

Questions from members of the public – Scrutiny management Board, 14 January 2025

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Ms Reid Hereford	<p>Per LAIT (Local Authority Interactive Tool) as at 31 March 2024, the rate of children in care per 10,000 children was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herefordshire: 114 • Statistical Neighbours' average: 66.78 • The Statistical Neighbours' rates are: • Wiltshire: 46 • Somerset: 53 • Devon: 59 • Cornwall: 59 • Suffolk: 62 • Gloucestershire: 65 • Dorset: 68 • Norfolk: 68 • Shropshire: 121 • England: 70 • West Midlands region: 90 <p>The document entitled 'Savings Proposals recommended for 2025/26' includes:</p> <p>"Reduction in Placements (Residential, Complex Needs, Independent Fostering Agencies and External Supported Accommodation)"</p> <p>Which mentions, for example:</p> <p>"Savings to be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of Best Value panel to manage all external and residential placements" <p>But does not mention savings proposals by reducing the number of children in care, should it?</p>	Scrutiny Management Board

Response:

We outline our care prevention and rehabilitation work within our Improvement Plan so it's appropriately associated with good safe practice and permanence planning in the interests of children and not saving money. The reference in the budget report is about how we ensure the placement cost for children who need to be cared for by the local authority to promote their safety and wellbeing are managed at the best value to the council financial envelope.

Our data shows a reduction in the number of new children entering care each quarter for the year to date and is reflective of our care prevention and restorative practice approach being successful. As this approach continues, over the next two years we will see children leaving care as care leavers or to permanency and our overall numbers will reduce to the level we would expect to see in Herefordshire i.e. in line with our statistical neighbours.

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 2	Mr Declan Hill Hereford	<i>With regards to the 2025/26 Draft Budget - Revenue, would the Scrutiny Management Board consider a recommendation to increase the Council tax premium from 100% to potentially 200% or even 300% charged for second homes and properties which have been empty to help bring a) additional revenue to the Council but b) may provide an incentive for a reallocation or slight reduction in council tax revenue for many hard working families who struggle on low or even middle incomes despite working full time to make ends meet, living paycheque to paycheque. Could such a recommendation then be sought to amend the Budget? This may reduce the over inflation of empty housing stock when there is need for it Herefordshire, making homes more affordable to those who need it and aren't reliant on temporary accommodation.</i>	Scrutiny Management Board

Response: *In February 2024, Council approved the decision to apply a premium of 100% for all dwellings which are unoccupied but substantially furnished (second homes) with effect from 1 April 2025. A premium of 100% for Empty Dwellings (unoccupied and substantially unfurnished) is applicable. This increases to 200% after 5 years and 300% after 10 years. These rates are the statutory maximum levels of premium permitted under legislation.*

Residents can access support through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. This scheme provides assistance to residents with a low income with their council tax bill and the amount of reduction is dependent upon circumstances. The scheme is available to working age and pensioner claimants. Details and eligibility criteria are available on the council's website: [Council Tax Reduction – Herefordshire Council](#)

In addition to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the Council's Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Policy provides short-term assistance to residents facing exceptional and temporary hardship. Details and eligibility criteria are available on the council's website: [Council Tax Reduction – Herefordshire Council](#)

Further support to residents in need is available through the Household Support Fund, funded through the Department of Work and Pensions, to help households in need. This funding is used to support a wide range of low-income households, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, care leavers and disabled people. Support includes help with energy bills, food and wider essential costs. This funding aims to support vulnerable households most affected by increased in the cost of living.