

Title of report: Report of the Children's Services Commissioner in Herefordshire.

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 23 January 2024

Report by: Corporate Director - Children & Young People

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To consider the recently published progress report on Children's Services in Herefordshire, produced by the DfE appointed Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Children and Young People consider the Commissioner's report and indicate how it might want to be updated on progress in the future, and**
- b) **The committee invite the Commissioner to suggest areas for inclusion in the committee work programme.**

Alternative options

1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee could choose not to review information contained in this report; this is not recommended as the Children's Improvement Plan is one of the council's priorities.

Key considerations

2. Children's Services were judged to be inadequate during the Ofsted inspection conducted in July 2022. The inspection report was published on 21 September 2022 on the Ofsted [website](#).
3. Following the Ofsted judgement a [Statutory Direction](#) was issued to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022 in relation to children's services.
4. The Statutory Direction was the mechanism for the appointment of a Commissioner for Children's Services in Herefordshire (Eleanor Brazil) and set out the Terms of Reference to the direction.
5. The Commissioner undertook a review of the Council's capacity and capability to improve services within a reasonable timeframe and her report to the Minister was published on 1 March 2023 on the Department for Education [website](#).
6. The report made five recommendations, one of which was to review progress after six months and that if the level and trajectory of progress that is required is not achieved within that timescale, consideration should be given to whether an alternative delivery model is required
7. The Minister accepted the recommendations and a revised [Statutory Direction](#) was issued.
8. A meeting to review progress was held on 6 November 2023, following which the Commissioner submitted a progress report to the Minister of State (Appendix 1). This has been published on the 13 December 2023 - [Progress report of the children's services commissioner in Herefordshire](#)
9. In her progress report the Commissioner notes a number of key developments in the last 6 months:
 - a. Formal agreement to 18 months programme of support with Leeds
 - b. Commission to listen to Families held and report published
 - c. Change in political administration
 - d. First 3 Monitoring Visits conducted by Ofsted
 - e. Planned support from other Local Authorities negotiated and partly delivered
 - f. Improvements in SEND and quality of support for disabled children
 - g. Progress in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
 - h. Limited progress in other parts of children's social care.
10. Progress and improvement is observed and reported in a number of areas of performance and service delivery. Progress has been made against each of the recommendations for practice improvement made in the original report, published earlier in the year.
11. The report concludes that whilst the pace of change is too slow, there have been positive developments and that there should not be any further consideration of an alternative delivery model as it remains the view of the Commissioner that supporting the council and its partners to deliver quicker and better improvements is the best way forward.

12. Progress will be reviewed again, six months after publication of the Commissioner's report published by the Department of Education. The Commissioner is working with officers and the council's partners to determine the specific areas against which progress will be measured and improvements will be made.
13. The report was presented to Cabinet on [21 December 2023](#).
14. Since publication, the Commissioner has met with the Corporate Director and his Leadership Team and agreed the following as further evidence of progress expected to be seen at the next review:
 - a) Increased parent and children satisfaction and involvement in service developments evidenced by increased proportion of complaints resolved at Stage 1, fewer Stage 2 complaints, feedback from parents and children.
 - b) Fewer children in care, alongside increase in Special Guardianship numbers, timely and appropriate use of Public Law Outline and Family Group conferences
 - c) Improved quality of support for children and families, evidenced by reduction in numbers of children experiencing high numbers of social workers, implementation of CAMHS pathway for children in care, reduction in Child Protection numbers
 - d) Locality arrangements developed and implemented with increased evidence of local early help multi-agency working linked to locally responsive social care
 - e) Continuing trajectory of increase in permanent recruitment of social workers and team managers with corresponding reduction in numbers of agency workers.
 - f) Improved joint working with partners evidenced by successful joint commissioning with health for SEND, and in the management of referrals at the front door.

Community impact

15. The Ofsted inspection judgement of 'Inadequate' has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
16. The County Plan 2020–2024 includes the ambition to 'strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together' and more specifically, the council aims to:
 - a. Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve;
 - b. Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices.

Environmental Impact

17. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.
18. Ongoing transformation activity will be undertaken with consideration to minimise waste and resource in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

19. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

20. In particular, the council must have due regard to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.

21. As our projects and service delivery progresses, and changes are designed, equality impact assessment will be undertaken where necessary.

Resource implications

22. There are no new or additional resource implications arising from this monitoring visit and report.

Legal implications

23. It is a function of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the Children's Improvement Board and the oversight of the required improvement journey.

Risk management

24. There are no new or additional risks arising from this visit. Risks associated with the wider improvement plan are monitored by the Improvement Board.

Consultees

25. None.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – [Report of the Children's Services Commissioner in Herefordshire \(December 2023\)](#).

Background papers

None Identified.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

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