt them. However, the first thing the partnership needed to focus on getting in place was the relationship between the partners.

The corporate director for children and young people explained that the safeguarding partnership was not a commissioning body in terms of services. Over a period of many years funding for youth services in Herefordshire from the partnership had ceased. It was stated that part of the improvement plan in the long term was to create a child friendly Herefordshire and to achieve this it would be necessary to open the door for conversations with partners about what that meant for young people.

The committee pointed out that there were various youth services, such as Close House, South Wye Police Boxing Club and the Scouts doing some excellent work with young people locally and that if savings were made within the budget it would be good to see finances being redistributed to these types of services.

The committee pointed out that many youth clubs/services were funded and operated by volunteers, but had a weekly or monthly subscription, which meant some families were locked out via costs. It was felt this could potentially be fixed by a local authority subsidy.

The committee also noted that not all children like uniformed and organised activities, and that perhaps youth drop-in centres would be helpful. The city council had done good work in this area and the question was raised as to whether the local authority owned any assets that could be used for such activities in geographically isolated areas and small parishes.

The independent scrutineer acknowledged that assisting with youth services was undoubtedly important and would reap benefits, but these issues needed to be raised when the partnership was in a more mature state and that building the partnership up to maturity from a reset was the current priority.

The committee enquired as to what level of maturity the partnership was at and when would it be mature enough to engage in wider activity such as those being discussed.

The independent scrutineer explained that this was a case of going back to basics and that the partnership had already developed from where it had been in September 2022, by resetting its governance and priorities. However, although the board meetings set good ambitions and reports, not enough was happening in relation to work and progress being made by the sub groups.

The independent scrutineer suggested that it could be a matter of sub groups having too much to do with limited resources. It was therefore necessary to nail down the basics. Reducing the number of priorities, aligning them with the improvement plan and then delivering on them was key to continued growth and success.

The independent scrutineer explained to the committee that a decision had been taken earlier in 2023 to ensure that if Ofsted returned and exclusively looked at whether the

partnership was delivering Working Together 2018 then the partnership would be in a position to demonstrate this was the case. It was anticipated that it would probably take another six or, more likely, twelve months until the partnership had achieved the desired level of maturity.

The committee referenced the deep dive into peer on peer abuse, which highlighted how partners were not communicating with each other. The question was asked as to whether there were too many partners involved and whether or not a process of rationalisation needed to occur to aid in the triangulation of information.

The corporate director pointed out that the safeguarding partnership was a statutory partnership, but the independent scrutineer was there to assess whether it was effective. The director of public health was currently looking at the children and young people partnership and there was a live debate on how partnerships should be structured and how they should fit in with the Integrated Care Board. Potentially there might be opportunities to reduce/streamline the number of boards and meetings officer and councillors were required to attend.

The partnership itself was also looking at the way it worked. An example was cited concerning how MASH progress had, until recently, been being reported to multiple boards, but was now being monitored by one group within the partnership and then disseminated from there.

The committee asked where, other than to scrutiny, did the partnership report go and whether or not it went to Cabinet.

The independent scrutineer stated it was good practice for the report to go to scrutiny, but that there was no requirement for it to go anywhere else, although it could. Working Together 2018 did not specify how the report should be delivered, but did state that the delivery of effective safeguarding arrangements must be demonstrated.

The committee asked if the independent scrutineer felt effective changes had been made.

The independent scrutineer responded that they felt the changes that had been made were positive and that everyone involved was committed to playing their part to improve things. However, there were still some concerns that needed to be discussed in relation to the pace of delivery. It was stated that the next report was due around autumn and mid-September 2023.

The committee suggested that it would like to see more support for small towns, as many services in geographically isolated areas had to be funded by parents.

The corporate director suggested this was a potential issue for discussion as a future agenda item, but pointed out that the safeguarding partnership did not organise or commission services. It was there to measure the effectiveness of the partnerships' response to safeguarding risks.

The committee welcomed the report looking at altering the police process for referrals as this had been an issue for a long time.

The committee expressed befuddlement at the resources section. It was felt the lack of detail about how each of the partners worked and how much each partner brought to the table in terms of resources, made it difficult to determine how and if things were working effectively. The 'No Wrong Door' service was used as an example of how there was no way of seeing what the plan for that service was at the end of its external funding period.

The independent scrutineer explained the focus within the report was on the fact that the partners had a statutory duty to adequately fund the safeguarding arrangements and that

that tended to focus on the business unit support given to make sure they were complying with Working Together 2018. The challenge in this respect was that there was no national funding model to guide on what the appropriate proportion of funding should be for that specific piece of work. It was noted that some of the concerns being raised were more closely related to the children and young people partnership and not the safeguarding board.

The committee voiced concerns about how effective the Clinical Commissioning Group (now the Integrated Care Board) was in using resources, based on the attitude that it said it simply contracted for services.

The independent scrutineer said that they had met with most of the partners and they generally claimed to have arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness of contractors. It was the job of the board to ask how these partners know the contractors are effective.

The committee suggested as an action that when the next annual report was published it would be helpful to invite the police and NHS to discuss their arrangements for evaluating contractor effectiveness in more detail.

The committee stated that with regards to the safeguarding review of peer on peer abuse, it would be useful to hear what issues had been identified by those serious case reviews and how those issues could be fed into the committee's work programme.

The independent scrutineer suggested arranging a meeting outside of the committee to focus on that and look at the recommendations. A future agenda item relating to the serious case reviews could look at the recommendations and how/if they had been actioned.

The committee observed that the actual work of safeguarding is usually conducted by groups of professionals who are often some way away from the individuals who turn up to meetings.

The independent scrutineer explained there was a sub-group structure in place, but partners needed to get people to step up and chair those boards as the work was falling on too few people.

One particular point of concern was the lack of connection between schools and the safeguarding partnerships. The role of schools was crucial, but the service director for education, skills and learning had informed the scrutineer that schools were almost self-regulating on safeguarding; they would conduct a 175 review about the effectiveness of keeping children safe in education, but this was not being connected to the board. This urgently needed to be joined up.

The committee asked when a teacher spotted and reported signs of neglect, whether that would go through the right channels to get actioned.

The corporate director explained that when the proportion of contacts and referrals that came into the MASH and early help services were examined, there was a higher proportion of those that result in a service. Schools were generally getting things right compared to some of the other agencies. The corporate director was confident that schools would refer appropriately in most cases.

The committee asked if there was any data/evidence to support the corporate director's confidence.

The corporate director explained that the board looked at the attrition rates and the proportion of contacts that didn't go anywhere, the safeguarding partnership looked at

that data. It was stated that the MASH conducted weekly quality assurance and looked at contact referrals. Schools were typically not shy if they thought MASH was not providing adequate service. The corporate director wasn't aware of a discreet report that could be shared, but was aware of indicators from a number of sources and that school feedback was solid.

The committee enquired about schools that have low attrition rates in terms of referrals and whether the service looked at the number of referrals that come from particular schools? Was there any kind of pattern linked to areas of significant deprivation? Were referrals higher in such places to reflect that or were they desensitised?

The corporate director explained that the service did filter data by school, EHCP, SEND and children missing from education and that the information was layered. Some schools did generate more referrals than others and the service had dedicated social care/early help officers covering such areas. Some schools had more resources to deliver pastoral care or early help intervention, but it was important to note that the numbers didn't always tell the story.

The committee enquired what it could expect from the neglect strategy and how that would fit in regarding the safeguarding partnership.

The independent scrutineer explained that the current strategy was agreed as an interim strategy, which was well meaning, but had recently been reviewed. Following the review, work was underway in the quality and effectiveness group and the learning and development group to see if the strategy could be improved.

The scrutineer stated that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) did not provide the depth of information required. There was a need for analysis of the data and work on intelligence, which could then be linked back into practice.

The committee asked if there was a plan to work on a system that would pull out and analyse the data from the JSNA.

The corporate director confirmed they were looking at the future development of the JSNA and would engage with the director of public health in relation to this.

The independent scrutineer explained that they had seen the community safety partnership profiles and that they contained more multi-agency data than the safeguarding profiles. It would potentially be necessary to go back to basics and visit certain partners to ask them directly for the data they use and incorporate this into the safeguarding profiles.

The independent scrutineer noted that it felt like there was not an understanding of what a multi-agency data set should like, especially compared with other authorities that used that data well.

The committee asked if work on data was something that the committee could be updated on and alerted to when the time was ripe for looking at partnership data.

The independent scrutineer pointed out that the data going to the improvement board from safeguarding was fairly comprehensive, but still lacked multi-agency figures.

The service director for early help, QA and prevention explained that the data set being produced was creating curiosity about impacts and outcomes. The wider ambition would be to grow that data set and to develop it into a multi-agency data set moving forward.

The independent scrutineer stated that multi-agency auditing needed to be conducted on a regular basis and that Herefordshire Council was currently ill prepared for multi-

agency. There would be a thematic audit of eight cases of children who were subjected to sexual abuse and a deep dive to see how the authority responded, this would be completed by early October 2023. There was a need not just for quantitative, but also qualitative data to get the line of sight of what practice actually meant to lived experience children, families and young people in Herefordshire.

151. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Date of Next Meeting: 26 September 2023 2-5pm

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chairperson