

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION

Tuesday, 28th July, 2020

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Jarvis, Atkin, Beaumont, Elliot, Fenwick-Green, Ireland, Marles, Pitchley, Senior and Simpson.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Buckley, Clark and Khan.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

78. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2020

Resolved: -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 16 June 2020, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

80. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the public or press.

81. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

Mr Liam Harron asked:

“Please can we have an explanation about the item on page 45 of the agenda papers relating to CSE Post Abuse Support Services.

What exactly is the role of this Commission with respect to Post Abuse Support services?”

In response the Chair advised that as a scrutiny committee the role of the Improving Lives Select Commission was to monitor the provision of the Post Abuse Support for survivors of CSE commissioned by the Council in order to ensure that the services provided were both of high quality and value for money. The Chair noted that a current needs analysis had been approved by Cabinet in June 2020 and that this needs was being used to inform the procurement and provision of CSE Post abuse support services in Rotherham.

The Chair advised that as part of its role, a sub-group of the committee had been established in 2019 in order to benchmark the provision of CSE

Post abuse support in Rotherham against services provided in other areas, and that it was this work that was referred to in the Sub and Project Group report in the agenda pack. The Chair advised that the sub-group would be continuing its benchmarking work against both the current provision in Rotherham as well as against the new services that would be implemented as a result of the current commissioning process that had been informed by the needs analysis.

As a supplementary question Mr Harron noted that when the Improving Lives Select Commission considered the draft needs analysis at its meeting on 2 March 2020 that the submitted papers contained errors and asked how could it be ensured that the right services that were fit for purpose were commissioned to support survivors of CSE.

In response the Chair advised that the only error she was aware of in the papers submitted on 2 March were with regards to the names on the other local authorities that the sub-group had benchmarked Rotherham against and advised that this error had been corrected before the needs analysis had been considered by Cabinet in June. The Chair reemphasised that the role of the Improving Lives Select Commission was to monitor performance and that the committee had no role in the commissioning of services or in the delays that there had been in the commissioning of new services. The Chair reaffirmed that the sub-group would be carrying its benchmarking work of both the current and recommissioned support services for CSE survivors in Rotherham against services provided elsewhere and noted that the results of this work would be shared and discussed in the public domain.

82. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair advised that she had attended the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel on 30 June where a report had been presented that had detailed the findings of a review of the LADO Process and its impact on foster carer retention in the Borough. The Chair advised that she would arrange for details of this review to be circulated to members of the commission.

83. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY - PROGRESS REPORT

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care, the Service Manager - Commissioning Performance and Quality and the Head of Development Programmes – Children's Services attended the meeting to present a report that provided a progress report on the delivery of the Looked After Children (LAC) Sufficiency Strategy 2019-2022 and also on impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on its delivery.

The report provided information on the delivery of key elements of the strategy, as well as detailing any current, or predicted future impacts of

the Covid-19 pandemic on its delivery including:

In-House Foster Carers

The report noted that Rotherham's new fostering recruitment website and customer relationship management system had been launched at the end of September 2019 and stated that it continued to generate interest in the Rotherham fostering offer. It was noted that since the recruitment website had been launched, 314 people had booked an initial information visit, and that while there had been some early fluctuations in interest it was noted that interest had remained steady during the pandemic.

It was noted that the pandemic had created some delay in the progression of assessments through March, April and May due to potential foster carers wanting to avoid physical meetings. The Service Manager - Commissioning Performance and Quality advised that this had been addressed by facilitating an offer of blended assessments that combined virtual and minimal direct physical contact sessions to ensure that assessments were able to progress. It was also noted that a virtual Skills to Foster training programme had commenced via Microsoft Teams for four prospective fostering households and that the Fostering Panel had continued to meet virtually. It was noted that it was predicted that performance on increasing the number of in-house foster carers was positive and that the numbers of new foster carers approved in 2020/21 would exceed performance for 2019/20 with a cohort of foster carers continuing to grow in terms of quality and availability.

IFA placements

It was noted that the White Rose Framework has provided positive support whilst managing Covid-19 by challenging providers who had approached individual local authorities to request an increase in fees. The Service Manager advised that whilst there had been very little impact on the fostering sector at the beginning of the pandemic, an increase in disruptions in foster placements for young people with challenging behaviours was now being reported. The Service Manager advised that there was concern that some foster carers were just holding onto until restrictions eased and that in the future a number of placements could break down which could lead to an increase in demand for looked after placements in the coming months.

In-borough Residential Provision

The report stated the strategy had led to an increase in local capacity of 16 places in the previous 18 months for placements that allowed children to retain local links and that were also less expensive than out of area private provision. The Service Manager advised that the impact of the pandemic had not negatively impacted on planned activities to source additional places.

In-house Residential Provision.

Activity to develop an in-house residential provision run by the Council had progressed as planned during the pandemic. It was noted that the recruitment and subsequent induction processes for the residential team had been delivered virtually, and, where face to face interactions had been required that this has been managed in line with social distancing guidance.

16+ Framework

The Head of Development Programmes – Children's Services noted that Rotherham's Flexible Purchasing System (FPS) for 16+ support and accommodation was now in its final stages and advised that the implications of the pandemic had not impacted on the original timescales planned for the procurement process.

Emergency Placements

It was noted that since restrictions related to the pandemic had been imposed in March 2020 that there have been between three and eight children placed in emergency provision at one any time. The Head of Development Programmes advised that the pandemic made it more difficult to identify long-term placements for some children who had been placed in emergency placements as quickly as was usually the case.

Members noted with concern that an increase in disruptions in foster placements for young people with challenging behaviours were now being reported and that this risked that these placements would break down once restrictions on daily life were eased further. Members asked what support was being offered to prevent placements breaking down. The Assistant Director - Children's Social Care advised that support using a variety of methods had and continued to be offered to families throughout the pandemic in order to prevent placement breakdown. The Assistant Director noted that foster families, like all families would have experienced similar difficulties and pressures throughout the pandemic and that while the summer holidays would offer some respite from these pressures the holidays would also provide new challenges for families.

Members asked for further information on the success that the service had had in preventing placements breaking down. The Assistant Director advised that the layered support offer that had included individual and group support networks for foster carers had been effective in preventing breakdown and noted that foster carers really valued the mutual support networks that were available to them. It was also noted that with appropriate safety measures in place that some face to face support had been provided by fostering social workers. The Chair welcomed the high levels of support that had been provided despite the challenges of the pandemic and the stability that this had provided families and children.

The Chair asked what the risks of further disruption and potential placement breakdown were moving forwards. The Assistant Director advised that while restrictions on daily life had eased substantially in recent weeks that life for all families was still far from normal, and that this summer would be very different creating further pressures and anxieties for families. The Assistant Director noted that further clarity regarding exactly how schools would return was needed in order to fully assess the support that would be needed for foster families. The Assistant Director also advised that the reintroduction of face to face contact for looked after children with their birth families could increase pressure on placements due to the emotions that these meetings would release.

The Assistant Director noted that as looked after children would be experiencing the same stresses and anxieties as other children due to the pandemic and as such assured members that appropriate support would continue to be offered.

Members asked for further information how the service was working in partnership with Adult Care and Housing to ensure that sufficiency was achieved for vulnerable 16- and 17-year olds. The Assistant Director noted that this area of support that was provided in partnership with Adult Care and Housing was the House Project that provided intensive support to 16- and 17-year olds. The Assistant Director advised that work was focused to ensure that young people who had been due to access the service did not miss out due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Members asked how this support differed to the support that was offered by the 16+ Framework. The Assistant Director advised that both programmes supported the same cohort of young people but that each project had a slightly different focus with the House Project providing the skills for young people to eventually obtain and sustain a tenancy of their own while the 16+ Framework was an alternative pathway that offered different types of support.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working advised that at a recent meeting of the House Project in Rotherham and the national House Project, that the project in Rotherham had been recognised as providing an effective and high level service to the young people that accessed the scheme.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care, the Service Manager - Commissioning Performance and Quality and the Head of Development Programmes – Children's Services for attending the meeting and answering the committee's questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the progress made in delivery of the LAC Sufficiency Strategy be noted.

- 2) That the risk that demand for placements will increase as lockdown eases be noted, and, that in addition to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission monitoring performance in this area using the established performance monitoring procedures, that managers proactively raise any concerns that they have with the Improving Lives Select Commission if they arise.
- 3) That a summary of the meeting with the National House Project be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

84. YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM - PROGRESS REPORT

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working and the Service Manager - Youth Offending Team and Evidence Based Hub attended the meeting to provide a progress report on the recommendations that the Improving Lives Select Commission had made at its meeting on 29 October 2019 (Minute No.40 2019/20) that:

- 1) That the Deputy Leader explores if further measures can be taken to identify Council apprenticeship opportunities for young people involved in the youth justice system and engage the wider business community in similar initiatives such as job fairs.
- 2) That the involvement of service users in offering awareness raising in schools and/or peer support to other young offenders or those at risk of offending, be explored.

The Chair noted that the committee had been expecting the report to also provide assurances around a changing demand due to the apparent decrease in numbers of first time young offenders and the increase in the complex nature of some cases, as noted in the committee's work programme. It was agreed that a further report providing this information would be submitted to the September meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

The Service Manager provided an overview of the activity that had taken place in response to the recommendations made by the committee in October 2019. The Service Manager advised that she had worked with the Early Help Voice and Influence Officer to create an apprentice Youth Support Worker post that had provided an opportunity within the Evidence Based Hub to support the delivery of interventions and increase youth participation. The Service Manager also noted that in order to provide opportunities for young people in Rotherham the service had offered a guaranteed interview scheme for the post to the authority's Looked after Children and Young People who had had previous involvement in the Youth Justice System. It was noted that interviews had taken place for the Apprentice Youth Support and that a conditional offer of employment had been made to a Young person who had first-hand experience of the Youth Justice System and being a Looked after Child in Rotherham.

The Service Manager advised that the Rotherham Youth Offending Team continued to work with Employers such as Timpson's who actively supported the rehabilitation of offenders by offering training and employment opportunities, but noted that the development of further partnerships with local businesses had been disrupted due to the pandemic. Members were however assured that activities to identify opportunities for post-16 learners and Education, Training and Employment remained a priority.

The Service Manager noted that between September 2019 and March 2020 the tri-borough Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) project (EPIC) delivered CCE awareness sessions to 11,801 young people across Rotherham Secondary schools.

It was also noted that the EPIC team had developed a crime and consequence programme (Think Forward) to be shared and utilised across the three boroughs and 'train the trainer' training was completed in February 2020. The Service Manager advised that the delivery of the programme had been suspended due to the pandemic but noted that alternative methods of virtual delivery were being explored.

The Service Manager provided information on the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme that was currently being offered via Liaison and Diversion across South Yorkshire. The Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme had been funded by the Violence Reduction Unit and the Service Manager noted that it was hoped that the programme would be utilised fully by schools and other key partners as the programme had been evidenced to lead to a significant reduction in violent incidents as well as providing opportunities for young people to develop wider key skills.

The Service Manager also presented a summary of the Youth Offending Performance Report that had been presented to the Youth Offending Team Management Board on 13 July 2020. The report was attached an appendix to the officer's report.

The Chair welcomed the work that had been carried out regarding apprenticeships and peer mentoring.

Members asked if there had been any increases in incidents of antisocial behaviour involving young people during the pandemic. The Service Manager advised that incidents had not increased and noted that any pockets of an antisocial behaviour were being addressed by the service and its partners. Members asked about how the police had been engaging with young people regarding the restrictions on social interaction so as to ensure that young people did not break the regulations risking fines or potential arrest. The Service Manager advised that the police had engaged well with young people around enforcing the restrictions and assured members that the police viewed enforcement

activity as a last resort. Members noted that it was important that young people were not criminalised for what was normal behaviour for that age group.

Members asked about figures in the Youth Offending Performance Report regarding the ethnic background of young people entering the youth offending system. The Service Manager advised that young people from BAME backgrounds tended to enter the system at a higher level than young people from white backgrounds and assured members that activity was being taken to address this disparity by engaging further with young BAME people.

The Chair asked for further information on the understanding and reasons on why the figures contained in the report showed a relatively high number of young people in the youth offending system that had special educational needs. The Service Manager advised that as young people with these needs often struggled to manage their emotions and subsequent behaviour they could be more likely to enter the youth offending system, and as such it was important that this group's needs were addressed at an earlier stage than was currently the case in order to reduce the numbers entering the system.

The Service Manager outlined the support that was available to young people who entered the youth justice team noting that this was delivered by both the Council's youth offending team and also delivery partners across a wide range of programmes and settings. The Service Manager advised that there was growing interest from schools regarding the Mentors in Violence Programme. The Chair welcomed this, noting that it was positive to see such a holistic approach being used to deliver support. The Service Manager advised that with regards to the Mentors in Violence Programme that while it was still early days it was hoped that the interest shown by some schools would encourage other schools to become involved.

Members asked how they could become involved in promoting the various programmes run by the youth offending team in their wards. The Service Manager advised that members could support the programmes and the work of the youth offending team by raising awareness of their services in their local schools. The Service Manager also advised that if members had any issues in their wards that would benefit from the support of the youth offending team then they should let her know. The Service Manager advised that she would circulate details of the Mentors in Violence Programme to members.

The Chair asked for further information on the "Levelling the playing field" initiative that had been referred to in the report. The Service Manager advised that this was a Youth Justice Board initiative that aimed to engage with young BAME people via sport and health at an early stage with preventative activity and was designed to address the disproportionate number of BAME young people entering the youth justice system.

The Chair asked what the potential impact would be on the services provided by the youth offending team as a result of the number of hours provided by the dedicated police officer who worked with the youth offending team being reduced by eight hours a week. The Service Manager advised that the reduction had had minimal impact as a new officer in the post had introduced new ways of working that were proving very effective. The Service Manager assured members that this reduction in hours would not negatively impact on service provision.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working and the Service Manager - Youth Offending Team and Evidence Based Hub for attending the meeting and answering the committee's questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That a further report be brought to the 22 September 2020 meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission to provide assurances around changing demand for Youth Offending Services due to the apparent decrease in numbers of first time young offenders and the increase in the complex nature of a this reduced cohort of young offenders.
- 3) That further information on the Mentors in Violence programme be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.
- 4) That a more detailed narrative in regard to table 13a of the Youth Offending Performance Report, as included in the agenda pack, be circulated to the members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

85. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2020/21.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the Work Programme be updated as discussed.
- 2) That the Work Programme for 2020/21 be approved.

86. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the outstanding actions on the Monitoring Report.

Resolved: -

That the Governance Advisor makes the required follow up activity as required for the outstanding actions.

87. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - SUB AND PROJECT GROUP UPDATES

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the scope for the review of Early Help be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission and that members of the commission contact the Governance Advisor with expressions of interest for taking part in the review.

88. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

89. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: -

That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 22 September 2020 at 5:30pm as a Microsoft Teams meeting.

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