

**Minutes of the meeting of the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 3 October 2024 at 2.00 pm**

**Committee members present in person and voting: Councillors: Pauline Crockett (Chairperson), Dave Davies, Mark Dykes, Louis Stark, Richard Thomas and Allan Williams**

Others in attendance:

H Crane	Head of Service Housing	Herefordshire Council
W Dyer	Commissioning Officer	Herefordshire Council
S Edwards	Service Manager Children in Care and Care Leavers	Herefordshire Council
Councillor C Gandy	Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing	Herefordshire Council
L Good	Service Director Communities	Herefordshire Council
H Hall	Corporate Director Community Wellbeing	Herefordshire Council
T Lynch	Head of Service for Corporate Parenting	Herefordshire Council
H Merricks-Murgatroyd	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
C Price	Chief Officer	Healthwatch Herefordshire
D Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council

**11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Polly Andrews, Cllr Jenny Bartlett, and Cllr Simeon Cole.

**12. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Cllr Louis Stark was present as the named substitute for Cllr Polly Andrews, Cllr Diana Toynbee was present as the named substitute for Cllr Jenny Bartlett, and Cllr Allan Williams was present as the named substitute for Cllr Simeon Cole.

**13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**14. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

**Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.**

**15. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

No questions had been received from members of the public.

**16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

No questions had been received from councillors.

**17. SUPPORTING OUR CARE LEAVERS**

The committee considered a report on the background council's services to support its looked after children who are leaving or have left care.

The slide pack was published as part of agenda: [Link to 'Appendix 4 for Supporting our Care Leavers'](#). The slides presented by council officers are outlined below (in italics), with summaries of the responses provided to the key lines of questioning by the committee.

- A. The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting introduced the presentation and presented:

*Corporate Parenting Responsibilities*

a.1 Some of the care leavers were asked what they would like to be said to the committee which were included in the slide.

*Pathway Planning*

*Provision of a Personal Advisor (PA)*

a.2 A question was asked about the backgrounds of PA's and their relationship to the council and to the care leaver.

The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting answered that PA's are all employed by the local authority into that specific role of PA and come with a lot of different experiences. There are currently 14 PA's who work in the council's care leavers team.

The Service Manager Children in Care and Care Leavers added that PA's come from a range of disciplines and it is intended that they build relationships with young people so they need to have some experience of working with that age group and have a good understanding of children who have lived in care.

*Financial Assistance*

a.3 The Service Manager Children in Care and Care Leavers noted that regarding the Council Tax Exemption is for young people in and out of county.

*What housing options are available – Commissioned (1)*

*What housing options are available – Commissioned (2)*

*What housing options are available – Non-Commissioned (1)*

a.4 The Head of Service Housing noted that the council is not classed as a stock holding local authority and does not have enough properties to be classed as stock holding. Any accommodation that is brought forward has to be acquired. Funding from the Ministry of

Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has assisted alongside the council's own grant funding to purchase properties for vulnerable client groups.

*Helping young people understand their support/accommodation options*

*What's in the accommodation pipeline*

a.5 The Head of Service Housing added that the council is trying to find accommodation outside of Hereford City in an attempt to branch out into the market towns, as all accommodation is provided in the city. This accommodation is therefore being divided between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye.

*Education, Employment, and Training (EET) Support*

a.6 The Service Manager Children in Care and Care Leavers noted that numbers of young people who are out of education, employment and training have increased locally as a result of training providers who have not been able to continue providing services in Herefordshire. The council has therefore been responsive in being able to look at how that challenge can be addressed and the Bespoke mentoring service has been commissioned for care leavers who are not in education, employment and training.

*Health and Wellbeing Support*

*Moving up to adulthood pathway*

*How we ensure this is a seamless service*

*Joint working story board*

The principal points of the subsequent discussion included:

- i. A committee member asked how it is ensured that children who have not had the same life experiences before the age of 16 are addressed as effectively as possible.
- ii. In response, the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting noted that there is an emphasis and duty on supporting children in their families wherever possible because care leavers tend to have poorer outcomes than their peers. However, if it is not safe, then this cannot be done and a small proportion of children will come into the care of the local authority. The co-allocation of PA's at 16 helps emphasise the importance of life skills earlier than the transition to adulthood at age 18.
- iii. The Chairperson asked if there is a sufficient number of PA's to manage the workload resulting from co-allocating at the age of 16.
- iv. In response, the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting said that there is a service redesign being considered where there will be at least four new PA's within the service.
- v. The Chairperson of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee asked if there is the capacity to capture the voices of young people who are being supported across the county.
- vi. In response, the Service Manager Children in Care and Care Leavers noted that there are a number of groups that young people are supported to attend and the participation lead Chase Dowling supports that with the

PA's. Therefore, young people have an opportunity to share their views on all aspects of care that is provided as a care leavers service. The Inspire Change group also exists which spends time with care experienced young people to gather their views and feed them back to Corporate Parenting.

- vii. The Commissioning Manager added that one of the supported accommodation contracts is about to be re-commissioned and a co-production approach is in place with young people to involve them to work on the full design of that service.
- viii. In response to a question about whether the balance is had between safeguarding the child and the potential downstream harm to the child once they become a care leaver, the Cabinet Member Children and Young People acknowledged that the outcomes for children who become care experienced often are not as good as for their peers. However, the ambition should exist to help support care experienced young people to achieve their ambitions. In terms of the balance, one of the impacts of inadequate judgement cited is that the whole system has become more risk-averse and therefore there has been a significant increase in referrals rather than professionals understanding what the appropriate level of response is to the level of concern. Engaging with the wider family is one example to help reduce the risk rather than moving straight into a looked-after arrangement.
- ix. The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting added that the number of children coming into care in Herefordshire month-to-month is reducing.
- x. In response to a question about the independence of advocacy provided to care leavers, the Service Manager Children in Care and Care Leavers noted that part of the role of a PA is to be an advocate for that young person so that they can champion that young person in seeking support for them. Additionally, the council has its own internal advocacy service 'Hear Me' and is independent to the PA.
- xi. The Commissioning Manager noted that as part of the tender process for commissioned services there is a social value element and collaboration is ongoing with young people on the provision of apprenticeships in organisations that are commissioning out.
- xii. In response to a question regarding whether the council serves as rent guarantors for young people, the Service Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers confirmed that the council does indeed provide this support.
- xiii. In response to a question regarding whether the PA supports the course content that care leavers are undergoing, the Service Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers confirmed that PA's can and do support care leavers with course content and there are staff with a strong education background. Currently there are fortnightly meetings with education colleagues to look at these difficulties with care leavers and individual circumstances can be considered in order to come up with an action plan to help support them.
- xiv. The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting added that there are plans to explore the possibility of appointing a Specialist Education,

Employment, and Training Officer, similar to the current role of the Specialist Housing Advisor.

- xv. In response to a question about the impact of the Bespoke mentoring service, the Service Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers noted that as part of the contract, impact will be considered to see where it has helped young people to improve their lives, however, it is too early to say at this time as it has only recently been mobilised.
- xvi. In response to a question about the 27% of placements which are out of county and whether they are out of the county because of choice or capacity issues, the Service Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers noted that some young people have been placed out of county because of their particular needs and the challenges in providing them educational opportunities in Herefordshire that they want.
- xvii. In response to a question about whether experiences with care leavers are used to tailor what PA's may be providing for the looked after children not to become care leavers, the Service Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers confirmed that learning is used to help PA's with their practice so that they can think differently to approach a situation in the future. A variety of toolkits are used to help check out with young people what skills they have which helps guide the steps to help them to prepare in the future.
- xviii. The Chairperson asked whether assurance can be given that a young person's voice is heard in terms of a safe and sound place to live, and is accommodation location planned in respect of access to education and employment opportunities.
- xix. The Head of Housing Service responded that on accommodation and location, the intention is needs-based and from there, the solution is considered. Therefore, the location will be considered where there is the availability of services, support and accommodation. In relation to the voices of young people, the accommodation in strategic housing is not commissioned but the standards are considered with the young people's best interests in mind.

There was a short adjournment to enable committee members to consider potential recommendations. The meeting recommenced, the draft recommendations were read out by the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, and the following resolution was agreed by the committee.

**Resolved:**

- 1. To allocate a personal advisor to each looked after child by their sixteenth birthday, to ensure that looked after children are prepared for independence through a well-designed and child-centred pathway plan.**
- 2. To look at best practice in other local authorities when providing life skills and other personal development training to care leavers.**
- 3. To explore ways to provide capacity to support care leavers in education, employment and training.**
- 4. To ensure that feedback mechanisms within the council ensure care leavers can influence policy and procedure.**

**18. BUILDING STRONG CONNECTED COMMUNITIES, TALK COMMUNITY STRATEGY, 2024 - 2027**

The committee considered a report on Building Strong Connected Communities, Talk Community Strategy, 2024 – 2027.

The Service Director Communities provided a brief overview of the key considerations from the report.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion included:

- i. The Chairperson asked about the delivery in 2024-25 and the implementation of the Talk Community communications strategy with regard to who is doing this and how its effectiveness will be measured. It was also asked whether this will be included in the upcoming parish summit.
- ii. In response, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing noted that Emily Lowe will be leading on the work regarding the communications strategy and will be doing it in partnership with stakeholders as to what Talk Community does and what it doesn't do and how partners work together within that Talk Community. In relation to how it is working, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing added that there needs to be clear metrics in the communications strategy.
- iii. In response to a question on structure, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing noted that the Talk Community function remains under the Community wellbeing directorate and the Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing is still the portfolio holder for Talk Community. The line management under Emily Lowe sits with her and Emily Lowe reports back to the Director of Public Health. There has been no change to the work of the team and the revised strategy will help shape the work further going forward.
- iv. The Chairperson raised the concern of partners, in recent years, who feel that Talk Community should have grown and not just be focused on health outcomes.
- v. In response, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing noted that public health has a wider remit around health and wellbeing and that is where Talk Community can be effective, particularly around prevention.
- vi. The Director of Public Health added that the focus on prevention is important for Talk Community in addition to strengthening early help to help people avoid crisis. Talk Community's links across the health spectrum can also be strengthened by operating within public health.
- vii. In response to a question about whether the approach should be replicated across the whole council, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing agreed that this work can be done across a wide breadth of different issues and across a number of different directorates.
- viii. In response to a question about Talk Community hubs, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing acknowledged that Talk Community is not just about having a hub and that the role of development officers for areas of the county is important in working alongside communities and existing facilities to help identify what is working well in different communities and share that best practice.
- ix. The Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing agreed that whilst Talk Community hubs exist across the county, there is no interest in imposing on any

particular parish or village what they should be doing in helping to support the people in their area. It is desired to make it clearer to those outside of the areas with Talk Community hubs to emphasise the work of Talk Community.

- x. In response to a question on the potential prioritisation of Talk Community services in the rural areas, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing agreed that there are areas which have differing need and noted that there are two main functions to the outcomes framework; one is to look at the effectiveness of Talk Community and the other is to evaluate the effectiveness in terms of addressing those health inequalities.
- xi. In response to a question of how the strategy align with the work of Community Paradigm, the Chief Officer Healthwatch noted that it does align and Talk Community is fundamental in helping to drive forward work with communities.
- xii. In response to a question about the role of development officers, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing acknowledged that more information could be provided and they could be linked up with ward members to provide them the opportunity to understand better what they do.
- xiii. The Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing added that if ward members do not get notification from their development officers about when they hold their network meetings, they should raise it with the Community Wellbeing team as they help provide the opportunity to understand what exactly is going on in their areas.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That the Talk Community strategy encourage the adoption of best practice in community support models across Herefordshire.**

**19. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer noted that the draft work programme had been circulated to members as updated for October. It was asked if members could vote to agree to pursue this work programme.

**Resolved:**

- a) The committee agree the draft work programme for Health Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee contained in the work programme report attached as appendix 1, which will be subject to monthly review, as the basis of their primary focus for the remainder of the municipal year.**
- b) The committee note the work programme for the other scrutiny committees, and identify any opportunities for collaboration or alignment of work.**

**20. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next scheduled meeting in public was confirmed as Monday 25 November 2024 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 4.49 pm

**Chairperson**