

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION**  
**Tuesday 15 December 2020**

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Jarvis, Atkin, Beaumont, Buckley, Clark, Fenwick-Green, Hague, Khan, Marles and Marriott.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Elliot and Pitchley.

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

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

**115. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27 OCTOBER 2020**

**Resolved:** - That the minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 27 October 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

**116. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**117. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**118. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

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

**119. COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chair advised that there would be a meeting at 5:30 on 16 December to enable members to comment on the development of the revised Domestic Abuse Strategy. The Chair encouraged members to attend in order to have the opportunity to input into the development of the strategy.

**120. ROTHERHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20**

The Independent Chair of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership, Jenny Myers attended the meeting to present the first Annual Report of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP).

The Independent Chair was accompanied by the District Commander for Rotherham, Chief Superintendent Steve Chapman and Sue Cassin, Chief Nurse at NHS Rotherham CCG. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services, the Assistant Director,

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Children's Social Care and the Business Manager, Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership were also in attendance.

The report stated that it was a statutory requirement under the Children Act 2004 for an annual report to be produced that detailed the activities that had been carried out by local safeguarding partners in the previous twelve months that also detailed the effectiveness of the activities in the safeguarding and the promotion of welfare of children in the local area. It was noted that as part of the governance arrangements of the RSCP that it was a requirement that the RSCP Annual Report was presented through Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's own scrutiny arrangements as well as the other safeguarding partners own governance arrangements.

The Independent Chair advised that the RSCP Annual Report detailed the activities that had been undertaken in relation to its core business and priorities for the year 2019/2020 and considered how well it had worked towards the achievement of the priorities and objectives as detailed in its Strategic Business Plan 2019-2020 that were:

- Safe at Home
- Safe in the Community
- Safe Safeguarding Systems

The Annual Report detailed the key areas of progress that had been achieved against each of the objectives and areas of priority. The Independent Chair noted how well the different members of the partnership had worked together and advised that the frequent meetings that had been held between partners had enabled effective oversight to be carried out and actions to be taken to deliver on the key priorities of the partnership.

In addition to detailing what had gone well the Annual Report set out that the areas of activity that could be done differently or better and detailed the challenges faced in achieving the priorities over the year. The areas identified for development that were highlighted in the report included:

- Budgeting pressures.
- Ensuring that babies and very young children were kept safe.
- Further scrutiny of Early Help Strategy and Front Door activity.
- New developments, including contextual safeguarding in the identification, assessment and response to criminal exploitation and adolescent neglect.
- Review of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements and safeguarding plan.
- Ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of children and young people, families and workforce were represented across the activities undertaken by the RSCP.

The Independent Chair detailed the objectives for the partnership for the coming year and advised that a key area of focus would be ensuring that

the voices of children were heard clearly by increased engagement activities so as to ensure that the partnership could meet their needs as effectively as possible. The Independent Chair thanked the members of the partnership for their work in keeping children and young people in Rotherham safe in what had been a very challenging year.

The District Commander for Rotherham, Chief Superintendent Steve Chapman highlighted the activity that had been carried out by South Yorkshire Police and the rest of the partnership regarding child sexual and criminal exploitation, including the activity to raise awareness widely on what the warning signs of such activity looked like.

The Chief Nurse at NHS Rotherham CCG, Sue Cassin summarised the activity that had taken place with regards to the role of health care provision in delivering the objectives of the partnership over the previous year.

The Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services noted that new approach to managing safeguarding strategically in Rotherham via the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership would provide a framework for managing safeguarding in an effective manner that also enable innovative approaches to safeguarding activity to be delivered across the Borough. The Strategic Director noted that while the number of Looked After the Children in the Borough was of concern, advised that as highlighted in the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services, that there were no children currently in care that did not need to be the care of the authority.

The full Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

The Chair thanked the Independent Chair of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership, the District Commander for Rotherham and the Chief Nurse at NHS Rotherham CCG for attending the meeting to present the first annual report from the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The Chair noted the comprehensiveness and wide-ranging scope of the report and welcomed the information on how the partnership had successfully responded to the challenges created by the pandemic. The Chair noted that the format of the report had not presented the information in way that was as accessible and easy to understand as it could have been and recommended that the format of the next annual report be reviewed in order to make the content clearer and more accessible for a wider audience.

The Chair asked for further information on the work that was being carried out to raise awareness of CSE and CCE. The District Commander provided further information on the video that had been created for hoteliers to help them identify potential warning signs of CSE. The District

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Commander advised the video had been created in a way that enabled it to be broken down into separate sections that could then be used more widely to raise awareness of the warning signs of CSE. The District Commander also advised awareness raising activities had taken place during National Children's Safeguarding week and were also planned for the National CSE Awareness Week in January 2021. The Chair asked that members be involved with future awareness raising activities where possible.

Members asked for further information on the budgetary pressures that the partnership was facing and how these would impact on the work of the partnership. The Independent Chair noted that the reduction in the contribution to the partnership from the Police and Crime Commissioner was an issue that was facing safeguarding partnerships nationwide and that as a consequence some innovative activities would have to be scaled back. The Independent Chair assured members that the reduction in the partnerships budget would not negatively impact its ability to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Rotherham.

The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and the Chief Nurse noted that while reductions in the budget did create challenges, the wealth of experience and knowledge across the partnership would ensure that resources were used strategically across the partnership in order to deliver the best possible outcomes. The Business Manager, Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership assured members that resources would be concentrated on core activities that provided the positive outcomes for children and young people and that any impacts of reduced funding would be on back office support functions and not on the delivery of front line services.

The Chair asked for further information on the concerns that had been detailed in the report surrounding the increase of incidents of injury to babies of less than one year old and enquired whether activity in this area would be impacted by the reductions in the partnership's budget.

The District Commander advised that an upcoming audit of cases would highlight key actions that needed to be taken in response to this concern. The District Commander assured the Chair that as this was an area of key concern for the partnership that related activity would not be negatively impacted by budget pressures. The Assistant Director advised that targeted social care visits with new parents would enable concerns surrounding risk in this area to be picked up and acted on. The Assistant Director noted that the partnership provided a framework for joined up multi-agency working in order to positively deal with concerns and enable appropriate and effective safeguarding activity to take place. The Chief Nurse noted that initiatives provided through maternity care had helped to address potential risks around injuries to babies and advised that learning from past cases would be used to develop future actions right across the partnership.

The Chair welcomed how this area of concern clearly showed how multiagency and cross partnership working was being enabled and maximised by the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Members asked for further information on what action was being taken regarding the concerns that had been detailed in the report regarding the increased number of children in receipt of Elective Home Education (EHE). The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working advised that the increase of the number of children in receipt of EHE was a concern nationally but advised that there had been some success in Rotherham in reducing these numbers and in parents being dissuaded from EHE and as a consequence keeping their children in school. The Assistant Director, Education who was in attendance at the meeting provided further information on the activities that were being taken around EHE.

The Chair asked whether the number of children in EHE was of concern for the police due to the potential risk that EHE provided for increased opportunities for the radicalisation of children and young people. The District Commander noted that children and young people not being in school could create a heightened risk of radicalisation but advised that as any activity was taking place in the home that it was very hard to take specific action on. The District Commander assured the Chair that despite the challenges this was a key area of activity and that work in this area was also supported by the work of the Safer Rotherham Partnership.

The Chair thanked the Independent Chair of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership, Jenny Myers, the District Commander for Rotherham, Chief Superintendent Steve Chapman and Sue Cassin, Chief Nurse at NHS Rotherham CCG for attending the meeting to present the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report and for answering member's questions.

**Resolved: -**

1. That the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report 2019-20 be received and noted.
2. That the format of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report 2020-21 be reviewed in order to make the content clearer and more accessible for a wider audience.
3. That the submission of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report 2020-21 to the Improving Lives Select Commission in December 2021 be supplemented with a presentation.

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4. That the refreshed Neglect Strategy be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission when it is completed.
5. That the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership's response to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel national thematic review into non-accidental injury into children aged under one be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission once completed.

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

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care attended the meeting to provide a report regarding the current situation in respect of the delivery children's social care services during the pandemic.

In introducing the report, the Deputy Leader noted that the report showed how well Children and Young People's Services had continued to deliver vital services throughout the significant challenges created by the pandemic. The Deputy Leader stated that the effective delivery of children's social care services during the pandemic had been a significant achievement and clearly showed the hard work and dedication of all staff involved in delivering services.

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care advised that the reintroduction of national restrictions during November had not impacted significantly on the delivery of services. The Assistant Director noted that having reviewed service delivery in view of the restrictions, it had not been necessary to pause delivery of any service as the guidance and risk assessments that had been put in place earlier in the pandemic had meant that services could continue to delivered safely.

The Assistant Director also advised that since the last report to the Improving Lives Select Commission in September that:

- Social workers were continuing to undertake their work with the children allocated to them, with most children being seen person. A pre-visit risk assessment process was in place to ensure the safety of staff and families.
- Staff had continued to use different technologies to engage with

children, young people and their families so as to provide flexibility in using different ways to maintain communication between physical visits.

- Performance against targets in relation to visits, assessments and plans had remained good.
- Staff had continued to have access to office space at Riverside House, but less frequently than previously due to the reintroduction of national restrictions.
- Staff training and development was now being offered and accessed online.

The Assistant Director assured members that the processes and procedures that were in place to enable services to continue to be delivered during the pandemic in a safe way ensuring that children and families continued to be supported were working well. The Assistant Director noted that the caseloads being managed by the service were no larger than at the same point in the previous year.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for the progress report and the assurances that the report and the previous reports had provided. The Chair noted her thanks to the Assistant Director and all of the staff in the service who had worked so hard to ensure that children and families in the Borough had been looked after during the challenging period of the pandemic.

The Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services advised that Ofsted had undertaken a Focused Assurance of Children's Services between 20 and 22 October. The Strategic Director noted that the purpose of the visit had been to examine the quality and impact of key decision-making across help and protection, children in care and services for care leavers, together with the impact of leadership on service development.

The Strategic Director, the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, the Assistant Director, Education and the Joint Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion made a presentation to members that detailed the outcomes of the inspection. It was noted that the inspectors had spent three days exploring in detail the work of service practitioners, with the inspection having been managed virtually, with inspectors given the opportunity to meet with early help workers, social workers and representatives from the education sector across the borough. The findings of the visit had been summarised in a letter that had been published on the Ofsted website, with the letter being positive in

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respect of the work being undertaken by the service.

The presentation detailed some areas that the inspection had highlighted as particularly good that included:

- Rotherham children's services had reacted rapidly and effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic in the early months of 2020.
- Strong and effective multi-agency partnerships had enabled the early identification of vulnerable children. Senior leaders, managers and staff had had effective oversight of children and young people who needed to be safeguarded and supported.
- Dynamic assessments of COVID-19 risks had allowed children to be seen directly where it had been safe to do so. Detailed children's assessments had enabled proportionate decisions to be reached, ensuring that families had received an appropriate level of support.
- The voice of the child was a strength in assessments and had influenced care planning. However, the quality of written plans was not consistent for all children.
- Effective pre-proceedings planning enabled children to remain living with brothers and sisters or with extended family where possible. Children were supported to maintain contact with their families, utilising digital technology if required. Additional support to meet the emotional needs of children in care was available via the in-house therapeutic service.

The Strategic Director advised that feedback from the Ofsted team had also provided areas for ongoing development and noted that it had been positive the areas that had been highlighted had closely linked with areas that the service had already identified as areas for further development.

The Deputy Leader advised that report had been overwhelmingly positive and had shown that that Children and Young People's Services was delivering an excellent service to children and families in Rotherham.

The Chair and members welcomed the positiveness of the Ofsted report. The Chair advised that the outcomes of the inspection were as they had expected due to the positive assurances that members had received over many meetings where they had scrutinised in detail the services that were being delivered.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader, the Strategic Director and the Assistant Directors for working closely with the Improving Lives Select Commission in a way that enabled members to have confidence in the services that were being provided.



**Resolved: -**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a further report be circulated to the members of the Improving Lives Select Commission by the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services if any significant concerns or challenges arise surrounding children's social care service in the light of Covid-19 pandemic.
3. That the service development plan created as a result of the Ofsted Focused Assurance Visit be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

**122. SEND PEER CHALLENGE OUTCOMES AND PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Joint Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion, Children and Young People's Services and the Head of Service, Inclusion attended the meeting to present a progress report on the outcomes of the SEND Peer Challenge.

The report stated that the Peer Challenge process had been developed for Children's Services across the Yorkshire and Humber region and built on the peer review model that had been developed by the Local Government Association.

The Joint Assistant Director noted that the SEND inspection had reviewed how the Council was supporting children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities to achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, such as being able to live independently, secure meaningful employment and be well prepared for their adult lives. The Joint Assistant Director advised that the process had been designed in order to not only to hold local areas to account, but also to assist local areas in improving and developing processes and support systems in order that they could become more effective and deliver better outcomes for children and young people.

It was noted that the SEND Peer Challenge had taken place in Rotherham between 28 February and 3 March 2020. It was noted that the findings of the Peer Challenge had been summarised in a letter that had been structured to identify headline strengths and areas for further consideration.

The Joint Assistant Director advised that the Peer Challenge Team had noted the following headline strengths in the feedback letter:

- Children and young people were at the heart of the services that were provided.

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- There was a long-standing and collective ownership of the SEND agenda at Rotherham.
- Senior leaders, from across the system, knew their services well. They understood the strengths, areas for improvement and what needed to be done to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people.
- There was an ambition to continuously improve, evidenced in part by an openness to scrutiny, by the commissioning of external organisations to support improvement activity and by internal and system strategies and plans, which demonstrated a commitment and drive for better services.

The following areas had been highlighted for consideration and further improvement:

- That SEND priorities should be considered across the Council more broadly, especially with regards to public health, early help, adult services and social care.
- That further consideration be given to autism and how it was managed and to its place in the broader system, both before and after a diagnosis in order to ensure that children and young people with autism had their needs met effectively.
- That a clearer method of recording and documenting the impact of SEND activity be developed in order to capture the value of the work that was being carried out with children and young and to provide a basis for developing further meaningful activity.

The Head of Service, Inclusion advised that the Council's Strategic Leadership Team and Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group's Operational Executive had both received the report and had approved the identified actions to address the areas that had been identified for development. The Head of Service advised that the Terms of Reference for the SEND Strategic Board, who would oversee the development of all key actions had been refreshed and noted that the Health Select Commission would have just received their first annual update focused on Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health.

A detailed analysis of the findings and activity required to address areas for development had been identified and was attached as an appendix to the officers' report. The Head of Service provided a summary of the actions included in the appendix to the meeting.

The Deputy Leader and the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services noted the peer review and the actions that had been identified for implementation would enable the SEND Service to be in the

best possible position for a formal inspection at a future date.

The Joint Assistant Director noted the peer review had highlighted the important role that scrutiny carried out in monitoring the work of the SEND service at Rotherham and that the openness of the service to scrutiny by members had been seen as a real strength.

Members welcomed the outcome of the peer review and noted their approval for how well SEND services were being delivered and the readiness of the service for a future formal inspection.

The Vice-Chair noted how well informed the commission was on the work of the SEND service due to the monitoring of the service and the open channels of communication between managers and members of the commission. The Vice-Chair noted how well the use of resources was being maximised across the service in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities in Rotherham.

The Chair asked how the areas for development highlighted in the review were being brought together with other strategic activity in the SEND service. The Joint Assistant Director advised that these would be brought together and monitored by the SEND Strategic Board. The Strategic Director noted that the identified actions from the peer review had been incorporated into the wider service improvement plan and advised that this document would be circulated to members of the commission for information.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Joint Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion, Children and Young People's Services and the Head of Service, Inclusion for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

**Resolved: -**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a progress report on the actions arising from the SEND Peer Challenge be presented at the December 2021 meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission. How are future updates received? Discussion on this?
3. That service plan, with dates for the completion of the be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

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### **123. WORK PROGRAMME**

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.

### **124. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered the outstanding actions on the Monitoring Report.

**Resolved: -** That Monitoring Report be noted.

### **125. 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.

### **126. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **127. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

#### **Resolved: -**

That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 26 January 2021 at 5:30pm as a Microsoft Teams meeting.