

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday, 22nd September, 2020

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Jarvis, Atkin, Buckley, Clark, Elliot, Marles, Pitchley, Senior, Simpson and Julie Turner.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Fenwick-Green and Marriott.

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

90. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 JULY 2020

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 28 July 2020, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

91. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

92. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

93. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

Mr Liam Harron asked:

“How do you as the Chair of the Improving Lives Select Commission ensure the accuracy of the information that is included in the reports submitted to the committee?” Mr Harron noted that he had particular concerns regarding the accurate recording of safeguarding issues detailed in reports.

In response the Chair provided information of the thorough processes that all reports went through before being published on a committee agenda, with reports being signed off at Strategic Director and Assistant Director level. The Chair noted the robust challenge that the Improving Lives Select Commission and the other scrutiny committees carried out regarding service delivery across council services.

As a supplementary question Mr Harron asked:

“If you received a report that contained errors regarding safeguarding issues that was subsequently considered by Cabinet or Council, what would be the implications for the committee?”

In response the Chair noted the remit of the committee and advised that any issues with the commissioning process would be picked up through other channels and challenged elsewhere in the Council, and not by the Improving Lives Select Commission. The Chair advised that with regard to the errors in the draft needs analysis that had been highlighted at the March 2020 meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission that these had been amended before the report proceeded to Cabinet, and that other than that issue she was not aware of any further errors in the draft needs analysis.

94. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair advised that an update on the recent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel would be circulated to members.

95. UPDATE REPORT REGARDING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICE IN THE LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care attend the meeting to present a report that provided an update regarding the provision of the Children's Social Care Service in the light of Covid19 pandemic. It was noted that report provided an update on the current position following a briefing paper that had been presented to the members of the commission in June 2020. The briefing paper considered in June was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

The report provided information on the number of social work visits that had been carried out since 23 March in person and remotely. The Assistant Director noted that during August the huge majority of visits had had been conducted in person, with appropriate risk assessment and safety measure in place and advised that all social work visits were now carried out in person. The Assistant Director advised that while virtual visits had now ceased, they had enabled essential contact to be maintained with families during the pandemic and that the use of technology would continue to be used to interact with families in the future in between visits.

The Assistant Director advised that face-to-face family time (contact) for looked after children and their birth families had been successfully recommenced, but that due to limitations on the building not currently possible to facilitate as many sessions as previously as the risk assessment of the building has meant that some rooms are not useable and the number of people that can use the building in a day has also been reduced. Therefore, physical family time was being complemented with virtual family time through phone call or video call.

The Assistant Director noted that close multi-agency partnership working had continued with a weekly meeting bringing senior staff from across the partnership together with a focus on problem identification and resolution

and that these meetings had successfully facilitated by remote technology.

The report noted that the service had continued to progress work in key areas, and that this had meant that some significant legal decisions for children had been able to be made during the pandemic. It was noted that some legal decisions had been delayed due to lack of court time to hold these hearings, but that work had taken place in order to enable these hearings to be scheduled in order to ensure that the children impacted had the right legal permanency in place.

The Assistant Director advised that on 3 August we a pilot programme had commenced to enable more social workers to be able to have some office-based time, with case holding social workers from First Response, Locality/Disability and the Looked after Children's service having been able to be able an office-based environment at Riverside House on a rota basis. The Assistant Director noted that while successful team and wider service networking had been enabled by the use of technology during the pandemic that social workers, due to the nature of their roles benefitted significantly from having the opportunity to have face to face interaction with colleagues. The Assistant Director advised that at the end of the pilot project feedback had been sought from participants that had shown strong support from social workers of being able to have office based time at Riverside, even if that was not their usual base and that looking to the future the majority of social workers would like a mixture of home and office working. The Assistant Director than the extension of access to office time would be impacted by local or national guidance surrounding the pandemic, but assured members that the individual needs of staff would always be considered when considering the allocation of office-based time.

The Assistant Director advised that there were some areas of concern for the department. One concern noted was the increase in the number of contacts received by MASH over the summer and the potential for referrals to increase further with the reopening of schools and the likely increases in contact with MASH and the subsequent increase in the flow of work to children's social care and early help. The Assistant Director also noted that more support activities took place with children, young people and their families in order to ensure that there can be assurance that the required work to intervene and support families was in place to progress plans forwards in a positive way and timely way.

The Assistant Director noted that the continued presence of coronavirus in the community could result in children and families having to self-isolate, which could impact on the ability of a social worker to visit and work with a family. The Assistant Director assured members that contact with families would be maintained and that any delays to the progression of support related to the impact of the pandemic would be recorded as such on file.

The Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services noted how impressively staff had risen to the challenges, such as extended periods of home working presented by the pandemic and advised that it was essential that all staff were supported effectively in the current situation. The Interim Strategic Director noted the wider challenges impacting on children and young people during the pandemic including having to spend periods of time out of school. The Interim Strategic Director noted that guidance regarding children having to stay at home if another child had tested positive for the virus had now been changed so that only close contacts, and not an entire year group had to self-isolate.

The Interim Strategic Director also noted that the year groups who would be taking exams in 2021 faced significant disruption and as such may be impacted more significantly by the pandemic in regard to their exams than the students who had had exams cancelled in 2020.

Members asked for further information about virtual and in-person visits and sought assurance that every looked after child had had a face to face visit. The Assistant Director confirmed that all looked after children had received a face to face visit during the pandemic. The Assistant Director advised that if a child, or family member were unwell, that unless there was a safeguarding concern an in-person visit would not be made with the social worker using another form of contact. The Assistant Director advised however that only in-person visits were recorded as visits, with other forms of contact recorded as case notes.

Members asked if there were any plans to open the office bases in the community. The Assistant Director advised that there were no current plans to do so and that before they could reopen that Covid risk assessments would need to take place. The Assistant Director noted that staff had welcomed the flexibility in managing their caseloads and visits that home working had provided and advised that staff would continue to have that flexibility.

Members asked for further information on the staff survey had taken place and whether the responses had been submitted anonymously. The Assistant Director advised that the survey had been anonymous in order to enable honest feedback to be submitted. The Assistant Director noted however that informal feedback had noted the challenges of always working from home and that staff had welcomed the opportunity to have some time the office to network with and support colleagues in what was frequently a very challenging role.

Members asked how access for children with their birth families had evolved throughout the pandemic. The Assistant Director advised that options had increased as restrictions had eased, but that due to limitations on accommodation and the need to be Covid secure, the council's facility for facilitating access could now only host six visits a day, whereas before the pandemic it had been able to host 21 visits a day. The

Assistant Director advised that alternative options were used and depended on the individual needs of the child and the level of supervision needed.

The Chair commended the way in which staff had been supported during the pandemic and how they had embraced new ways of working as well as and how the service had continued to provide children and families with a high level of support.

The Chair thanked the Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care for attending the meeting and answering members questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That a further progress report be brought to the December 2020 meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

96. COMPLEXITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUTH OFFENDING COHORT

The Assistant Director - Early Help, Family Engagement and Business Support and the Service Manager – Youth Offending and Evidence Based Hub attended the meeting to present a report that provided information on the changing demand for Youth Offending Services, the increase in numbers of complex cases in the current cohort of young offenders and current re-offending rates.

The Service Manager noted that as the overall number of young offenders being supported by the service had decreased it had meant that a much higher proportion of current caseloads were comprised of complex cases than had been the case in the past when caseloads were higher. The report provided a breakdown of the characteristics demonstrated in the current cohort of cases based on factors including substance misuse, being a "looked after child" and having identified physical needs, amongst other factors.

The Service Manager advised that every young person with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) received an individual support plan, based around their specific needs that would support them not to reoffend. The Service Manager advised that the YOT always looked to utilise existing services to address the identified risks and needs of the young people it was working with, for example DIVERT would support young people with substance misuse.

The Service Manager provided information on the current cohort of young people that the YOT were working with and advised that the most common offence in this cohort of young people was violence against the person, with nine young people receiving a conviction for this plus a

further three young people being recorded with a robbery offence.

The Service Manager provided information on levels of reoffending and noted that the most up to date data showed levels of reoffending, in both the overall number of offences committed and in the number of individuals committing these offences reducing. The Service Manager assured members that reducing levels of reoffending was a key area of focus for the team but noted that as the current cohort of young people being worked with were the more complex cases, reoffending was more likely to occur. The Service Manager advised however that in the current cohort of young people who were being worked with, all of those who had reoffended had committed a less serious crime subsequently than their initial offence. The Service Manager assured members that Rotherham YOT continued to monitor re-offending via the YOT Management Board, and that information was sent on a monthly basis to case managers in the YOT so that this data could be used to inform intervention and risk management plans.

The Assistant Director commended the Service Manager for how the Youth Offending Service was being managed and how by attending several meetings of the Improving Lives Select Commission the Service Manager had opened up the service to members by providing information on how the service operated and on the challenges that it faced. The Assistant Director also thanked the Service Manager for all the work that she and her team had put in during the recent external inspection of the Youth Offending Team, noting that the inspection had been more challenging to manage due to the current restrictions related to the pandemic.

Members asked whether young people currently in young offender's institutions outside the borough were counted in the current cohort. The Service Manager advised that they were but noted that the numbers in an institution were very low, with the YOT carrying out effective work in keeping young people out of custody.

Members asked if there were any patterns in offending behaviour regarding the victims of crime. The Service Manager advised that there were no discernible patterns regarding victims of crime but assured members that there was extensive support available for victims of crime and that restorative justice and other positive ways forward following an offence were frequently utilised.

Members asked for further information on how the YOT were addressing the issue of members of BAME communities being overrepresented in the statistics regarding youth offending. The Service Manager assured members that work was being carried out to address issues of disproportionality, and that as this was a problem that was not unique to Rotherham, that this issue, and how to address it was being discussed with other YOT's in the region and nationally. The Service Manager noted that interventions targeted at BAME groups such as mentoring and the

“Levelling the Field” initiative that engaged young people via sport, aimed to prevent young people from offending and from keeping them out of the youth offending system.

Members asked if Hate Crime was a factor in the offences committed by the current cohort of young people. The Service Manager advised that there were no indications of Hate Crimes currently being a factor but assured members that if evidence showed an indication of this then action would be taken to provide suitable interventions to address the problem.

The Chair asked for further information on the ethnic breakdown of offenders as detailed in the report regarding the group of young people who had not declared their ethnicity. The Service Manager advised that disclosure of ethnicity was voluntary and that some young people did not declare their ethnicity due to concerns regarding discrimination, but assured members this area of service delivery was monitored regularly and that there were currently no areas of concern surrounding it.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director - Early Help, Family Engagement and Business Support and the Service Manager – Youth Offending and Evidence Based Hub for attending the meeting, answering member questions and for highlighting the work of the YOT with members.

Resolved: -

That the report be noted.

97. 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.

98. 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.

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

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

Resolved: -

That the update be noted

100. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

101. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: -

That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 27 October 2020 at 5:30pm as a Microsoft Teams meeting.