

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
4th November, 2015**

Present:- Councillor Hamilton (in the Chair); Councillors Ahmed, Beaumont, Cutts, Hague, Hoddinott, Jones, Rose, Rosling, Taylor, Elliot, M. Vines, Jepson and Reeder and Co-opted Member Ms. J. Jones.

Apologies for absence were received from the Mayor (Councillor Clark), Councillor Astbury and Co-opted Member Mr. M. Smith.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No Declarations of Interest were made.

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

No members of the public or the press were in attendance.

24. COMMUNICATIONS.

It was noted that Councillor S. Currie had left the Improving Lives Select Commission and that he had been replaced by Councillor J. Elliot.

25. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2015.

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 23rd September, 2015, were considered.

From the matters arising on the previous minutes, 22nd July, 2015, Councillor Hoddinott asked whether there was any advance in the CSE scorecard. In July it had been promised in September. It was now November and it had not been submitted or circulated to Elected Members. How could the Improving Lives Select Commission scrutinise agencies' response to CSE without knowing or understanding the CSE profile?

Councillor Hoddinott asked for an update on Regulation 44 reports. She had asked at the September meeting how many Regulation 44 reports there had been over the past year, and where they had been reported to. She had not received a response.

It was noted that the Improving Lives Select Commission needed to appoint a lead to work with the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board on audit. Expressions of interest were received from Councillors Hoddinott and Ahmed.

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The Improving Lives Select Commission confirmed that Councillor Hoddinott would be the lead Member for this, with Councillor Ahmed acting as her substitute and receiving full information.

Resolved: - (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd September, 2015, be agreed as an accurate record and the matters arising updates be noted.

(2) That Councillor E. Hoddinott be confirmed as the Improving Lives Select Commission's lead Member in respect of Audit of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board. Councillor S. Ahmed will act as her substitute member and receive training and information requisite to the role.

26. EARLY HELP.

David McWilliams, Assistant Director Early Help and Family Engagement, Children and Young People's Services Directorate, was welcomed to the meeting to provide an update on Early Help. David gave a presentation and welcomed Members' questions and comments.

David's presentation covered the following information: -

- Storyboard;
- Early Help Vision;
- Leadership team and structure for Early Help and Family Engagement: -
 - There was currently one vacancy within the structure.
- What is early help?;
- Contact and reach of other services;
- One Family, One Worker, One Plan;
- 'Worked with' – co-production – not 'done to';
- Named worker;
- Families are encouraged to find their own solutions to their own problems;
- Ofsted inspections evaluation of the early help offer: -
 - Previous inspection feedback/outcomes had been that early help was not integrated enough. A scorecard had now been established to target the work;
- Early Help was working closely with the Multi-Agency Support Hub;
- Early Help was working on step down / step up arrangements for families entering the service and withdrawing from it;
- Re-referral rates were monitored;
- Wider workforce implications – investment in people working differently and an investment in permanent staff;
- Savings and efficiencies. Early Help provided cashless savings, it was important to know unit costs;
- Early Intervention Foundation (EiF);
- Interactive social media was planned, including self-help guides;

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- The service included youth work, and so encompassed statutory duties;
- The aim was to provide consistency across the Borough;
- The drop in the 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' rate to 6.4% had been due to Early Help teams getting in touch with members of the community to find out destinations.

Discussion and questions followed David's presentation. The following areas were covered: -

- Councillor M. Vines asked whether the delay in inspections of Children's Centres was a good thing? - David agreed that the additional preparation time was a good thing. Children's Centres worked to self-evaluation frameworks and knew the criteria that was required.
- Councillor M. Vines asked whether self-evaluation was the most reliable method of assessment? Were self-evaluators likely to reveal if they found issues of concern? - David had witnessed the personal commitment of staff in what was a tough and challenging job. They wanted to do a good job. Sixteen people had signed up for the challenge and they had the energy and expertise to do this;
- Councillor Ahmed asked about the online early help offer that included all agencies? - David explained that a meeting had been arranged to discuss this proposal;
- Councillor Ahmed asked about the cost of Early Help. Did it include working with additional families who were new to the caseload, or were these families part of current caseloads? - David explained that the Service had many links across the country to other Early Help provision. He had his own network of peer support. The Service's PDR completion rate was at 100% and the next step would be to look at the quality of the completion. Savings had been identified within the outturn budget;
- Councillor Elliot asked about team sizes. Were they receiving the right support, peer support and supervision? How did 'One Worker, One Family and One Plan' work for families that had multiple needs? When a worker was away, how were their cases covered? David explained that the teams were large and based with other professionals working in the area with local knowledge. Contingency planning was worked through with management and through talking to family members;
- Councillor Hoddinott asked about how Early Help could assist with the types of issues that were brought to elected member surgeries, including issues relating to low level anti-social behaviour and housing issues. David explained about the developing web presence, which would provide a library of information individuals and families could look at. Elected members would be aware of who their local early help team were. It was important that referrals did not bypass the front door;

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- Councillor Hoddinott asked whether the housing and police agencies would be keyed in to families' workers? - David explained how this development work was continuing but the Safer Rotherham Partnership meetings would be considered;
- Councillor M. Vines asked whether there were any agencies that were not coming forward? – David was confident that with a credible offer, participation would remain strong and continue to improve;
- Councillor Hamilton asked what success would look like? – David explained that this would be said by the families themselves. Were they happy, how had things improved for them, along with complaints and compliments received giving a picture of the service;
- Councillor Hamilton asked whether the service had enough staff to respond to need? – David described his team as hard working who regularly worked beyond their hours. There were currently the right numbers of staff, they had the right skills, but there was a need to ensure that they were maintained. Deployment/ location of bases would be looked at.

Councillor Hamilton thanked David for his presentation and informative contribution to the discussion. As the Early Help structure was at a formative stage, it was requested that a future update be provided.

Resolved: - (1) That the information shared about Early Help be noted.

(2) That an update be shared in the future outlining the Service's initial progress.

27. CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL CARE ISSUES.

Councillor Hamilton welcomed Ian Thomas, Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services Directorate, and Michelle Whiting, Interim Looked After Children Adviser, Safeguarding Children and Families' Services, to the meeting.

Ian and Michelle, with reference to the submitted reports, informed Elected Members about the current situation relating to Rotherham's residential homes. Ian started his presentation with an apology to Elected Members for the very disappointing outcomes that had been reported. Ian expected progress and knew that there was much more to do.

Ian and Michelle covered the following areas in their presentation on Rotherham's Woodview and Saint Edmund's residential homes: -

- Regular independent Regulation 44 Visits had been conducted. Copies of the reports were submitted to the Assistant Director for Safeguarding Children and Families and Ofsted;
- The material condition of the homes;
- Practices in the homes;

- Culture and that fact that homes were not child-centred;
- None of the children living at the homes were being abused whilst in the Local Authority's care, but the mechanisms in place at the homes did not show that staff were curious about the comings and goings of the young people living there;
- The Local Authority had taken the decision to close Woodview. The children who had lived there were moved to provision that was Ofsted judged to be Good or better;
- Management actions following the close of Woodview would be appropriate;
- In relation to Saint Edmund's, an improvement plan had been issued and submitted to Ofsted;
- Educational outcomes had been found to be good at Saint Edmund's, although there were still areas of concern.

Ian described a future options appraisal process that would take place in relation to Rotherham's current offer of residential homes. The process would look at value for money and outcomes.

The role of Regulation 44 visits was considered, along with the enhanced involvement that Rotherham's Corporate Parenting Panel would have. This included ensuring that there were strong protocols around the visits so that they were conducted in a controlled way that did not encroach on the young people's homes. It had also been agreed that elected members would act in roles as 'Champions' for issues relating to looked after children's lives.

Discussion followed and the following questions were raised: -

- Councillor M. Vines described the Ofsted outcomes as embarrassing. He asked what the hold-up was in progress being seen? – Ian explained how the improvement journey would take three to five years. Progress had been made in the developing Mash and tackling CSE. The negative outcomes in relation to the residential homes were set-backs. The Local Authority was committed to its looked after children and had launched the nine Promises to them setting out what they could expect and what they were entitled to from Rotherham Council;
- Councillor Hoddinott asked why issues at the homes had not been tackled based on the reports provided by the Independent Visitor? It was really disappointing to learn that staff at Saint Edmund's awareness of CSE was found to be low. – Ian explained how the issues had come to the fore and how proprietries had addressed. The concerns reported around CSE related to recording and monitoring, rather than there being a direct issue. Michelle explained how work with the Police had taken place to ensure that there were strengthened risk assessments;

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- Councillor Jones asked why the monthly Regulation 44 visits had not identified the problems that were clear to Ofsted. Michelle explained that the interim Head of Residential had been tasked with understanding the evidence that was coming forward;
- Councillor Jepson asked whether the positions found at Woodview and Saint Edmund's applied at the other homes? – Ian explained the work that was continuing to look at standards. These issues would be considered through the options appraisal;
- Councillor Ahmed explained how she was deeply saddened and concerned about the failure for the young people. She was concerned about the emotional impact that living in inadequate environments could bring. The looked after young people needed the best environment, any exposure to poor environments could make young people think that that level was acceptable. How would they be able to challenge poor experiences if they did not know their rights? - Ian explained the voice and influence work that was taking place. A video had been produced for all stakeholders. An event had been held at the New York Stadium where the pledge to looked after children and young people had been shared. There were independent channels by which to raise concerns. All staff were encouraged to treat and respond to looked after young children as though they were their own child. The Independent Reviewing Officer team was a small team with a range of experience and specialisms;
- Councillor Clark had submitted a question via Deborah Fellowes, Scrutiny Manager, asking about the process for informing Ward Members. She had not been aware until it was raised with her in the Ward. – Ian explained that there was a sequence of who was informed and when. There were some who were informed first because of their statutory responsibilities;
- Councillor Hoddinott felt that these issues should not have been a surprise. They should have been picked up by the Regulation 44 visits. It was important that Elected Members had oversight of all issues and services for looked after children. – Ian and Michelle agreed that the services needed to be rigorously scrutinised;
- Councillor Hamilton asked what would happen to the intended refurbishment of the residential homes? - Ian explained that this would be placed on hold until the outcome of the options appraisal was known.

Councillor Hamilton thanked Ian and Michelle for their presentation and informative contribution to the discussions. She asked that the Improving Lives Select Commission be kept informed of the progress in relation to residential homes for looked after children and that they be considered as stakeholders to the decisions made.

Resolved: - (1) That the information shared be noted.

(2) That future updates be provided to the Improving Lives Select Commission informing them of progress made.

28. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME.

Deborah Fellowes, Scrutiny Manager (Legal and Democratic Services, Resources and Transformation Directorate) introduced the report that outlined the Improving Lives Select Commission's proposed work programme for 2015/2016. The report outlined what would be covered in each meeting.

Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission were asked to state any other areas that they felt should form part of the priorities to be considered. The following topics were raised: -

- Survivors;
- Survivors with children;
- Parents and carers of survivors;
- Supporting the workforce in the Children and Young People's Services Directorate: -
 - Key competency framework;
 - Appraisals and monthly supervision, along with direct supervisions/observations;
 - Performance management;
 - Training requirements;
 - Capability procedures.

Resolved: - (1) That the proposed Improving Lives Select Commission work programme for 2015/2016 be accepted, along with the suggested additions received in the meeting.

29. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING: -

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Wednesday 16th December, 2015, to start at 1.30 pm in the Rotherham Town Hall.