

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 16 September 2025 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Toni Fagan (chairperson)
Councillor Ben Proctor (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Frank Cornthwaite, Dave Davies, Robert Highfield and David Hitchiner

Co-opted member: David Willis (Diocese of Hereford)

In attendance: Gareth Boulton (Chief Executive of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office/ Chair of the Justice Management Board), Councillor Ivan Powell (Cabinet Member Children and Young People).

Officers: Simon Cann (Democratic Services Officer), John Coleman (Democratic Services Manager), Tilly Page (Complaints and Children's Rights Manager) Alfie Rees-Glinos (Governance Support Assistant), Tina Russell (Corporate Director Children and Young People), Suzanne Sims (Service Manager for Safeguarding Quality Assurance and Improvement - Interim), Lorna Tilley (Head of Service West Mercia Youth Justice Service), Danial Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer).

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

14. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No substitutes had been named.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

17. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Two questions had been received from members of the public, which had been published, along with responses, as a supplement to the meeting agenda on the Herefordshire Council website.

A record of a supplementary question and a verbal response provided during the meeting, are attached at Appendix 1 to these minutes

18. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There had been no questions received from members of the council.

19. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Complaints and Children's Rights Manager, Head of Service Safeguarding and Review and Corporate Director Children and Young People provided an overview and briefing on the development, management and learning arising from complaints and compliments.

The Chair invited comments and discussion from the committee in relation to the report. The key points of the discussion are detailed below:

1. Question: What were the complaint response times?

Answer: Complaints were acknowledged within three working days; full investigations, including reviews and interviews, must be completed with a written response within 20 working days.

2. Question: How was independence ensured in investigations?

Answer: Stage 1 complaints were handled by independent Quality Assurance Practitioners, not case teams, and all responses were checked by senior managers.

3. Question: When would the website and policy be updated?

Answer: The revised policy awaited CLT approval and would be uploaded with the 2024-25 Annual Report once signed off.

4. Question: How was public trust being improved?

Answer: Increased engagement showed greater confidence in services; feedback and complaints informed continuous learning.

5. Question: Why had complaint numbers dropped?

Answer: Fewer complaints reflected success in restorative practice, resolving issues earlier through communication.

6. Question: Were corporate complaints included?

Answer: Yes, both statutory and corporate complaints followed the same reporting and quality assurance process.

7. Question: How was learning from compliments used?

Answer: Compliments were categorised by theme and analysed with complaints to reinforce good practice. An analysis of learning from complaints could usefully be included in quarterly monitoring reports.

8. Question: Were informal resolutions recorded?

Answer: Yes, they were logged in case files, reviewed in audits, and shared through training and quality assurance bulletins. They were not explicitly pulled out into complaints reports. It would be desirable to do this if a method could be found that did not add to the paperwork for staff.

9. Question: Would rejected complaints be reported?

Answer: Yes, future reports would show numbers and reasons. In Quarter 1, none were rejected.

10. Question: What caused complaints about staff attitude?

Answer: Mostly miscommunication; new videos and reflective learning aimed to improve staff–family understanding.

11. Question: How were staff supported during complaints?

Answer: Managers provided support, clarifying complaints targeted the authority, not individuals. Repeat issues prompted training or case reassignment.

12. Question: How were complaints handled informally?

Answer: Resolution meetings or calls were offered before formal stages, often settling issues early.

13. Question: How accessible was the complaints process?

Answer: A one-page guide and verbal support were given; a digital project would improve website access and materials.

14. Question: Could complaints be shown as a percentage of service users?

Answer: Yes, future reports would include contextual data to show complaints relative to caseload.

15. Question: Why might a complaint be rejected before Stage 1?

Answer: Only those outside the 12-month timeframe or statutory scope were declined, with reasons and alternatives provided.

16. Question: Was the process trauma-informed?

Answer: Yes, a trauma-informed, restorative approach was taken, offering advocacy and sensitive communication.

17. Question: Were all children's complaints reported?

Answer: Yes, both statutory and corporate complaints were included; the distinction was only for classification.

18. Question: How were families encouraged to complain?

Answer: Complaints were normalised as learning tools; staff provided information and reassurance in correspondence.

19. Question: How independent were investigations?

Answer: Stage 1 was independent of case teams; Stage 2 involved external investigators, with Ombudsman oversight if needed.

20. Question: How were senior officer complaints escalated?

Answer: Such cases could proceed directly to the Ombudsman if no suitable internal investigator was available.

21. Question: Why was the complaints team within Governance and Law?

Answer: This structure followed standard local authority practice, ensuring independence and proper oversight.

22. Question: How was continuous improvement assured?

Answer: The Independent Scrutineer confirmed Herefordshire's process met national standards and best practice.

At the conclusion of the debate the committee discussed and agreed the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Herefordshire Council ensures that in quarterly performance monitoring and its annual report of complaints it includes:
 - a. learning from compliments
 - b. complaints that are declined and the reasons for this and
 - c. evidence in case file audits of informal resolutions.

20. YOUTH JUSTICE

Before debating the item, it was resolved that:

1. Under section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act, paragraph 2 and it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

At the conclusion of the debate the committee discussed and agreed the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Herefordshire Council engage with colleges regarding education and training for those in the youth justice system.

21. WORK PROGRAMME

1. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer outlined the work programme in Appendix 1 of the report, with a separate programme being finalised for the early help task and finish group.
2. Recruitment for co-opted members was ongoing. David Willis (Diocese of Hereford) was in place, the Archdiocese of Cardiff had been contacted, and advertisements had been sent for three parent governor positions.
3. The Chair welcomed David Willis and recorded thanks to outgoing co-opted members Jan Frances and Stuart Mitchell.

Resolved that:

a) The committee agree the draft work programme for the Children and Young People 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.

22. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 11 November 2025, 2pm

23. APPENDIX 1: SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Supplementary Questions from members of the public – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, 16 September 2025

Question Number	Questioner	Supplementary Question	Question to
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SPQ	Ms Maggie Steel, Hereford	<p>The Nolan Principles are a set of seven ethical standards for public life, and they apply to everyone in public office. Principle 4 says this:</p> <p>Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.</p> <p>Is it ethical to reject a complaint because the person whose actions are under scrutiny is a senior officer?</p>	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
<p>Chair's response (delivered verbally during meeting): As councillors, we accept that the Nolan Principles apply to everybody in public office. Complaints are accepted or rejected according to the council's complaints policy and not according to the seniority of the officer relating to the complaint. I would suggest that if anybody has information otherwise that they contact us outside of the public meeting to raise any queries about that. Thank you</p>			

The meeting ended at 16:52

Chairperson