

Questioner:	Ms Hannah Currie
Scrutiny Meeting:	14 November 2023
Question:	
<p>The below are quotes from the Family Rights Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Lifelong Links is an innovative approach developed by Family Rights Group, in which a coordinator works with a child in care to identify people who are important to them, such as relatives, former foster carers or teachers.”• “Multiple evaluations show that this approach can make a significant positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.”• “The Government ... has already committed to making sure that every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place by 2027.” <p>How many young people left the care of Herefordshire Council during 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and how many of them benefited from Lifelong Links?</p>	
Response:	
<p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>Between April 2022 and March 2023, 105 children and young people left our care. We are taking actions to ensure that all young people in our care, and those leaving our care, understand their life story although we recognise we have more to do in respect of this. Life-story work within the Children with Disabilities Team was described by Ofsted in the most recent monitoring visit as being completed “...to a very high standard...” We are sharing this work and methods across our wider service so that all our children and young people understand why they are in our care (or were for those having left care) and to support them to build and maintain strong connections with their birth families</p> <p>Lifelong Links is part of the Family Rights Group and offers a commissioned service to Local Authorities; Herefordshire does not at this time have a contract with Lifelong Links. The Council does not hold details of Herefordshire young people and their family members who contact or self-refer to the Family Rights Group.</p>	

Questioner:	Ms Reid, Hereford
Scrutiny Meeting:	14 November 2023
Question:	
<p>On 31 October 2023, Ofsted wrote to the county's Director of Children's Services about the monitoring visit on 26 and 27 September 2023. The letter included:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Very few special guardianship order (SGO) applications have been made. The potential for special guardianship is not considered for children sufficiently well when this would enable them to achieve a stronger sense of family identity and belonging. As a consequence, some children continue to be looked after subject to a statutory order unnecessarily or for too long.”</p> <p>“A special guardianship order secures a child's long-term home with someone who is not their parent. It lasts until the child turns 18 (FRG).”</p> <p>SGOs were <u>not</u> mentioned the latest Improvement Plan (7/6/2023) that was presented to the Committee (18/7/2023).</p> <p>How and by when will the number special guardianship orders be increased to the highest possible number?</p>	
Response:	
<p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>The Herefordshire's Children's Improvement Plan is a high level document which incorporates a number of underlying programmes and initiatives. Special Guardianship Orders are incorporated in the permanency activities in section 6.5 of our Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Permanency decisions, including Special Guardianship Orders are specific to each child, family and carer and it would not be appropriate to put targets in place in respect of this. We have recently reviewed and relaunched our Permanency Strategy which clearly sets out that the preferred option for permanency for children in our care is for them to return or remain in the care of their parents where this is safe and meets children's needs. The second preference, as set out in the Permanency Strategy is for a child to be cared for by a member of the child's family which might include the use of court orders such as a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.</p> <p>Whilst we recognise that previously more Special Guardianship Orders could have been applied for we believe that our current approach and the recently relaunch of our Permanency Strategy is having an impact. During the last Monitoring Visit, Ofsted have recognised this and noted that an improved approach to permanence is being implemented, which has benefited children who entered care more recently.</p>	