

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held in Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 23 January 2024 at 2.00 pm

Board members present in person, voting:

Councillor Clare Davies
Councillor Toni Fagan
(Chairperson)
Councillor Liz Harvey (Vice-Chairperson)
Councillor Robert Highfield
Councillor Jim Kenyon
Stuart Mitchell (Co-opted member)
Councillor Ben Proctor
Councillor Rob Williams

Board members in attendance remotely, non-voting:

Kate Joiner (Co-opted member)

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

Others present in person:

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| Ben Baugh | Democratic Services Officer | Herefordshire Council |
| Kevin Crompton | Independent Scrutineer | Herefordshire Council |
| Steve Eccleston | Partnership Manager | |
| Darryl Freeman | Corporate Director, Children and Young People | Herefordshire Council |
| Victoria Gibbs | Service Director Early Help, Quality Assurance and Prevention | Herefordshire Council |
| Heather Manning | Nurse Safeguarding Children | NHS/ICB |
| Councillor Ivan Powell | Cabinet Member Children and Young People | Herefordshire Council |
| Superintendent Helen Wain | | West Mercia Police |
| Danial Webb | Statutory Scrutiny Officer | Herefordshire Council |

Others in attendance remotely:

| | | |
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| Eleanor Brazil | Children's Commissioner | Department for Education |
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175. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Anna Eccleston (Parent Governor Primary Co-opted Member) and Sam Pratley (Diocese of Herefordshire Co-opted Member).

176. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No named substitutes.

177. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

178. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

179. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A document containing a question received from a member of the public and the response given, plus a supplementary question and the response, is attached at Appendix 1 to the minutes.

180. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from councillors.

181. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

The Independent Scrutineer took the report as read and gave a brief overview including the following considerations.

- It was noted that the report covered 2022/23 and was ten months out of date.
- Significant progress had been made in many areas since the publication of the report. The Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup was used as an example, as its use of performance data, and analysis of partnership participation had greatly improved over the last ten months.
- It was noted that there was still a lot to do, but the Independent Scrutineer believed there were refreshing signs of commitment from partners to improve things.

Following the presentation the report was opened up to the Committee, the principle points of the discussion are summarised below.

1. In response to a question from the Committee the Independent Scrutineer explained that evidencing the positive impact of what the partnership does for children was still a challenge, but that this was true of similar partnerships in other areas.
2. The partnership now reports to the Improvement Board and has an agreement with the board that the partnership will deliver on the neglect strategy, continued improvements in the mash, adopting a get safe model and the implementation of the partnership wide trauma informed approach.
3. There had been a challenge finalising the neglect strategy, but good progress had been made with the interim programme, and the final strategy would be available for scrutiny as soon as it was complete.
4. The Family Approach was progressing well across the partnership and was tied in with the roll out of restorative practice training. The Independent Scrutineer

stated that they had seen clear evidence of agencies working together for the benefit of families.

5. The Committee heard that since the report had been published the Audit Subgroup had been combined with the Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup. There had been an improvement in the focus on multi-agency audits and the timescales for audits and annual plans.
6. The Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup had reported back on six cases where child abuse was suspected, the group had looked at those cases, conducted a multi-agency audit and received learning recommendations back, which were now part of an action plan that would be followed through.
7. The Independent Scrutineer stated that there were aspects of partnership work that could be taken as a specific focus and tracked through for the year. Regular updates on multi-agency audits could be provide for the Committee if it wished.
8. In accordance with 'Working Together 2023', the next report has to be available by September 2024.
9. The Committee raised concerns about individual partner members being too busy to engage with assessing how they're working together as a partnership. It was felt that communication and coordination should be at the heart of the partnership and not sliding away because people were 'too busy being busy'.
10. The Independent Scrutineer acknowledged an issue in relation to capacity challenge for the partners, because the same pool of people were tasked with working with multiple partnerships, which could create conflict. However, the situation was proving and this was likely to be reflected in the following year's report.
11. The Independent Scrutineer explained that, individually, most of the partners were quite strong in terms of safeguarding, but the whole was not greater than the sum of its parts. The challenge of partnership working and the journey the partnership was on was making the sum greater than the whole.
12. The Committee heard that multi-agency data was still a challenge and work was ongoing between the partners to remedy this. An embryonic safeguarding partners' dashboard was being supported by the local authority. There was sufficient partnership information for the Quality and Effectiveness group to tackle the next challenge, which was to look at the data, what it was showing and what to do about it.
13. The Committee heard that the partnership did not have a dedicated Children's data analyst, although there was one within the Council's Performance and Intelligence Team.
14. Greater resource in relation to partnership data analysis was necessary and there was a need to bring together all the individual data people from each partner to map out where things were.
15. There had been strong replies from individual agencies to challenges on Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, but as a partnership this was not in evidence.
16. In relation to a question regarding increasing the pace of change, it was explained that there was a multi-agency review of the MASH with Leeds, adopting a peer review methodology where colleagues would go into the MASH to observe some of the practices. There had also been governance changes, which now required the MASH to report to the Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup, which added another level of reviewing.
17. The Committee heard that measuring the impact of improvements was a challenge and that 'pulling levers' in certain areas and attributing impact to that was difficult to do in the short term.
18. The Committee noted the difficulty in measuring and allocating impact to improvements, but asked how and if the partnership could detail what impact it expected its improvements to have.

19. The Independent Scrutineer explained that to get to a point where sophisticated questions about measuring impact could be asked, there was a necessity to have certain architecture - such as data and training - in place. In the last 12 months the partnership had got this architecture in place, but there was still more to be done.
20. The Committee heard there were good links between the partnership, education department and schools. The challenge wasn't just about schools but the whole education sector. Schools under local authority control were straightforward to deal with, but independent schools, early years providers and specialist education needed to be engaged and included in a way that didn't look like or was tokenism. A piece of work to achieve this was currently underway.

Resolved: The Committee voted unanimously to approve the following actions:

Action: That a workshop be held including all data analysts from across the partnership.

Action: In relation to impact. That the partnership focuses and responds to the question of what it is expecting to see if the suggested improvements are implemented?

182. REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMISSIONER IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Children's Commissioner introduced the report and gave an overview of the main themes contained within. The key considerations included:

- An acknowledgment from the Commissioner that there had been clear improvements in some aspects of the service, but there were still areas where a significant amount of work needed to be done. The need to implement improvements at pace was emphasised.
- The Commissioner drew the Committee's attention to section 14 of the cover report, which detailed six areas where evidence of progress would be expected to be seen at the next review.
- The Committee was advised to consider the work being carried out by the Improvement Board and align its work programme accordingly to avoid duplication of work. It was suggested it might be useful to obtain officer feedback regarding parent and children's satisfaction and involvement in service developments. It was also suggested that the Committee might wish to focus its attention on areas not being directly looked at by the Improvement Board, such as the development of locality arrangements and multi-agency working.
- It was noted that the Families Commission report, published in June 2023, had raised issues about the approach taken in supporting families and helping them to understand better ways of caring for their children. The report had provided clear evidence and views from families that their experience with the service was not as positive as it should have been.
- It was explained that the partnership with Leeds Council had been developed shortly after the review. It was an 18 month programme funded by the Department for Education, with a primary aim of improving the quality of practice and addressing the culture of working with families.

Following the presentation the report was opened up to the Committee, the principle points of the discussion are summarised below.

1. In response to a question from the Committee it was explained that Leeds Council had longstanding locality arrangements, which were commonly referred to as 'The right help, at the right time, in the right place'. It was suggested by the Children's Commissioner that it might be useful if the Leeds partners delivered a presentation about how they deliver locally based multi-agency support to families.
2. The Corporate Director Children and Young People acknowledged potential issues around language and how services were described, especially in relation to early help. The Director clarified to the Committee that early help was not typically carried out by social workers, and that early help and prevention should be being conducted by a wide range of statutory, community, voluntary and faith agencies, with a view to preventing a higher level of need being reached where a social worker would be required.
3. It was explained that children's services did run targeted early help services when there was a particular level of need and that this would ideally remove the requirement for social care intervention.
4. The Committee heard that there was an opportunity to strengthen and coordinate relationships between the Council and multi-agency partners by using primary schools as early help hubs. This was a model that had already been employed and had worked well for autism hubs.
5. The Corporate Director explained that it was in the interests of children and families in Herefordshire that the service and its partners strengthened early help arrangements so that families got the right help at the right time. Ideally, families would be able to either go online or go into their local school, health centre, library or other setting and obtain information about parenting support or any other issues that might be impacting their families. This would eliminate or reduce the need for matters to be escalated to a point where the involvement of statutory services was required.
6. The Corporate Director explained to the Committee that starting in April 2024, the service was looking to allocate new referrals by postcode, so that social workers in assessment teams would be working with a cluster of families in a particular area. There would be a transitional element to this and where social workers had already built strong relations with families they would strive to avoid disrupting those existing relationships by waiting until interventions had concluded.
7. It was stressed that social workers would largely continue to be based at Plough Lane, with workloads and cases that were postcode allocated, then for several days a week workers could potentially hot desk at a school or health centre within their allocated area.
8. The Children's Commissioner was keen to see arrangements put in place that would be easily accessed and well understood by both families and agencies. Ideally there would be a mechanism for determining the most suitable professional/agency to support families.
9. There was a need to ensure that children's social care was well aligned with the arrangements of other agencies, such as the police and health partners, who had shown a willingness and readiness to be involved in new locality arrangements and multi-agency working. Milestones and timetables to monitor how partners were being engaged needed to be maintained.
10. The Committee heard that the service was keen to build trust with families and consult in relation to parent and children satisfaction with the service. Once a clear set of proposals for the service was in place then these would be shared widely and people would be asked for their input and feedback via surveys and other activities.

11. It was explained that websites containing service information were available across the partnership. The Council was looking to make its own website more accessible, but would not consider one over-arching site, as this would be too difficult to resource, update and maintain.
12. Social media platforms were increasingly being used to disseminate information and the Council was continuously learning from families about how they accessed and would like to access information.
13. The Committee heard that the majority of complaints relating to children's services fell within the statutory children's complaints process as laid down by legislation. This was a 3 stage process with recourse to the ombudsman. The number of complaints had been decreasing and number of compliments going up, with more cases being resolved at stage 1 and 2 of the process than before.
14. The Corporate Director offered to bring a report by the complaints team to the Committee if it wished to see it.
15. The Committee head that the six areas identified in the report at section 14 - where evidence of progress would be expected - replaced and ran alongside existing measures on the dashboard.
16. The Committee questioned how it might be possible to acknowledge work being carried out by the Improvement Board publicly. The Corporate Director suggested that it might be useful for the Chair, Vice Chair, Chair of Improvement Board, Corporate Director CYP and Scrutiny Officer to meet up and discuss the best approach to take in regards to the matter.

Resolved: The Committee voted unanimously to approve the following actions:

Action: For the Committee to consider, as part of its work programme, which areas it will focus on over the next six months and be mindful of, but avoid duplication of work being carried out by the Improvement Board. The Committee should also pick up on areas that aren't being covered off by the Improvement Board, such as locality arrangements and multi-agency support for families.

Action: Chair, Vice Chair, Chair of Improvement Board, Corporate Director CYP and Scrutiny Officer to meet to discuss how the work of the Improvement Board could be made more visible and accessible to the public and other members of the Council.

Action: The Committee to hold a work programme meeting to discuss how to approach subjects such as the complaints procedure including: how complaints/compliments are registered and scrutiny of the annual complaints report.

183. TASK AND FINISH GROUP - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DIRECTORATE BUDGET

The report was introduced by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, who provided the Committee with an overview of the findings and recommendations of the group. The key considerations included:

- The group had met once in person and twice online.
- The group had been provided with a number of documents - some in confidence - that provided information about oversight in relation to how the delivery of services in the directorate was being undertaken on a monthly basis.
- Cost consequences of decisions that were made on care packages were often monitored on a weekly basis.

- The level of detail that had gone into providing monthly reports to Cabinet, which Cabinet had scrutinised collectively in terms of maintaining oversight on in-year delivery.
- The group had looked at in-year delivery, as well as budget proposals, in order to gain an understanding of the trajectory/journey of the service in terms of delivering on the improvement plan.
- The group had sought evidence and assurance on progress being made in-year to support and underpin the balance and content of the budget in terms of service area budgets, but also areas of savings and identified pressures.
- It was noted that the directorate had overspent considerably over the last two years and that this had posed a significant risk to the Council and resulted in savings being imposed in other areas. The group had been keen to obtain assurance that the directorate would get it right this year
- The group had produced seven recommendations (a-g) covering the range of different areas that had been investigated.

Following the presentation the report was opened up to the Committee, the principle points of the discussion are summarised below.

1. The Committee acknowledged that progress had been made to improve the understanding of costs associated with service delivery, but expressed concern that the savings targeted for this year had not been delivered as of yet.
2. The quarter 2 performance report and monthly cabinet reports going up to October 2023 had not provided assurance that tangible savings relating to reduced costs of looked after children and the staff mix between permanent employees and agency staff were starting to be delivered.
3. The committee raised concerns about spiralling costs within the care service system and felt that it would be useful to look at the national situation to determine whether the system was dysfunctional and what could be done about it.
4. The Corporate Director echoed the highlighted problems with the system and explained that information and recommendations had been put to the government by various stakeholders. This was not a market the Council had direct control over, although it had built good relations with providers to ensure that costs had been kept lower than the national average, whilst making sure children's needs were being met.
5. A discussion took place in relation to each of the recommendations made within the report. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer suggested that six of the seven recommendation had been discharged during the course of the meeting, these related to proposed work programme item considerations for the Committee and data requests to the directorate. The final recommendation (g) would require a response from Cabinet.

The Committee voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, but acknowledged that recommendations 'a-f' had been discharged during the course of the meeting and should be noted by Cabinet. Recommendation 'g' would require a response from Cabinet.

Resolved: That it be recommended to the executive:

- a. Financial performance data to form part of the 'measures that matter' and performance dashboard data, and should be reported back to staff teams**

so that they are aware of the financial consequences of the service performance alongside other measures.

- b. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to examine how SEND Transport demand and costs are managed, including a review of operations in other rural local authorities.
- c. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise work to step children down from residential care, and to reunify families where children have become looked after.
- d. Dedicated financial resource to continue to be embedded within the children and young people directorate to provide challenge and assurance that day-to-day costs are being captured and forecast correctly.
- e. Each monthly financial outturn report for the Children and Young People directorate, and weekly Children's Service Analysis Tool (CHAT) be provided to the chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
- f. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee undertake a piece of work to examine the robustness of the council's data and management information supporting the children and young people directorate.
- g. Savings as proposed to be targeted for Children's directorate to deliver in 2024-25 but assured funding to be found from elsewhere to balance the council's budget.

184. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee agreed to hold a work programming session for the coming year.

185. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 12 March 2024 2.00 pm

The meeting ended at 5.03pm

Chairperson