

Title of report: Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 17 September 2024

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

All wards

Purpose

To scrutinise the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 2.

Recommendation

That:

- a) That the committee scrutinise the Herefordshire Children's Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 2, and make any recommendations to the service that they believe will support the implementation of the plan.

Alternative options

1. The committee agreed to carry out this work at its meeting on 30 July 2024. Therefore no alternative options are presented.

Key considerations

2. Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.

3. The inspection report was published on 21 September 2022 and is available at <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50192875>.
4. The Secretary of State issued a Statutory Direction (<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50192875>) to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022, and appointed a Commissioner for Children's Services.
5. The overall judgement was that Herefordshire Children's Service was 'inadequate'. The judgements contributing to this outcome are as follows:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

6. Three Ofsted monitoring visits have taken place to date. These monitoring visits found insufficient consistency and pace of progress in the areas of focus.
7. The Director of Children's Services left Herefordshire Council by agreement in March 24. Following this, an interim Director of Children's Services was appointed who started post on 1 July 2024 and is subject to a 9 month fixed term contract to 31 March 2025.

Current Situation

Development of the plan

8. The Phase 2 Improvement Plan (the plan), attached at Appendix 1, has been developed to bring focus, pace and measures to the improvement journey.
9. The plan sets out highlights of what has been achieved in the last two years and importantly introduces a quality assurance framework of measures to enable us to monitor progress. Key Performance Indicators', Service User feedback and Audit, defines measures.
10. The Children's Improvement Board, has reviewed its terms of reference and membership and is independently chaired by the Department of Education Commissioner Eleanor Brazil. Meetings are held on a six weekly basis.
11. Herefordshire Council continues to have a strong commitment to improving performance in children's services. Transformation of the service is now in its third year of a three-year programme that began in October 2021. This phase 2 covers the period 2024/25 and will be refreshed in July 2025.
12. The aims of the transformation plan remain the same which are:
 - a. Improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.
 - b. Making working in Herefordshire an attractive and rewarding career choice.
 - c. Embedding systemic partnership approaches and exploring alternative models of delivery.

- d. Making the service financially viable for the future across a range of services the council delivers.

All of these are underpinned and driven by improvement across the system of practice, management and leadership.

Community impact

13. 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.
14. Effective scrutiny enables the committee to reflect community concern, one of the four purposes of scrutiny as outlined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

Environmental impact

15. There are no direct environmental impacts resulting from scrutinising this report.

Equality duty

16. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. There are no direct equality impacts in scrutinising this report. However any recommendations made by the committee may have an equalities impact if agreed by Cabinet or the portfolio holder. These risks will need to be evaluated and if necessary mitigated before any recommendation is accepted.

Resource implications

17. This report constitutes part of the typical function of this committee. Similarly, a programme of work undertaken by committee is an integral part of the council's 'business as usual'. There is no therefore no resource implication in setting or agreeing a work programme. However any recommendations made by the committee may have a resource implication if agreed by Cabinet or the portfolio holder. These risks will need to be evaluated and if necessary mitigated before any recommendation is accepted.

Legal implications

18. The remit of the scrutiny committee is set out in part 3 section 4 of the constitution and the role of the scrutiny committee is set out in part 2 article 6 of the constitution.
19. The Local Government Act 2000 requires the council to deliver the scrutiny function.

Risk management

20. In producing the plan, the Director or Children's Services has considered and mitigated the following risks.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Partnership buy in to the plan – recognising a joint responsibility to deliver an improved childrens services.	Extensive partnership engagement activity and involvement, focus groups with children and young people and key stakeholders. Quartely partnership summits.
Plan is not adopted or endorsed.	Continuous engagement throughout the development of the plan and the governance process. Engagement with Corporate Leadership Team, Department Leadership Team, the Improvement Board, the Commissioner and the Department for Education.

Consultees

21. There have no consultations required to produce this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Herefordshire Children’s Services and Partnership Improvement Plan Phase 2

Appendix 2 Improvement Plan Phase 2 – plan on a page

Background papers

None