



Herefordshire Champion | Spring 2022

## A Record Of Failure That Has Hurt Our Most Vulnerable Families

In June 2018, Herefordshire's Children's Services were rated as needing improvement. By September 2022 the standards had declined so much that when Ofsted inspected Herefordshire Children's Services again they judged them to be inadequate across the board - the lowest possible rating.

Perhaps most damning of all the report stated that "Leaders and managers fail to safeguard and protect children in

Herefordshire". Ofsted's verdict could not have been clearer. One leading Councillor even described the report as the "lowest point Herefordshire Council has been in for

**"Leaders and managers fail to safeguard and protect children in Herefordshire"**

25 years". This decline has happened on the watch of the Green-Independent Coalition

and it has resulted in families suffering as a direct result of the Council's failings. Perhaps most galling of all for those affected is Herefordshire Council's inability to offer a satisfactory full and unreserved apology. The Coalition's response to this mess has been policies that have failed to deliver the required improvements leaving vulnerable children and families still at risk and your Council's reserves greatly diminished. This represents a failure of leadership at the highest level.



Families In Herefordshire Deserve Better From Their Council

Eleanor Brazil – the Herefordshire Children's Commissioner appointed by the Department of Education, identifies in her recently published report that the **problems in the county's Children's Services started more than 10 years ago**. It's about time the Tories acknowledged the truth of the matter and owned up to the consequences of their actions.

In 2011 - despite acknowledging the existing difficulties in recruiting staff and foster carers and the need for family support services - **the Tories made large cuts to the budget for Children's Services**, stopping and slashing support services in all areas. In the following 7 years they implemented further 'savings' initiatives across the directorate – **reducing financial support by a massive £17m**.

Over that time they had repeatedly worrying OFSTED inspections, highlighting **poor practice and inadequate management and leadership**. High profile court judgements followed over the serious mishandling of specific cases. A bullying culture, which prevented Independent Review Officers from challenging social worker decisions and care plans, was called out by a High Court judge in 2018 – but the rot and complacency continued.

**Present inadequacies were caused by the Tories – not the coalition**. Since 2019 the Independent-led coalition has been turning the super-tanker around. Covid made the situation more difficult - as face-to-face contact with known families became limited and the economic and social pressures of the pandemic pushed more families into crisis. Despite this, **we have invested nearly £20m of new money** in an improvement programme over the last 2 years and have **replaced the top three layers of management** – not just in Children's services - but across most of the council.

The problems are deep-seated and will take time to address, and we are determined to do this and, in doing so, to **avoid repeating the mistakes made during 12 years of Tory mismanagement**. Our family-centred approach aims to rebuild the early years and preventative services slashed back in 2012 and to work with our schools sector, our communities and our expert third sector organisations and charities to **broaden the help and support available to families** when they start to wobble.

We must work positively with families and with partners to **establish a firm foundation of trust and good practice** upon which to build a better service for Herefordshire.



The Conservatives published their own 'newspaper' full of misleading nonsense. For a full explanation of why their claims are such utter rubbish, go to the Myth Busting page. Meanwhile here are the headlines...



Planters were paid for out of a covid grant to improve the city centre, not from your council tax.

The 'bypass' was a Conservative waste of money. It would have encouraged more traffic at a time when we need to find ways to encourage less. Plus it would still take another 10 years to do and cost another £250 million+

Conservatives raised council tax by the full amount every year they were in power. Plus inflation was lower then.

Government directed all councils to reorganise bin collections with a greater emphasis on recycling. The public were consulted on the plans and a majority agreed with the new arrangements



Money spent on Hereford city centre is aimed at actually solving the cities transport problems, which these roads schemes never would.



Conservatives approved a massive increase in poultry farming without thinking of the effect of phosphates on our rivers. Now they try to blame us!

The new cycle lane was not our 'vanity project'. It was actually part of a scheme designed by the Conservatives. Costs went up because their design needed improvement.

Our Children's services have been in trouble since long before the Coalition took over. The headline cases date back to when the Conservatives ran the council. Funding has been under pressure for over 10 years.

The reason our rivers are so polluted is because Thatcher sold off our water to companies who want profit over nature. The Government still refuses to take the pollution of our rivers seriously, letting these companies discharge raw sewerage into our rivers.



Rural areas are undervalued by Government. It is they who spend billions on HS2 rather than local bus services. Not your council

Basically every story in their 'newspaper' is a total misrepresentation of the truth. Even the 'potholes have potholes' story conveniently forgets to mention that the government has slashed the money available to sort out roads while the cost of materials has gone up.

Find out more about Independents for Herefordshire on our website: [www.i4H.org.uk](http://www.i4H.org.uk)