IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday, 27th October, 2020

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

Apologies for absence:- There were no apologies for absence

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

102. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2020

Resolved: - That the minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 22 September 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

103. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

104. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

105. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

Mr Liam Harron asked the Chair to provide an update of the work of the sub-group of the Improving Lives Select Commission regarding the provision of support services for the survivors of CSE in Rotherham and asked whether the input of survivors would be included in the review.

In response the Chair provided details of the work of the sub-group, including its remit to benchmark services provided in Rotherham against those provided elsewhere, the membership of the group and the methods of research, noting that the review would involve members of the sub-group speaking to both elected members and officers at the authorities that had been selected for comparison. The Chair noted that as given the remit of the sub-group, the review would not involve survivors of CSE in Rotherham.

As a supplementary question Mr Harron asked about a request that he advised he had made previously to the Chair for her to meet with survivors of CSE and also how the results of the review conducted by the sub-group would be communicated with survivors of CSE.

In response the Chair advised that was happy to meet survivors of CSE at

any time and that Mr Harron should contact her in order to arrange this. The Chair advised that the findings of the work being carried out by the subgroup would be reported at future meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

106. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair provided a short report on the June and September 2020 meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel and a noted that a more detailed briefing note had been circulated to members.

107. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director, Education, attended the meeting to provide a report on Elective Home Education (EHE) in Rotherham.

The Chair expressed her disappointment that the report had been submitted for consideration had not been focussed on the areas of concern that members of the committee had requested, these had been to seek assurance that children who were being elective home educated were receiving an effective education and were also being safeguarded from harm.

The report stated that Elective home education (EHE) was the term that was used to describe a legal choice by parents to provide education for their children at home - or at home and in some other way which they choose - instead of sending them to school full-time. It was noted that in these circumstances the local authority had a statutory duty to establish the identities, so far as it was possible to do so, of children in their area who were being educated at home and as such may be at risk or not receiving a suitable education.

The Assistant Director, Education noted that there were many factors why a parent may choose to de-register their child from school such as their own philosophical position regarding how their child should be educated, or having concerns regarding the suitability of the school environment for their child. The Assistant Director noted that revised guidance had been received from the Department for Education regarding EHE had been issued to local authorities in 2019 but advised that further planned consultation with local authorities had been delayed due to the pandemic.

The Assistant Director noted the varying profile of children across Rotherham who were being educated at home included those who suffered from school anxiety and those whose parents made a philosophical choice to educate at home. The Assistant Director advised that the most recent figures showed an increase in the number of children being educated at home and noted that this mirrored a trend seen across the country during the pandemic. It was noted that the increase in

numbers of children being educated at home had presented challenges in ensuring that all parents who were home educating received suitable support.

The Assistant Director advised that while the decision to home educate was that of the parent, that every step would be taken where possible to discourage this action and ensure that a child stayed on roll at a school. It was noted that the regulations surrounding EHE were quite broad and were not prescriptive regarding what a "suitable education" was, and that it was the requirement of the local authority to ensure that each child received. The Assistant Director advised that if the education a child was receiving at home was not suitable or adequate then a school attendance order could be issued. The Assistant Director advised that a communication had been received from the Department for Education regarding the processes that should be followed regarding ensuring that children being educated at home were receiving a suitable education.

The Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services noted the difficulties that were being experienced nationwide by local authorities in ensuring that being children educated at home were receiving a suitable education in the context of increasing numbers and lack of clear guidance on what a suitable education was.

The Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services noted that it was essential for safeguarding that the council ensured it maintained good levels of contact with families where children were being lived at home.

Members welcomed the focus on safeguarding due to concerns that they had previously expressed regarding the risks of radicalisation for children who were being educated at home. Members asked for assurance that officers when visiting families who were home educating were trained to have an awareness of behaviour that may lead to radicalisation. The Assistant Director advised that staff were aware of the issue and noted that further staff development activity in this area was planned. The Assistant Director noted that the best outcomes for children being educated at home were where families had a good relationship with the council.

Members asked whether it may be a potentially better use of resources to focus on activity on keeping children in school rather than supporting them to be educated at home. The Assistant Director advised that the support surrounding EHE at Rotherham was part of a wider support offer to schools and families, and as such resources could not be redirected.

Members asked if the reasons why parents chose to educate their children at home had changed over time. The Assistant Director advised that there had been a change with more children being educated at home due to school anxiety than had been the case previously. It was also noted that some communities, such as the gypsey and traveller

community would be more likely to educate children at home than others.

Members asked for further information on the number of children who were educated at home sat formal exams. The Assistant Director advised that the financial responsibility for EHE children, including paying for exams was the responsibility of the parent but noted that if a family has a good relationship with the council then the outcomes for children, including sitting exams and going on to further education in a formal setting improved.

The Chair asked for further information on the reasons why children who had been home educated subsequently returned to school. The Assistant Director advised that the reasons were often financial, but the reason was often a change in the individual circumstances of a family. The Deputy Leader noted the challenges that were faced by families educating at home due the lack of specialist equipment in subjects such as science.
Members asked how the approach to EHE in Rotherham compared to the approach taken in other areas. The Interim Director noted that Directors of Children's Services nationally been discussing the challenges of EHE and that the outcomes of these discussions would be fed back to the Department for Education.

The Chair asked for information the characteristics of the current cohort of children being educated at home. The Assistant Director advised that work on this was currently taking place.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services, the Interim Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director, Education for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

1) That the report be noted.

2) That the recent Department for Education briefing on Elective Home Education be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

3) That the structure chart and the procedural process document for the Elective Home Education Service be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

4) That once completed, the detailed analysis of the current cohort of children in Elective Home Education in Rotherham be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

5) That the most up to date information on exam entry and progression to further education of children who have received Elective Home Education be circulated to members of the

Improving Lives Select Commission.

108. ROTHERHAM EDUCATION STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director, Education, attended the meeting to provide a progress report on the work of the Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership (RESP).

In introducing the report, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services noted the remit of RESP was to bring together key partners from across Rotherham's education system into a coherent and effective strategic partnership in order to maximise outcomes and improve life chances for children and young people, promote inclusion and reduce inequalities, and in doing so ensure that no school, child or young person in Rotherham would be left behind. The Deputy Leader advised that due to the pandemic, RESP had not had a full formal meeting for some time, but assured members that the objectives of RESP were still being pursued, with meetings between various stakeholders continuing throughout the period of the pandemic. The Assistant Director, who had only recently been appointed to the post confirmed that he would be the new Chair of RESP.

A table that showed progress made against key activities and actions for RESP was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

The Chair welcomed the confirmation that the new Assistant Director would be the new Chair of RESP but noted her disappointment that report that had been submitted for consideration was very general and noted that it did not focus on the areas of concern previously highlighted by the Improving Lives Select Commission. It was noted that the areas that the commission had previously asked for further information on included how gifted and talented children were being stretched, as well as for specific detail on the impact that RESP was making to educational outcomes in Rotherham.

The Assistant Director, Education noted that despite the challenges that had been experienced for all of those involved in the provision of education in Rotherham due to the pandemic, communication and collaborative working had carried on throughout the period by members of RESP. The Assistant Director also noted that since taking up the post he had facilitated a meeting between the head teachers of local authority maintained schools to enable collaboration and the sharing of best practice, and that moving forwards he was keen to provide more opportunities for schools to work together collaboratively.

The Assistant Director advised that he would be working with the new Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services to discuss the

future priorities of RESP and to establish how RESP would be managed in order to ensure that it worked in the most effective way to drive collaboration and improve outcomes across the education sector in Rotherham. The Assistant Director advised that once the revised priorities for the Rotherham Education Partnership and the timeline for their implementation had been established, they would be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

The Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services noted her commitment to RESP continuing in the future and ensuring that it effectively enabled partnership working and positive educational outcomes.

The outgoing Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services noted the strong culture of collaborative working between academies, maintained schools and the local authority in Rotherham and advised that this strength had been highlighted by OFSTED in their recent inspection of the Education Department.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director, Education for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

The Chair, on behalf of all members noted her thanks to the outgoing Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services, Sally Hodges for all the work she had done for children and young people during her time in Rotherham and for how closely and effectively she had worked with the members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

Resolved: -

1) That the report be noted.
2) That it be recommended that Elective Home Education be a priority area for the Rotherham Education Partnership.
3) That information on the revised priorities for the Rotherham Education Partnership and the timeline for their implementation be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

109. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY - PROGRESS REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, the Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services attended the meeting to provide a progress report on the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017 – 20 and the activity that had been taking place in the development of an updated Domestic Abuse Strategy.

The report stated that the vision for the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017 – 20, that had been developed in partnership with the Safer Rotherham Partnership, was: “In Rotherham we do not tolerate domestic abuse and as agencies, we will consistently identify risk, work to protect victims and address offending behaviour. In communities, we will promote the value of positive relationships and identify need, in order to focus on preventing conflict and abusive behaviours. Our services will work together, be responsive, evidence based and informed by those affected. Rotherham’s approach seeks to focus on improving the quality of relationships in the borough, whilst working to protect and support those already affected by domestic abuse.”

It was noted that within the strategy the vision had been broken down into a range of key objectives, and that in order enable the development of a refreshed strategy, a review of each objective had been carried out in order to reflect on progress and to identify any continuing gaps in the strategy. The report provided details on the objectives of the strategy alongside of an analysis of the progress made in the delivery of each objective. The full Domestic Abuse Strategy was attached as an appendix to the officer’s report.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety noted the achievements of the strategy as well as the review activity that had taken place during its implementation that would be fed into the development of the refreshed strategy. The Cabinet Member noted that a report on the commissioning of Domestic Abuse Services would be considered by Cabinet on 23 November 2020, and that members would have the opportunity to scrutinise the report and recommendations as part the pre-decision scrutiny process.

The Cabinet Member noted that the issue of Domestic Abuse, and in particular the issue of stalking and harassment had been a key area of enquiry for the Improving Lives Select Commission in recent times. The Cabinet Member advised that as a result of these discussions the Safer Rotherham Partnership had undertaken further work and additional monitoring with regard to stalking and harassment in cases of domestic abuse. The Cabinet Member advised that stalking and harassment was often a part of a broader pattern of abusive behaviours in cases of domestic abuse, and as such stalking and harassment had been included in the standard assessment framework and was also a key part of the safety planning work undertaken by statutory and commissioned services.

The Cabinet Member assured members that the protection of victims from stalking and harassment was considered in the delivery of all services that provided to support victims of domestic abuse. The Cabinet Member also noted that work had been carried out regarding the issue of stalking by people not known by the victim and advised that data had shown that up to the end of 2019, no incidents of this type of stalking and harassment had been identified in Rotherham. The Cabinet Member advised that the

Safer Rotherham Partnership had also developed a clear stalking pathway in order to provide clarity in terms of the support that would be offered to any victims of stalking by strangers.

The Chair noted how the provision of Domestic Abuses services and the support provided to victims had increased and developed over the period operation of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and welcomed the activity that was currently taking place to inform the development of a refreshed strategy.

Members asked whether the activity that had taken place around stalking and harassment also included stalking and harassment activity that had been carried out online. The Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services assured members that all forms of stalking and harassment activity were investigated if reported. Members also sought assurance that those receiving reports of domestic abuse had been trained to identify incidents of abuse that had been carried out online and were asking the right questions to enable a full picture of a situation to be gathered. The Head of Community Safety noted that this had been an area highlighted for further staff development and training. Members also asked for information on the number of non-molestation orders that had been issued and were advised by the Head of Community Safety that information on this would be circulated to members of the committee.

The Cabinet Member noted the challenges surrounding referrals being made to the police and other services during the pandemic due to the related restrictions on people's lives, and advised that these issues would continue to be a challenge into the future as services continued to be delivered online. The Cabinet Member advised that despite the current challenges surrounding the provision of services, the profile of the problem of domestic abuse and the provision of support services in Rotherham had developed greatly in recent years. The Cabinet Member noted her thanks to the former South Yorkshire Police District Commander for Rotherham, Una Jennings for the work she had carried out in improving how domestic abuse was dealt with in Rotherham.

Members agreed with the Cabinet Member's concerns regarding the challenges of victims of domestic abuse being referred to services during the pandemic, noting that many successful methods such as the "Ask Angela" initiative were not currently accessible due to the restrictions. Members thanked the Cabinet Member for the significant work that she had carried out in raising the profile of domestic abuse and taking the actions that had been required in order to ensure that services related to combatting domestic abuse were as effective as possible.

Members also sought assurance that services were accessible to residents from all different backgrounds, including for those who English was not their first language. The Cabinet Member assured members that services were accessible to all members of the community and that services could support all victims of domestic abuse including men,

people in co-abusive relationships and people in same sex relationships.

The Chair asked for further information on proactive and preventative work around domestic abuse. The Head of Community Safety provided information on the preventative work that was being carried out where an individual's behaviour was providing cause for concern as well information on how preventative work was part of the Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education curriculum in schools.

The Chair asked whether service users would be involved in the development of the refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy. The Head of Community Safety advised that feedback had been gathered throughout the period of operation of the current strategy noted that this information would be fed into the development of the refreshed strategy.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, the Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

1) That the report be noted

2) That information on the number of non-molestation orders issued in 2020 be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission

3) That members of the Improving Lives Select Commission are involved in the development of the new Domestic Abuse Strategy.

110. 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.

111. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the outstanding actions on the Monitoring Report.

Resolved: - That Monitoring Report be noted.

112. 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.

113. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

114. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: -

That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 15 December 2020 at 5:30pm as a Microsoft Teams meeting.