

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Wednesday, 21st September, 2016**

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Allcock, Bird, Cooksey, Cusworth, Elliot, Fenwick-Green, Jarvis, Marriott, Napper and Short.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor Pitchley), from Councillors Beaumont, Khan, Senior and Tweed and from co-opted member Mrs. J. Jones.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

20. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

21. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no issues to report.

22. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27TH JULY, 2016

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 27th July, 2016, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

23. ROTHERHAM LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

Consideration was given to the 2015/16 Annual Report of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The Improving Lives Select Commission welcomed Mrs. Christine Cassell (Chair of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)) who presented the Annual Report.

The report and accompanying presentation highlighted the following issues:-

: Children and Social Work Bill, currently being considered in Parliament, which will change the statutory guidance provided for a Local Authority's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LCSB);

: the LSCB will co-ordinate what is done by each person/organisation and promote the welfare of children and ensure the effectiveness of work being undertaken to safeguard children;

: the report of the Office for Standards in Education (2014 Ofsted Report) had concluded that the effectiveness of the Rotherham LSCB was inadequate at that time;

: as a result, the LSCB received an increase in resources to enable it to carry out its functions effectively;

: the LSCB now uses the same performance framework as the Local Authority Improvement Board, so as to monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding;

: the past year has included an increase in the number of audits; the LSCB will consider the individual audits of the safeguarding role of partner agencies and organisations; these audits are open to scrutiny and challenge;

: open meetings are held in which partners challenge each other's processes – a means of ensuring organisational transparency in respect of their work to ensure the safeguarding of children;

: there is evidence of good work being undertaken by the Evolve Team dealing with child sexual exploitation;

: there is already improved compliance with statutory guidance (eg: assessment work being completed on time);

: the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), established by the Borough Council, the Police and other partner agencies is undertaking good work by sharing information and making early decisions in respect of safeguarding;

: the re-launch of the Early Help Service (in February 2016) was an important part of the Safeguarding process;

: a future challenge is to improve service quality (eg: of front-line work with families and vulnerable children and young people); such improvement will require good multi-agency understanding of the thresholds, which in turn determine the level of intervention needed for individual cases, based on the assessments undertaken;

: one LSCB priority area is to ensure that organisations take responsibility for determining the degree of Early Help required; some organisations must take the lead in respect of this aspect of safeguarding;

: the Rotherham LSCB priorities for 2016/17 are : governance and accountability; community engagement and the voice of children and young people; scrutinising front-line practice including Early Help; the safeguarding of Looked after Children; child sexual exploitation and children who go missing; Neglect (an issue which encompasses domestic abuse, alcohol and substance misuse by parents, as well as mental

health issues affecting both children and young people and their parents);

: the mantra that safeguarding is everyone's business (eg: of both the statutory and voluntary organisations and also the wider community).

Members' questions included the following issues:-

(i) the perceived gap in education (especially for secondary school pupils) in respect of child sexual exploitation and the need to address this gap – the LSCB has a sub-group which has assessed the initiatives being used in schools (eg: the use of drama/theatre groups in schools – Chelsea's Choice and Working for Marcus); there is also the provision of outreach support for school-age children and young people, which is another development introduced since April 2016;

(ii) the use of drama/theatre groups has enabled agencies to share key messages with children and young people who are not attending mainstream school (eg: they may attend pupil referral units);

(iii) the awareness of disability and long-term illness – there is an apparent increase in the number of children and young people in this category; whether this increase is accurate and/or appropriate in all individual cases; LSCB intends to ensure that those children and young people who are in this category are being properly safeguarded (although the LSCB does not itself assess the appropriateness of any individual being classified within this category);

(iv) visits to the Rotherham town centre by children and young people have reduced, because of anxiety about personal safety – this is a recurring theme from the Lifestyle Survey of Rotherham's primary and secondary school-age children and young people; there is a specific concern about being in the Rotherham Interchange (bus station), especially in the evening; the Safer Rotherham Partnership has also examined ways of providing reassurance to children and young people visiting the Rotherham town centre;

(v) meetings have taken place with schools' head teachers concerning safeguarding in schools (eg: anti-bullying policies and support for the victims of bullying) and also to engage with children and young people so that they may gain a better understanding of safeguarding issues;

(vi) assessing the incidence of female pupils being harassed in school; the Lifestyle Survey has a set format of questions which facilitates the year-on-year comparison of responses; an additional question about the harassment of female pupils may be included in the future, although the LSCB has no direct control over the contents of the Lifestyle Survey;

(vii) young people and use of alcohol; Members asked to be informed of the definition of a "large proportion" of pupils, as contained in the Lifestyle Survey;

(viii) female genital mutilation – there is national legislation concerning the requirement to report incidences of female genital mutilation; a multi-agency conference held during the Summer 2016 alerted all organisations of the need to identify young girls at risk (eg: children being taken out of school); the LSCB will keep under review the statutory reporting requirement for certain professionals and organisations;

(ix) the LSCB acknowledges that there is more work to do to ensure that the voices of children and young people are being listened to; this is known to be a national issue and will be a future priority for the LSCB, which will continue to ask for evidence from the various agencies and organisations that the voices of children and young people are being obtained;

(x) Lay members of the LSCB and their accountability – they are elected as lay members and bring that perspective to the LSCB Board, although they are not accountable in the same way as Elected Councillors are; the lay members do have accountability as full members of the LSCB;

(xi) addressing the weaknesses identified by the 2014 Ofsted Report - particularly in terms of quality assurance, learning and improvement, governance; the LSCB will ensure that further improvements are made in terms of quality assurance and that partner organisations are being transparent in bringing/sharing information and challenging each other;

(xii) it was acknowledged that the Annual Report covers 2015/16 and therefore more up-to-date information may already have been provided for Elected Members in respect of specific issues;

(xiii) the LSCB will review the skills and resources available for the Early Help service and will act appropriately if any shortage becomes apparent;

(xiv) the continuity of dealing with individual casework – a very important aspect in terms of safeguarding (acknowledging that changes of personnel do sometimes occur); the LSCB expects there to be greater stability in the workforce, especially amongst social workers; the turnover of agency social workers should reduce; the recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff is an important issue under the consideration of the Local Authority;

(xv) updates and reports on the work of the Early Help service are submitted regularly to the LSCB meetings, as well as reports on whether this work “is making a difference”;

(xvi) whether there is an increase in the incidence of professional staff escalating their concerns (within their organisations) about individual cases; there are examples but no data on whether there is an increasing incidence; the LSCB does support and promote the use of escalation to ensure that mechanisms are in place to allow such escalation of

concerns;

(xvii) feedback to agencies which make referrals and how this process is operating in practice; there is the use of online forms for referrals; quality audits are undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the interaction with the referring agency; a streamlining of the service will be undertaken by the MASH; currently, the feedback provided to those agencies making the initial referral is inconsistent and the MASH will carry out a review;

(xviii) Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 – the number of Section 47 assessments is high and may reflect the fact that, in Rotherham, the professionals involved in these assessments are risk-averse and ought to review the methods of weighing up the evidence before them;

(xix) there has been an increase in referrals of cases of child sexual exploitation during the months after publication of the report by Professor Alexis Jay; there has also been an increase in the number of care proceedings issued by local authorities; Rotherham has a larger number of Looked After Children than its statistical neighbour local authorities; the early and effective intervention in families with difficulties should assist in avoiding higher-level intervention later on; the LSCB will keep under review the support mechanisms available to try and prevent a child being taken into care;

(xx) child protection plans and the expectation of reducing numbers of these plans; the LSCB will undertake audits of single agencies and on a multi-agency basis and will review whether correct decisions are being made and to ensure that children are not unduly being omitted from this process; (Members of the Select Commission requested statistical information about this matter);

(xxi) Looked After Children returning to Rotherham from an out-of-authority placement – the need to ensure that there are sufficient placements available within or near to the Rotherham Borough area for this Authority's Looked After Children (although an individual's specific circumstances may require a placement much further away from this local area);

(xxii) child protection conferences – monitoring of actions identified at audit; the LSCB will take action in cases where the audit recommendations are not being implemented;

(xxiii) emergency holding/placements for Looked After Children as a consequence of specific incidents; the LSCB will review the use of emergency placements for Looked After Children as part of its 2016/17 work programme;

(xxiv) Members requested the precise definitions for children and young people who are repeat absconders and for those categorised as missing children;

(xxv) low attendance by Looked After Children at dental care appointments and ensuring the timely health assessments for Looked After Children – the LSCB will receive and consider the report of the multi-agency group which is investigating this issue; efforts will be made to ensure that Looked After Children receive these assessments; this aspect involves joint working with Corporate Parenting Panel which has a more detailed oversight of the issue;

(xxvi) return home interviews undertaken by professionals other than the child/young person's individual case worker; practice has shown that the use of an independent person is preferable for the young person concerned (the Annual Report contains case work examples);

(xxvii) Taxi licensing standards to be consistent across local authority regions – the Rotherham LSCB will confer on this issue with other authorities' LSCBs;

(xxviii) conviction rates for historical cases of child sexual exploitation – the LSCB does review historic cases and ensures that preventative work and disruption work is undertaken; it is the duty of the LSCB to examine significant cases and the LSCB will continue to ask appropriate questions about the effectiveness of the current work being undertaken;

(xxix) although domestic abuse is not shown as a priority of LSCB, there is a current focus on a few specific priorities to ensure the effective use of available resources; the domestic abuse issues will be included as part of the focus on Neglect as a priority of the LSCB;

(xxx) the incidence of forced marriages taking place in Rotherham; Members of the Select Commission will receive appropriate information as to whether any forced marriages have taken place;

(xxxi) the multi-agency risk assessment conferences – the 90% contact rate is good and Members asked how does this rate compare with other LSCBs nationally – answers to this question (and other detailed questions to be submitted to the LSCB, will be provided at a later date);

(xxxii) children missing from care homes and the use of return interviews – whether children may be contacted again by the interviewer later on and whether children would be prepared to divulge more information at a later interview; there will be follow-up/repeat interviews offered if an initial interview is unsuccessful; this is a developing issue for continuing review by the LSCB;

(xxxiii) the LSCB has data about children who go missing again, after they have had a return interview; the LSCB will continue to review the effectiveness of the return interviews and the impact upon the lives of vulnerable children and young people;

(xxxiv) return interviews previously being undertaken by the Safe@Last organisation, although they are now undertaken by the Local Authority's Children and Young People's Services; the LSCB sub-group will be asked to reflect upon the relative effectiveness of the two organisations conduct of return interviews;

(xxxv) the LSCB will clarify the meaning of the statistics about outstanding referrals, as shown in the Annual Report;

(xxxvi) the way in which the use of audits is helping to improve practice will continue to be reviewed by the LSCB;

(xxxvii) further details will be supplied to Members on the outcome and impact of audits and case reviews;

(xxxviii) the Prevent Strategy – the LSCB has a responsibility for the review of the effectiveness of this Strategy in Rotherham (but does not own it); currently, there is dialogue with the Home Office about the possible release of appropriate information to ensure effective working in respect of this Strategy;

(xxxix) the home schooling of children and the presence of unregistered schools in the Rotherham Borough area; the LSCB will review the extent of the statutory powers of available to local authorities to inspect the circumstances of children who are educated at home;

(xxxx) the MASH screening process has to be consistent; the LSCB has a sub-group which reviews the MASH processes and the sufficiency of guidance processes which inform the work of the MASH;

(xxxxi) what do children say about their experience of the safeguarding system? – further detail is needed to respond to this very broad question; the LSCB will consider this matter in the future, including information available from within the Lifestyle Survey;

(xxxxii) the way in which children and young people are supported to express their wishes and feelings; the LSCB is preparing guidance material for professionals so that they may assist children and young people appropriately in this matter;

(xxxxiii) the availability of evidence of systems to ensure that children and young people participate in decisions affecting their lives; the expectation is that that professional staff do listen and take account of the voices of children and young people;

(xxxxiv) providing evidence to show that agencies ensure that the voices and opinions of children and young people, about their needs, have an influence upon organisations' decision-making and service provision at a strategic level.

Members thanked the Chair of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding

Children Board for presenting the Annual Report.

Resolved:- (1) That the 2015/16 Annual Report of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board, as now submitted, be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board be requested to:-

(a) request the inclusion within future years' Lifestyle Surveys of an appropriate questions about the harassment of female pupils in schools;

(b) furnish details of the sufficiency strategy in respect of the provision of emergency accommodation for vulnerable children and children missing from home;

(c) provide information about any unregistered schools situated in the Rotherham Borough area;

(d) request the Corporate Parenting Board to review the health assessments of the Authority's Looked After Children in order to improve both the regularity of provision and the rate of attendance at such assessments.

(3) That Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission be invited to submit further detailed questions on the contents of the 2015/16 annual report, for later response in writing from the LSCB.

(during the Select Commission's consideration of the above item, Councillor Clark vacated the Chair to attend a previously arranged meeting and the Vice-Chair, Councillor Allcock assumed the Chair for the remainder of this meeting)

24. CHILDREN LIVING WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE - INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

The Select Commission received a presentation from Mrs. M. Meggs, Deputy Director of Children and Young People's Services, about the proposed inspection framework for children living with domestic abuse.

The presentation highlighted the following salient issues:-

: the Government's definition of domestic abuse as "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 years or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members"; this definition includes but is not limited to the following type of abuse : psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional;

: domestic abuse can be significant and harmful for children who witness

it and is often categorised as : emotional abuse; physical abuse; neglect.

: the impact is on every aspect of a child's life;

- Education (including attendance at school);
- Emotional well-being (children may feel they are to blame);
- Social well-being;
- Cognitive (brain) development;

: statistics about the prevalence of domestic abuse and specific details relating to the Rotherham Borough area; referrals would usually be from the Police who have a system of assessing the incidents of domestic abuse as either low, medium or high risk;

: the serious lifelong impact of domestic abuse, including different impact upon males and females;

: the statutory agencies must take the necessary action to : protect the child; empower the non-abusing parent and hold the abuser to account (in order to end the abusing behaviour);

: the protection of the child ought to include early referral to the relevant agencies and to support services and the following actions/assessments in accordance with the needs of the individual:-

- Child Protection Plan (Section 47, Children Act 1989 assessment)
- Child in Need Plan
- Early Help

: further reading of the "In Plain Sight" document, containing the evidence from children exposed to domestic abuse, from the Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA); Internet website link below:-

<http://www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Final%20policy%20report%20In%20plain%20sight%20-%20effective%20help%20for%20children%20exposed%20to%20domestic%20abuse.pdf>

: the key questions for the scrutiny of support services responding to domestic abuse:-

- How well does the Council identify and support victims of domestic abuse?
- How well does the Council work with others to identify and support victims?

: Future actions:-

- Innovation Bid (for funding) jointly by all four South Yorkshire Councils;
- Scale-up the Doncaster MBC model – it is known that domestic abuse has begun to reduce after the introduction of this model;

- A programme of work with communities which are known to experience high levels of domestic abuse.

Members' questions referred to the following issues:-

(i) the way in which evidence of domestic abuse is obtained, in order to assess its impact upon families – the basic social work assessment will examine the circumstances in which families are living; some victims will self-identify; the Police are now empowered to progress prosecutions without the need for testimony from victims; statutory agencies being able to understand the whole perspective (of family circumstances) and therefore recognise signs and symptoms of domestic abuse;

(ii) being able to evidence coercive behaviour (eg: on a victim's personal finances); refraining from labelling people as perpetrators of domestic abuse where there is no evidence of such behaviour; the social work assessment is vital in such cases, together with the role of the Police in investigating possible criminal acts of domestic abuse;

(iii) the range of measures in place to deal with the abusers; the way in which success may be measured in terms of preventing or terminating domestic abuse; some of the pilot projects include working with offenders in the pre-conviction period, although success-rates have been inconsistent; success rates may ultimately improve if funding is eventually obtained to develop further the innovative project begun within Doncaster MBC;

(iv) the impact of domestic abuse (and neglect) upon households which may include elderly people and/or younger people with a disability, all of whom may have significant and demanding care needs; the possibility of other children and young people in the household being neglected because of the demands of those people in the household who require extensive care; - it was acknowledged that domestic abuse is a multi-dimensional issue and the Community Safety Unit within Rotherham MBC takes the lead in responding to incidents of domestic abuse; there are also specialist support services for children and young people who have a disability; there is a wide-ranging capability amongst the various agencies in respect of dealing with the impact of domestic abuse upon vulnerable children and adults; the Police also have authority to instigate prosecutions in cases where the victims of domestic abuse are reluctant to do so;

(v) it was acknowledged that published statistics may not reflect the actual incidence of domestic abuse; comparatively, there is less investment in support services for children and young people than is similar services being provided for adults, although there are also differences in methods of providing support; the Early Help Service is useful for providing support, in addition to traditional social work services; the total costs of these services ought to be quantified; a review ought to include assessments of whether the statutory agencies are the most appropriate

organisations to provide the necessary support, the overall effectiveness of the provision of support services and the value for money being achieved;

(vi) the impact upon households in which a child has complex needs and where siblings may fulfil the role of young carer (sometimes the carer for an adult victim of domestic abuse); it was acknowledged that agencies are sometimes slow to identify this type of example, which may include the young carer suffering neglect; the Local Authority's short-breaks service enables parents to spend more time with their children, by providing support for the care of children and young people who have a disability.

Resolved:- (1) That the presentation about the inspection framework for children living with domestic abuse be received and its contents noted.

(2) That consideration of the following aspects of the inspection framework for children living with domestic abuse be included within the 2016/17 work programme of the Improving Lives Select Commission:-

: a targeted review of support services to ascertain whether the levels of funding and of other resources are sufficient to meet local needs in the Rotherham Borough area;

: effective means of gathering evidence about the perpetrators of domestic violence, including evidence of the use of coercive behaviour within the Rotherham Borough area;

: after an assessment of the provision of services for victims of domestic abuse available within the Rotherham Borough area, undertaking a comparison with and study of the Doncaster MBC model of service provision, which has been validated by Central Government and is the subject of independent audit and evaluation (this study to include a visit to Doncaster should that be deemed necessary).

(3) That the Safer Rotherham Partnership be requested to carry out an initial health check of the current state of services for victims of domestic abuse available within the Rotherham Borough area, especially the methods of identifying the perpetrators of domestic abuse and a report on this health check be submitted to the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission to be held on 14th December 2016.

25. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME AND PRIORITISATION 2016/17

Further to Minute No. 17 of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 27th July, 2016, consideration was given to a report, presented by the Senior Adviser (Scrutiny and Member Development), concerning the outline work programme for the Improving Lives Select Commission for the 2016/17 Municipal Year.

The specific topics discussed were;-

- (i) the role and function of the Corporate Parenting Panel and issues concerning this Authority's Looked After Children (including the placement of Looked After Children as a consequence of the closure of this Authority's Children's Residential Homes);
- (ii) alternative delivery models of social care and how this impacts on accountability, improvement and the delivery of this Authority's statutory social care duties; and
- (iii) from within the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions, the forthcoming progress report about the Council's response to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Dispersal Scheme; it was noted that this matter was being considered from a whole region (Yorkshire and the Humber) perspective, as well as on a sub-regional basis; a decision on the Dispersal Scheme was expected to be made during January 2017.

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

(2) That the Deputy Leader (and Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services) be requested to refer the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel to the Improving Lives Select Commission.

(3) That the Improving Lives Select Commission shall undertake a review of the effectiveness of alternative delivery models of social care and how this impacts on accountability, improvement and the delivery of the authority's statutory social care duties (Members were asked to volunteer to join the sub-group for this review).

(4) That the report about Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Dispersal Scheme be submitted for consideration at the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, to be held on Wednesday, 2nd November, 2016.