

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
11th June, 2019

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Clark, Elliot, Ireland, Khan, Marles, Marriott, Price, Senior, Short, Atkin, Fenwick-Green and Jarvis.

Also in attendance: John Edwards, Regional Schools Commissioner (East Midlands and the Humber Region); Councillor Watson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services; Pepe Di'Lasio, Assistant Director for Education; Ailsa Barr, Acting Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding; Sue Wilson, Head of Service, Performance and Planning and Anne Hawke, Performance Assurance Manager Early Help.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beaumont and Hague.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16 APRIL 2019

Resolved:-That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 16th April 2019, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Committee and placed on record her thanks to Councillor Amy Brookes for her work as Vice-Chair in the previous municipal year.

Members were informed that a work planning had been organised on Tuesday, 18th June, from 2.00-4.00pm. Members were invited to submit suggestions should they be unable to attend.

Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

The Chair reported that a Sub-Group had commenced a review of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) process which was nearing conclusion. Feedback would be provided to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

6. REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER (EAST MIDLANDS AND THE HUMBER REGION) - MR. JOHN EDWARDS

The Chair welcomed Mr. John Edwards, Regional Schools Commissioner (East Midlands and the Humber Region) to the meeting.

Mr. Edwards gave a brief introduction to his role and responsibilities. The Commissioner's region covered 17 local authority areas. There were 8 Regional Schools Commissioners working to a National Commissioner, and were accountable to the relevant Ministers for delivery of Ministerial priorities.

As Senior Civil Servants, the Commissioners had certain delegated decision making powers on behalf of the Secretary of State in relation to academies. These included identifying sponsors for inadequate maintained schools; making changes to academies and the formation of Multi-Academy Trusts; working with Local Authorities, Diocese and other related partners; making decisions on Free Schools and overseeing the 'school improvement offer' for those trusts who met the criteria.

Academies were educational charities, funded directly by Government to deliver education and regulated by Ofsted. The Commissioners work with academies to ensure that they were underpinned by sound governance and finance to deliver good educational outcomes. Within the region, the Commissioner outlined that there were 1,285 Academies; with more than 170 Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and a similar number of single academy trusts. His teams worked with the academies to support and challenge improvements.

Through academies, a school-led system of improvement was developing, supporting those schools where progress was needed to be made and sustaining good outcomes for schools which were successful. As part of a Trust, schools could access specific support improvement support, including specialist assistance with Maths and English and school leadership. Examples were given of specialist hubs and teaching schools based in Rotherham.

Focusing on Rotherham, the Commissioner highlighted that 65% of all Primary Schools were academies, working in single or MATs. All but one of Rotherham Secondary Schools were academies. Most of the large Trusts were based within the area and whilst this brought benefits of building capacity within the Borough, there was a challenge to ensure that good practice from elsewhere was shared to support improvements.

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It was noted that Rotherham outcomes had not kept pace with improvements that had taken place nationally. The Commissioner gave a commitment to work with Trusts and individual schools within the Borough to drive improvement and leadership.

In response to a question about the rising numbers of children who were being Elective Home Educated (“home schooled”) and comparisons with the national picture, the Commissioner outlined that the Government had recently commissioned the “Timpson Review” which had looked at a range of issues, including exclusions, Elective Home Education and children missing from education and would consult on proposals in due course. The Assistant Director for Education clarified that data was available and work was underway to analyse trends and good practice which would be submitted to a future meeting of the Commission. Responsibility for the safeguarding of children who were home education remained with the local authority.

Clarification was sought on the work underway regionally and nationally to support schools which had larger numbers of newly-arrived pupils, particularly those who joined the school roll after the standard transfer date and the challenge of working with transient populations. It was observed that there were some local authorities in the Commissioner’s region which were facing greater challenges in this respect. The Local Authority had a responsibility to secure a school place and trusts and maintained schools had a responsibility to ensure the student could transition into the provision. There was a range of approaches adopted by Trusts and Maintained Schools across the region to mitigate the impact, this included school liaison and language acquisition support, use of the Pupil Premium, sessions to familiarise students and families with the UK school system and specific pastoral support for children with additional vulnerabilities. The funding allocation was based on a number of criteria and provided a predictable platform for resources. The expectation, therefore, was that school leaders would use the funding allocated to meet the needs of its pupils accordingly.

The Commissioner was asked to outline how good practice was shared between schools and Trusts around the region. It was stated that this was done through a variety of means, including a formal accreditation process, bringing together national leaders of education, research-based schools in addition to the teaching schools, hubs and funded school improvement offer cited earlier. Many local areas had education partnerships providing formal brokerage and informal networks and there was an expectation that school leaders would share good practice amongst themselves.

Views were sought from the Commissioner on how well Rotherham shared good practice and the level of collaboration between the Local Authority and Trusts. The Commissioner outlined that he had been appraised of the Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership (RESP) by the Strategic Director and Assistant Director and had offered thoughts on its development. He observed that Rotherham had strong teaching

schools in the Borough, leading school improvement, training teachers and reaching out to other schools in the area. He perceived that there was a commitment that the Local Authority would drive a strategic partnership and willingness for Trusts to engage in this.

Further details were sought on improving educational outcomes, in particular if the Local Authority recognised the challenge and if it had a grip on what improvements were required. The Commissioner stated that there was recognition from senior officers and an ambition to make necessary improvements. In working with Trusts, the Commissioner issued challenge to improve outcomes at all levels. He observed that coming together in a local area could identify where problems arose and draw on good practice to address concerns accordingly.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Regional School Commissioner be thanked for his presentation
- 2) That a report be submitted by the Assistant Director for Education on Elective Home Education to a future meeting.

7. ROTHERHAM EDUCATION STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (RESP) UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Education gave an update of the key priorities identified by RESP and progress in meeting these.

The Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership (RESP) was established in 2018 following the Enabling School Improvement consultation. The first meeting was held on 24th October 2018 and the Board had been meeting half termly since.

RESP has brought together key partners from across Rotherham's education system enabling the work of key partners to be brought together into a coherent and effective strategic plan communicated through the Partnership. It aimed to maximise outcomes and improve life chances for children and young people, promote inclusion and reduce inequalities, to ensure that no school and no child or young person was left behind.

Previously there was an absence of a strategic body which held an overview of all educational partners and priorities. This had been brought together under RESP which aimed to ensure that the life of every child and young person was enhanced to the full by the provision of first class education.

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The priority areas were as follows: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND); Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT), Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). Actions and progress against these areas were detailed in the report.

The Assistant Director observed that whilst a relatively a new Partnership, progress had been made, with good levels of collaboration and co-construction of policy between the Local Authority and educational provision in Rotherham.

Clarification was sought on the support available to children with special needs or disabilities or other vulnerabilities and how more able pupils were supported. The Assistant Director stated that it was the vision of the authority to ensure that no child was disadvantaged. The focus on SEND was to address the lack of sufficiency in provision.

Reference was made in the report of concerns about the traded offer; details were asked to establish what has been done to address these. The Local Authority had a number of traded services which schools could buy into. However, there was a lack of clarity about what was a statutory obligation or traded. A key priority for next year would be to differentiate between what the Local Authority had to do and what schools wanted it to do which would be traded.

Further explanation was asked about dual funding and the responsibility of host schools to give a child a sense of belonging to their community. It was outlined that some students attended alternative provision which may be outside their local community. The host school had responsibility for funding this provision to ensure that the links between the pupil and host school were maintained. Whilst ever students were in alternative provision, Aspire, the Pupil Referral Unit, worked therapeutically to address students' needs and maintain and build links.

In response to a question about home visiting in relation to disadvantaged 2 year olds, the Assistant Director outlined that a successful bid in conjunction with South Yorkshire Futures and neighbouring authorities, had been achieved focusing on areas with low take-up. The bid would target families who were less likely to engage. Details of the evaluation and monitoring reports would be submitted to the Commission.

Assurance was sought about Elective Home Education (EHE) and how this was monitored. Each EHE family was visited to check on home provision, however, as numbers of families opting for EHE were increasing, this was proving challenging. A further question was asked to establish if there were any concerns about provision of EHE in households where English was not the first language; it was established that the issue had not been raised as a concern.

In respect to concerns raised about school funding, the Assistant Director had made representations to Government about funding options being applied from the date a child from a transient community joined a school rather than being determined from 'census date'. There had been positive engagement on this issue.

Reference was made to a previous report to the Commission (2018 Education Performance Outcomes, Minute No. 34 refers) where actions to boost the attainment of more able pupils were reported as a priority. It was noted, however, these actions were not referenced in the current report submitted to the Commission for consideration. The RESP priorities had been set prior to the Education Outcomes being published. Assurance was given that the attainment of more able pupils would feature as a strategic priority for RESP next year. It was stated that individual schools and Trusts would be addressing the needs of high performing and more able pupils in their own plans and targets.

Clarification was sought on how the progress and attainment of pupils attending academies who did not buy into the school traded offer was ensured. The Assistant Director cited the longstanding relationships with Rotherham schools and growing levels of positive collaboration. In respect of those academies which were not fully engaged, the Assistant Director met regularly with the Department for Education (through the Regional School Commissioner) and worked closely with the academy Chief Executives to ensure there was progress and concerns flagged appropriately.

Further details were asked about how the Commission could hold the Assistant Director and RESP to account for performance, particularly in respect of key milestones and a demonstration of effectiveness. The Assistant Director outlined that the annual performance outcomes report, which would be submitted to the Commission, would provide a vehicle for this enquiry.

Reference was made to the number of abbreviations and acronyms in the report. It was asked that in future reports that acronyms/abbreviations be explained appropriately.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the evaluation of the Early Years Home Visiting Project be submitted to this Commission.
- 2) That a report detailing key timelines, milestones and outcomes to reflect the difference that RESP is making be submitted to this Commission in December 2019.
- 3) That the above report detailed the actions taken to boost the performance of high performing and more able pupils.

8. CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES (CYPS) 2018/2019 YEAR END PERFORMANCE

The Acting Assistant Director for Childrens Safeguarding provided a summary of performance under key themes for Childrens and Young People's Service at the end of the 2018/19 reporting year. The report detailed performance in relation to: Early Help and Family Engagement; Children's Social Care; Education and Inclusion.

The Acting Assistant Director gave a brief presentation to the report which outlined areas which were working well; areas of concerns and actions to address these.

What's Working Well

- Timeliness of engagement with families in Early Help improved from 59.7% to 72.6%
- 97.2% people who completed the Early Help exit survey during the year rated the Service as good or excellent
- Timeliness of Early Help Assessments had improved from 47% to 62.9%
- The number of re-referrals into Social Care had further decreased during the year (23.1% to 21.3%)
- The number of referrals going onto assessment was 98.2% reflecting the quality of the processes in MASH
- The overall Children in Need (CIN) population reduced by 295 from 1,678 to 1,383 and those with an up-to-date plan increased from 82.8% to 90.5%.
- 95.5% of LAC visits were undertaken in statutory timescales, some months 98%.
- The Ofsted focussed visit recognised the significant improvements in permanency planning for Looked After Children.
- EYFS, KS2 (for writing) were both above national average
- Significant progress had been made during the year in developing a performance management framework for Inclusion Services which includes a version of "Insight"

What are we worried about

- 85.5% of Early Help contacts were triaged within 5 working days (against a target of 100%) but still improved performance on the previous year
- 46% of the families the Service were working with in the Families for Change Programme achieved outcomes that led to a Payment By Results (PBR) claim (871)
- The rate of Section 47 investigations continued to be high, however, they were still appropriate and the correct decision for the child
- Partners undertook 24.9% of Early Help Assessments (397), however, only 11 of those were undertaken by Health (0.68% of the total number)

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- The number of children in a commissioned placement (either Independent Fostering Agency or Residential) increased slightly by 1.8% from the previous year which meant that children were living further away from Rotherham
- The overall number of Initial Health Assessments completed within the 20 day timescale decreased from 55.7% to 52% since the previous year
- There had been a gradual decline of review health assessments during the year from a high of 92% to 83.7% at the end of March 2019
- KS1 and KS2 Reading needed to improve to close the gap to national average

What do we need to do next

- Continue to ensure that the right service at the right time was in place including work across CYPS and partners at all stages of the process particularly around thresholds
- Continue to embed key strategies (sufficiency, demand and market management) to ensure that families were supported
- Continue to work with families to achieve improved and sustained outcomes to achieve the Families for Change targets
- Continue to work with partners in Health to ensure that they undertook a larger number of Early Help Assessments
- Continue to work with schools to improve attainment in Reading through the traded services offer
- Continue to strengthen performance management arrangements in Inclusion Services

In response to a query about persistent absence, details were given about a range of interventions in place to support and escalate concerns. Assurance was given that schools took action and raised concerns promptly, and these were monitored closely by the performance leads in Early Help and Family Engagement.

In respect of Early Help Assessments undertaken by partners, the Service was asked if there were any barriers which prevented these being completed. Early Help leads worked closely with agencies to clarify process and levels of involvement and co-ordination. It was expected that numbers of Early Help Assessments would increase although it was recognised that current levels were at a low base.

A query was raised in respect of immunisation and if there were any levels of concern in this area. Work was underway with Health colleagues on how this was recorded and this would be brought back in a future report.

Clarification was sought if the measure on customer feedback was focussed on those who had a positive experience of Early Help or if it included those who had been stepped up to Social Care or had not engaged. The Early Help Assessment had been adapted to capture feedback on closure and the feedback form reviewed.

The format of the performance information and the quality of the narrative was commended. A query was asked in relation to comparative information (benchmarking with other authorities) and its timeliness. Work was underway with regional neighbours to draw together some comparative information to inform practice across other Early Help and Social Care Services. This would be shared as part of future reports.

The Chair asked for an overview of staff turnover, vacancies and caseloads and if there were any concerns in relation to these. Level of vacancies compared positively with authorities as did agency usage which was at a low rate.

Assurance was given that the performance in relation to Education, Care and Health Plans would improve. A query was raised in respect of Young People not in education, employment or training and if there was a detailed breakdown of the cohort. Assurance was given that this was the case. The Cabinet Member offered to meet with the Member to provide further clarification.

Clarification was sought on accessing Children Centres and incentives offered to parents. Further details would be sought from the Assistant Director Early Help and Family Engagement on any criteria applied.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report and accompanying datasets (Appendices 1 & 2) be received and consideration be given to the issues arising.
- 2) That the Commission give further consideration to its scrutiny of performance.

9. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there was no business that should be considered as a matter of urgency.

10. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Tuesday, 9th July, 2019, commencing at 5.30 p.m.