

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The comments below respond to the key findings of the national Chief Inspector's report on arrangements to Safeguard Children published in July and reflected in the main cabinet report at paragraph 2 under "Safeguarding Children". The Chair of the new Local Safeguarding Children Board (Head of Social Care – Children) has completed an initial response to the full recommendations for consideration at a future meeting of the LSCB.

Some agencies give insufficient priority to safeguarding and children's interests and there are some groups of children, including those with disabilities and those living away from home whose needs are not always given sufficient recognition or priority;

Herefordshire has a positive record to taking safeguarding seriously and is in the process of setting up its Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). There has been approval of the principle constitution of the new Safeguarding Board by the Children and Young Person's Partnership Board (CYPPB) in May 2005 and the practical arrangements for the setting up of the LSCB will be reported to the November 2005 meeting in order that there will be full implementation by the due date of 1st April 2006.

Children in Education Placements

The County has 12 children in education placements who are "out of area" by the definition of the DfES. These are placed more than twenty miles from the child's home area. These placements will end within the next 2 years and are fully monitored by staff in the Children's Services directorate. Additionally there are five children who are joint funded by health and the local authority. A proportion of these children are "looked after" children.

Herefordshire Looked After children placed outside the County boundary in what could be defined as "out of authority" placements.

The calculation is based on distance from Hereford City (as distance from the boundary was difficult to measure). There are currently 27 children placed more than 20 miles from Hereford City and 9 children placed within 20 miles of the City (16% and 5% respectively of the total looked after cohort). An explanation of the position of these children is given below, in four placement type categories.

Children placed with Herefordshire foster carers who live outside the county boundary.

More than 20 miles (13 children):

8 are placed with kinship carers, in placements which meet the children's needs to remain within their wider family network.

5 are placed with Herefordshire approved and supported foster carers in the bordering counties of Worcestershire and Monmouthshire. Two of this group required very specific foster caring skills because of their disability, not available more locally. The other three could not be found suitable more local carers at the time of placement.

11 are placed appropriately in mainstream local authority schools.

2 are placed appropriately in specialist local authority schools because of their special educational needs.

Less than 20 miles (3 children):

All three are with the same Herefordshire foster carers who live in Worcestershire but only 16.5 miles from Hereford. More local placements were not available at the time of placement. All attend local authority mainstream schools.

Children placed with agency foster carers.

More than 20 miles (6):

3 of the children are in permanent placements which are stable and meeting their needs appropriately. None of them could be found suitable local provision at the time it was needed. They needed skilled foster carers. All are in appropriate mainstream education.

1 has moved successfully to a foster home following several years of specialist residential provision, which was not available locally. The need to maintain stability in her educational provision was a high priority in the decision not to bring her back into Herefordshire.

2 are children whose emotional and behavioural needs could not be met by local foster carers.

Less than 20 miles (3):

2 required specialist fostering skills not available from the cohort of Herefordshire foster carers at that time. Education stability has been maintained for both.

1 required placement urgently at a time when no local placements were available, although her needs were not complex. The current placement is meeting her needs well, especially educationally and has been made a permanent placement.

Children placed in agency residential care.

More than 20 miles (8):

All these children have complex needs which has made them very difficult to place, and for whom even specialist foster care has not been a viable option.

4 have special educational needs which cannot be met by Herefordshire's local educational provision. They also have emotional and behavioural problems. They are placed in care settings and residential schools designed to meet their needs.

4 have severe emotional and behavioural problems, requiring specialist therapeutic provision. One child is now ready to move on and will be returning to Herefordshire (private agency foster carers).

Less than 20 miles (3):

All have complex needs, as above.

2 have special educational needs. One is attending local education provision in Hereford, and the other is in a specialist educational setting.

1 has specific emotional and behavioural needs which needed specialist provision. There are concerns about the educational provision in this case, which are being addressed.

All children are reviewed as prescribed by the DfES and our own Looked after procedures. The above information was correct as of August 2005.

There are considerable concerns about the differing thresholds in their child protection and family support work and about the lack of understanding of the role of social workers by other agencies.

May 1st 2004 was the launch of the Child Concern Model (CCM) which was developed by all the agencies through the Area Child Protection Committee. This model aims at developing a common approach to managing concerns about children. An evaluation is currently being undertaken which will report to the Area Child Protection Committee (which commissioned the report) the initial findings in October 2005. The purpose is to recognise that this is a first year evaluation of a three year process. The findings are aimed at developing the model further, recognising training needs, and preparing the ground for evolving the model into the government designated common assessment framework. This is due to be introduced from April 2006 with full implementation within three years. A response to the evaluation with an action plan will be made to the new LSCB and the Partnership board and developments will be incorporated in the Children and Young Person's Plan which is due to be published in April 2006.

The development of the CCM has given confidence to professional and agencies in Herefordshire and early indications of improved outcomes for children.

Continuing difficulties in recruitment and retention in some services affect their ability to safeguard children effectively and may restrict their capacity to deliver the new Every Child Matters arrangements.

Herefordshire has not been immune to the national shortage of qualified social workers. This has been exacerbated this year with the change over to the new social work degree which means that there is no one qualifying this year. This is a pressure on all local authorities. Whilst pressure has been particularly experienced in the duty team over the July and August period by the beginning of October this will have improved. Any changeover in staff has implications for training and support. There are significant vacancies in our Adoption and Fostering teams. However the Council has ensured that all children who are looked after (170) and on the child protection register (42) has an allocated social worker. The Children's Services Directorate maintains an "open" approach to recruitment being aware that numbers can fluctuate in this section of our workforce. This situation is closely monitored by senior managers.