

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
24th October, 2012**

Present:- Councillor G. A. Russell (in the Chair); Councillors Ahmed, Buckley, Dodson, Donaldson, Kaye, License, Pitchley, Read and Robinson with co-opted members Mrs. A. Clough, Ms. J. Jones, and Mrs. J. Fitzgerald.

Also in attendance were: - J. Thacker, H. Barre, J. Parkin and P. Theaker.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Astbury, Clark, Roche and Sharman and from co-opted members Parish Cllr N. Tranmer, Mr. M. Smith and Mrs. J. Blanch-Nicholson.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no Declarations of Interest to record.

26. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS.

There were no members of the public or the press in attendance.

27. COMMUNICATIONS.

There was nothing to report under this item.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2012.

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission were considered.

Resolved: - That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as an accurate record for signature by the Chairperson.

29. SCHOOL PLACES.

Consideration was given to the report and presentation of the Service Lead, School Admissions, Organisation and Special Educational Needs Assessment Service, Schools and Lifelong Learning, Children and Young People's Services.

The report informed members of the Select Commission on the recent and future projects being undertaken to increase school place availability within the Borough in response to pressures on primary school provision and in certain areas of the Borough.

The Service Lead referred to a number of legal background considerations: -

- The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 and Department for Education guidance 'Expanding a maintained mainstream school by enlargement or adding a sixth form' stated that local authorities had a duty to: -
 - Ensure there were sufficient school places;

- Promote diversity;
 - Increase parental choice;
 - There should be a system where all parents felt that they had the same opportunities to apply for the school they wanted for their child;
 - Provide quality provision for all children that was responsive to the needs of parents and children.
- The Department for Education advised that the proposals to extend successful and popular schools should be approved and that the existence of surplus capacity in neighbouring schools should not in itself be sufficient to prevent expansion.

The Service Lead's presentation made reference to: -

1. Update on the schedule of primary school organisation proposals;
2. Admissions, Appeals and Catchment Areas;
3. New Arrivals.

Locally and nationally, preparation for children to start in Foundation Stage 2 (FS2) [Reception] in September, 2012, had been the most challenging ever:-

- 53 of the Borough's schools for FS2 were full or over subscribed;
- There were 109 children whose first, second or third preference could not be met. In these cases, the next nearest school with places had been offered;
- During the year 2012/13, in FS2 only, 75 additional places had been created;
- For September, 2013, 455-805 proposed FS2 places would be created across 11 schools, dependent on discussions with Headteachers and Governing Bodies;
- The Local Authority was a net gainer of pupils from other Local Authorities;
- Two schools were unable to accommodate children from their catchment area where a preference had been made (13 children);
- School expansions – Department for Education allocations and Section 106 agreements;
- For the 2012/13 school year, there had been a total of 538 School Admission Appeals logged with Committee Services;
- Consultations on catchment areas would not take place until September, 2013, at the earliest due to linking up with communications in respect of the Local Development Framework;
- Lessons learned included the greater emphasis on multi-agency cross-service intelligence being used to consider birth statistics, parental preferences and attendance at nursery provision to plan FS2 provision;
- Support networks had been put in place in relation to Slovakian and Roma families, including a developing Special Educational Needs pathway to ensure that assessment took place quickly, admissions and support from GCSE level into accessing Further Education courses.

Discussion ensued, and members of the Improving Lives Select Commission raised the following salient issues: -

- Provision of Section 106 monies from developers – there were concerns

that these funds could automatically lead to Free Schools or Academies being built, removing the Local Authority from using the funding to address the issues of need in the area.

- Were there any children who were not in education and did not have an offer of a place? [anecdotal evidence suggested that this was the case for some families].
- There were numbers of siblings who did not have places in the same school, and the impact this could have on families.
- Travel costs to families in these situations.

Resolved: - (1) That the report be received and the content noted.

(2) That the Improving Lives Select Committee receive a report in relation to the scrutiny review undertaken by the Improving Places Select Committee into Section 106 agreements.

(3) That the Admissions Team be supported in their efforts to ensure that all of Rotherham's children and young people have an allocated school that they are attending particularly in terms of working with them to identify any children perceived to be slipping through the net.

(4) That the Improving Lives Select Commission receives further progress updates in relation to this issue.

30. 'PROPOSAL FOR A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO RESPOND TO THE DFE SEN GREEN PAPER 'SUPPORT AND ASPIRATIONS: A NEW APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY'.

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Operational Commissioner, Commissioning, Policy and Performance, Resources Directorate, and the Children's Disabilities Co-ordinator, Children and Young People's Services that informed the Improving Lives Select Commission of the decision of the Cabinet on 3rd October, 2012 (Minute No. C67 refers). Cabinet's decision was to support a proposed change management programme and project management approach to respond to the requirements on the DfE's Green Paper 'Support and Aspirations: a New Approach to Special Educational Needs'.

The Children and Families Bill was expected in early 2013 which would set out the biggest Special Educational Needs reforms for thirty years. It would bring about a requirement for a strategic partnership response that would include Education, Health and Care Plans, Personal Budgets, joint and integrated commissioning, market facilitation and parental participation. It was thought likely that the provisions would be implemented from September, 2014.

Consultation was underway in relation to five clauses of the draft legislation and piloting of the reforms in pathfinder pilots was taking place across thirty-one local authorities. These included: -

- A single education, health and care plan from birth to 25 years old, focusing on whether outcomes for disabled children and their parents had been improved
- Personal budgets for parents of disabled children and those with Special

Educational Needs so they could choose which services best suited the needs of their children;

- Strong partnership between all local services and agencies working together to help disabled children and those with Special Educational Needs;
- Improved commissioning, particularly through links to health reforms;
- The role of voluntary and community sector organisations and parents in a new system;
- The cost of reform.

Pilots were underway in relation to: -

- Developing a health, education, care plan from birth to 25 years;
- Personal budgets.

These were significant requirements and a change management programme and project management approach was proposed to meet them. This included that a Project Group be set up as the overarching body to take forward this work. Issues that required a strategic approach included the Education, Health and Care Plan, Personal Budgets, joint and integrated Commissioning, market facilitation and market management. Sub-groups would sit underneath the Project Group.

Discussion ensued, and the following issues were raised by Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission: -

- Requirements to be met from existing resources;
- Listening to the voice of families and providing what they wanted;
- Supporting parents and carers to utilise the Personal Budget allocations;
- Ensuring that children and young people's needs were met;
- Role of 'Key Worker' as the long-term, ongoing liaison between services and families;
- Workforce development requirements;
- Impact on existing services.

Resolved: - (1) That the change management programme and strategic project management approach adopted to respond to the reforms outlined in the Children and Families Bill be noted.

(2) That further reports be provided to this Commission in due course.

(3) That Councillor Lindsay Pitchley be nominated to be the Improving Lives Select Commission's Representative on the Strategic Planning Group.

31. SAFEGUARDING ACTION PLAN.

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Performance and Quality Manager, Commissioning, Policy and Performance, Resources Directorate, and the Interim Service Manager, Safeguarding Children and Families, Children and Young People's Services.

The report informed Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission on

the outcome and resulting action plan from the Ofsted inspection of Rotherham's arrangements for the protection of children, which took place between 2nd and 11th July, 2012.

The inspection report produced by Ofsted, and the Children and Young People's Services Improvement Panel's Action Delivery Plan that was produced in October, 2012, to address the 13 inspection recommendations, was considered by the Commission. There was a timeline for addressing the recommendations: three were classed as requiring immediate attention, seven were required to be addressed within three months and three were required to be addressed within six months.

Rotherham was the second local authority in the country to be inspected under the new Ofsted framework. Overall, Rotherham had been judged to be Adequate, and had received four separate judgements: -

- Overall effectiveness – Adequate
- The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people and families and carers - Adequate
- The quality of practice - Adequate
- Leadership and governance – Adequate.

Inspectors agreed that there had been a series of improvements since 2009; some areas of good practice were identified, whilst in other areas Inspectors felt that it was too early to judge the changes that had been made. This contributed to the overall grading. Comments received on the work that the Local Authority demonstrated in relation to the Slovakian and Roma communities were that it was exceptional.

Seven inspection reports had been published where inspections had been carried out under the new framework; four of these reports gave the local authority a grading of 'Inadequate'.

The inspection report confirmed that in Rotherham there was a commitment of all staff to keep children and young people safe and ensuring their wellbeing.

In preparation for Ofsted's future revised inspection framework that assessed all multi-agency partners, the action plan had been developed alongside partner organisations. A learning event was held on 28th September for all partners to challenge each other, develop case studies and confirm priorities for improvement.

A multi-agency referral form had been redesigned and issued to partners to use when making referrals to children's social care. This would ensure that referrals followed a standardised format and met the criteria for referral to social care.

Discussion ensued, and Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission made reference to the following issues: -

- **Was the action plan on target to meet its deadlines?** – The action plan was on target and monthly publications of revised policies was taking place;
- **Would meeting all of the recommendations on the action plan give**

Rotherham a Good grading? – The action plan responded to the recommendations highlighted in the inspection and meeting these would not automatically bring Rotherham into a Good grading. However, as part of the action plan, all of the Children and Young People's Services partners were now fit for the new Ofsted Inspection framework. Efforts would be ongoing to ensure Rotherham became at least a Good rated service;

- **What was the external message provided following this outcome?** – The inspection outcome demonstrated that there was a secure Service for children, young people and families which was boosted by its focus on providing early help;
- **What was the Council doing to reinforce this message and provide reassurance to members of the public that children in Rotherham were being kept safe?** – It was confirmed that there was shortly to be a position statement posted on the website in relation to sexual exploitation. This was intended to provide useful reassurance and guidance to communities concerned about the issue;
- **What other ways had the Service prepared for inspections?** – Children and Young People's Services had been members of the Local Government Association's Peer Support programme and had worked with other local authorities as a critical friend;
- **Did any long-term social work vacancies now exist within the Service and why had the agency and out-of-authority placement budgets slightly overspent?** – There were no long-term social work vacancies in the Service, which had reduced from fifty, and was a result of the Authority's efforts in recruitment and retention and 'grow your own' social work initiatives. There was around 8.9 vacancies being filled through agency staff but efforts were underway to permanently recruit to these posts. There were currently 426 looked after children, which had risen from just under 400 children;
- **Could the Service continue its upwards trajectory in a time of cuts?** – The Service was currently stable and children were being protected from harm. Further planned changes to Welfare Benefits would be a critical time for the Service.

Resolved: - (1) That the report be received and its content noted.

(2) That a further report in relation to progress against the action plan be presented to the Improving Lives Select Commission in six-months' time.

32. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME - UPDATE.

The Scrutiny Manager, Legal and Democratic Services, Resources Directorate, provided an update on the Improving Lives Select Commission's work programme.

It was suggested that two areas on the work programme be taken forward through task and finish groups. These were anti-bullying work in schools and early help and prevention. It was noted that the anti-bullying work in schools had been requested through the Youth Cabinet and that representatives of the Youth Cabinet would contribute to the review, along with their support officers.

It was anticipated that the task and finish groups for each item would be able to report to the December meeting of this Commission and that the meeting's

agenda would cover both items.

Depending on the success of the task and finish groups, there would be scope to address other items on the work programme in the same way. Possible topics included domestic abuse and countering child exploitation.

Resolved: - (1) That the Improving Lives Select Commission establish two task and finish groups in relation to the following, and that five Members of the Commission sit on each: -

- Anti-bullying work in schools – Councillor Buckley to sit on this group;
- Early Help and Prevention – Councillors Pitchley and G. A. Russell to sit on this group.

(2) That a further update in relation to this Commission's work programme be presented to the December meeting.

33. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING:-

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Wednesday 19th December, 2012, commencing at 1.30 pm in the Rotherham Town Hall.