

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 5 December 2023

Present:- Councillor Pitchley (in the Chair); Councillors Cooksey, Bacon, Baker-Rogers, Z. Collingham, Griffin, Haleem, Hughes, McNeely, Monk and Bennett-Sylvester.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Wilson and Mills.

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

131. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 31 OCTOBER 2023

Resolved: - That the minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 31 October be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

132. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair invited Members to declare any interests in the items of business on the agenda.

Councillor Griffin declared a non-pecuniary interest (Minute 138, Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2027 Update). He remained in the meeting but did not participate in the debate or vote.

133. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items of business on the agenda that required the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

134. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

135. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair provided the following update in respect of matters within the Commission's remit and work programme:

- Members were reminded that the Children's and Young People's Service Members Report had been circulated for information and

comment. Members were asked to raise any queries via email and either a written response would be arranged, or if appropriate it would be requested that officers attend the next meeting in January to provide further information.

136. CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL - UPDATE

The Chair advised that the Corporate Parenting Panel met on 13th November 2023 and consideration was given to the following items during the meeting:

- An update on the One Adoption South Yorkshire Annual Report, which included a high-level overview on progress during the period of 2022-2023.
- An update on the Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023.
- An update on the Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028.
- An update on the Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer.
- An update on the Leaving Care Action Plan.
- A Performance Monitoring Report, which included trend data, graphical analysis, and latest benchmarking data against national and statistical neighbour averages.

The next meeting would be held on the 12 December. A further update would be provided to the Commission, at the next meeting in January.

137. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY UPDATE

This agenda item provided an update on the delivery of the new Looked After Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2027, over the past year.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, the Cabinet Member for Childrens and Young Peoples Services, Helen Sweaton, Joint Assistant Director of Commissioning and Performance and Mark Cummins, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transformation Project Lead.

The Chair invited Councillor Cusworth and Helen Sweaton to introduce the report and the following was noted:

- The Strategy set out how the local authority would fulfil its role as corporate parents and meet the statutory sufficiency duty, by providing good quality care, effective parenting, and support to children and young people, in and leaving care.
- The Strategy was a high priority for the local authority and set out the principles applied when seeking to commission the provision of secure, safe, and appropriate accommodation and support to children in and leaving care over the next four years.
- There were pressures nationally on local authorities to meet the required duty. The local authority was in a good place, in relation to provision of placement mix, ensuring it could meet everyone's need.

The Chair invited Mark Cummins to lead on the presentation. The presentation gave an overview of the following content:

- Strategy Overview and Priorities-
 - The Looked After Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2027, was approved at Cabinet in October 2022.
 - The Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy was developed in line with the duty to provide or procure placements, for children looked after by the local authority. The duty of 'sufficiency' required local authorities and children's trust partners, to ensure that there was a range of sufficient placements which could meet the needs of children and young people in care.
- Key Priorities 2023 to 2027-
 - More young people would be able to be cared for safely in their families and communities.
 - Children and young people would have access to a range of homes with both internal and external options, that would meet their needs and improve their outcomes.

- All services would take the Rotherham family approach, to ensure all Rotherham children and young people would be resilient, successful, and safe. This would be evidenced by quality assurance activity.
- Children and young people would be able to access the support they need, when they need it by ensuring Health, Education and Care Services would share a joint understanding of the needs of children and young people in Rotherham and would use this to inform commissioning and service delivery.
- Children and young people, their families and carers would be able to access Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) assessments and intervention when needed.
- Children, young people, families, and carers were benefiting from additional social value in Rotherham. An example was provided of more employment opportunities.
- More children, young people and families benefited from additional support to improve outcomes and access to employment.
- A residential Case Study-
 - BB had resided in an external residential provision at distance from Rotherham, since 2021. BB was placed in a residential provision after several fostering moves. The residential provision offered care and education, the external placement cost at the time that BB left was £6436.00 per week.
 - BB's progress had been monitored via various children in care panels over the duration of his placement and an agreement was in place to continue to support BB's placement at a distance from Rotherham, due to concerns about the availability of an appropriate local education provision.
 - The latest review focused more on permanency, BB's Social

Worker provided an update on the progress that BB had made and a possible change in care planning, due to developments with family networks, which identified that it would be easier for BB to reside locally.

- Through the Permanence Panel, it was agreed to explore the possibility of BB returning to Rotherham into one of the services in-house residential homes. Following several planning meetings, BB was suitably matched to a home.
- Working collaboratively with education colleagues, the service was able to secure an in-house residential home for BB. This allowed attendance at a local education provision and brought BB back into the Borough with the right support around BB. This was done over an agreed transition period where BB was integral to planning and leading the change. This was a very positive outcome for BB and saved the Council more than £100k a year.
- Short Breaks Innovation-
 - The project supplemented the services existing short break provision, by developing a Short Break Hub and incorporating community-based care and support for children aged ten years old and upward, with complex Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
 - The short break offer was a maximum of twelve weeks and would provide an opportunity for overnight respite with an intensive behavioural offer. This would link the school, community, and home-based support, and would reduce the likelihood of care entry and placement in out-of-borough education placements.
 - Nine young people were supported this year and eight young people had started a new or sustained an existing education placement, with a sustainable short break in place.
 - Following a competitive application process, Rotherham was

successful in receiving funding to expand the project between the period of 2024 to 2025. This would include an opportunity to develop solo overnight short break provision, improve access to community short break facilities and develop work with Personal Assistants.

- Fostering Rotherham-
 - Fostering Rotherham was a collaboration of digital on-line marketing and place based foster carer recruitment, support and retention of local foster carers.
 - Fostering Rotherham worked with local foster carer heroes, who offered up their homes and hearts to young people in and around the Borough. The service worked with over one hundred and twenty fostering families from across Rotherham and South Yorkshire and were aiming to improve the lives of local children and young people.
- A Fostering Case Study-
 - Through the Fostering Rotherham recruitment process, JW had recently transferred from an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).
 - The foster carer was already caring for a Rotherham child when they applied to be part of the fostering rotherham family. The assessment and approval processes were completed in twelve weeks. As well as improving the support network for the foster carer and the child, it had also achieved significant savings for the Council.
 - The foster carer had been approved to care for two children. The foster carer also had a spare bedroom, therefore there was scope for further growth of this foster carer.
 - The child in the foster carers care had other siblings who were placed with in-house foster carers, this meant that there were now better opportunities to promote sibling relationships and develop peer support between the different foster families. The child did not experience any

disruption to their education.

- Challenges-
 - Children's home acquisitions remained challenging due to a variety of factors, including successful progress through planning, community engagement and timescales for implementation.
 - Recruitment for residential workforce remained extremely competitive.
 - Recruitment and retention of foster carers remained an ongoing challenge due to the competitive nature of the market.
 - Shortage of available externally commissioned placements across fostering, residential and sixteen plus remained a challenge.
- Opportunities-
 - There was an opportunity for continued, improved awareness and local support for looked after children with opportunities in relation to developing new provision.
 - There was an opportunity for development of place-based marketing and recruitment, to complement the online presence.
 - There was an opportunity to continue to develop the short breaks provision to ensure a continuation to meeting needs locally.
 - There was an opportunity for continued promotion on what's working well and sharing good new stories.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- The service was working towards increasing the percentage of children looked after in the local authority's in-house provision. In comparison to other local authorities, the service was doing well in this area.

- The number of children that must be looked after, that are children in care in general, had reduced from 514 (noted in the report) to 507. This number was significantly lower in comparison to last year.
- The service was investing in family support to prevent family break downs for teenagers. In August 2022 there were eight teenagers whose relationships at home had broken down during the school holidays, in summer 2023 this figure had reduced to zero, by investigating in the Engage Service.
- The Permanence Panels main priority was to agree the appropriate permanent arrangement for the child or young person. Eight weeks after a child becomes a child in care, the Social Worker and Team Manager would attend the Permanence Panel and assess a permanent plan. The Panel was chaired by the Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance.
- There was a challenge in recruitment and retention of workers in residential homes, this was a national challenge and would continue to be monitored.
- CAMHS would be presenting at the Health Select Commission on the 25th of January and all members would be invited to attend this meeting.
- Work was on-going to ensure that all foster carers would know who their local Councillors were. It was advised that the Community Leadership Fund could be used to support children in care, in situations where it was requested and appropriate to do so.
- The short breaks innovation project was available for any children or young people with complex SEND needs. Social Workers and Early Help Workers would identify potential children who could be eligible and refer them into the project. Eligibility for the project could change, if the complexity of the child's needs changed.
- In relation to placement stability comparison (on the graph at 2.4), the service was working to improve this number. It was also noted that even a positive move, was a move.

- Bridging payments were provided to foster carers between placements. Until recently the offer for Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) was different to the offer provided to in-house carers. Cabinet had now approved more flexibility for the service, to ensure that they could match the payments provided to IFAs, to in-house carers also.
- When the service was looking at acquisition of properties that could be utilised as residential homes, all options were assessed. Planning created challenges in relation to community engagement and additional parking places to support the change of usage to the building, this reduced potential suitable and available properties. The Planning Team would make the Commissioning Team aware when a planning application was approved for an in-house or private residential home provider, in future this information would be shared with elected members.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the Improving Lives Select Commission note the progress made against the delivery plan for the Looked After Children's Sufficiency Strategy.
- 2) That invitations to the Health Select Commission on the 25th January (CAMHS update) be circulated to members of the Commission.
- 3) That the request for specific data in relation to children and young people, who move on to alternative independent living arrangements and remain in contact with previous carers, be assessed.
- 4) That the Commissioning Team notify Elected Members when a planning request is submitted by a private residential care home provider.
- 5) That Appendix One, referenced in the body of the report, is circulated to members.

138. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2022-2027 UPDATE

This agenda item provided an update on the progress towards the Rotherham Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2027.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, the Cabinet Member for Childrens and Young Peoples Services, Emma Ellis, Head of Service for Community Safety and Regulatory Services and Kayleigh Charlton, Community Safety Officer for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

The Chair invited Councillor Cusworth and Emma Ellis to introduce the report and the following was noted:

- The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2027 that was approved by Cabinet in 2022, aimed to ensure that the pathway into services would be seamless and that people would have one point of contact, with support provided.
- It was advised that 44% of the actions within the plan were completed and the Strategy was on track.

The Chair invited Kayleigh Charlton to lead on the presentation. The presentation gave an overview of the following content:

- Developing a Single Abuse Pathway which followed the below process-
 - A domestic abuse incident would occur.
 - There would either be a victim self-referral or an agency referral with victim consent.
 - Rotherham Rise would complete a triage process and identify the most appropriate support.
 - If the case was highly complex, a domestic abuse assertive outreach case worker would be assigned or alternatively a Rotherham Rise case worker would be assigned.
 - The victim would be supported.
- Changing Rotherham's Engagement Rate Definition-

- The definition had been changed to ensure that there was a clear definition of engagement and a methodology to work out engagement rates that was consistent.
 - The new definition was for any referrals that had engaged in any support offered, for example one to one support or attending programmes and/or interventions.
 - The change would provide a more accurate and reflective engagement rate figure, as inappropriate referrals and/or uncontactable referrals would not be included in the engagement rate calculation.
- Victim Barriers to Accessing Services-
 - National domestic abuse charity, Safe Lives confirmed that families lived with domestic abuse for a significant period before seeking effective help.
 - There were many reasons why families lived with domestic abuse or returned to their abuser after attempting to leave. It may not have been apparent to the victim that a relationship was abusive.
 - On average high-risk victims lived with domestic abuse for 2.3 years and medium risk victims for a period of 3 years, before getting help.
 - On average victims experienced fifty incidents of abuse, before consenting to effective help and support.
- The Strategy Update So Far-
 - There had been a focus on driving change together by prioritising the strengthening of governance processes and improving ways of working. As a result, there had been the development of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Priority Group and awareness training with schools and General Practices (GP's).
 - There had been a focus on prevention and early intervention, with a review conducted of all multi-agency meetings such as MARAC and MADA.

- There had been a focus on justice and on-going protection and as a result 60% of victims were engaging with domestic abuse services.
- There had been a focus on minimising harm by providing Early Help support.
- There had been a focus on providing safe accommodation and support, as a result the number of specialist domestic abuse houses had increased from eleven to twenty-four. There had been an increase in refuge spaces from eight to ten, and one hundred and eighteen victims had been supported financially to be able to remain in their own homes.
- There had been a focus on responding to changing need and demand, with a focus on weekly safe accommodation meetings and working on complexities.
- The Cranstoun Programme-
 - From the commencement of the program in September 2021 there had been five hundred and seventy-three referrals, with a 55% completion rate.
 - 88% of victims and/or survivors reported feeling safer on exit from the service.
 - 68% of victims and/or survivors reported that the abusive behaviours had stopped or reduced.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- In relation to Rotherham Rise case workers, there were male case workers and male counsellors available to support male victims.
- Rotherham Rise consulted with service users frequently, in order to shape their service offer and gather feedback. The local authority had regular commissioning meetings with Rotherham Rise, where case studies were provided.
- Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO) had changed and the

length of the DVPO had increased from eight weeks to thirty-one weeks.

- There were now thirteen furnished properties, specifically used for domestic abuse victims, that provided a homely environment.
- Evidence based behavioural programmes such as Inspire to Change, would always require an element of voluntary engagement, to ensure people engaged and were ready to change. There were mandatory programmes for offender prevention in custody and in the community.
- Operational Encompasses aim was to ensure that a notification was provided to schools where there had been any domestic abuse incident.
- The process for referrals into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was changed last year, so that referrals could only be received by phone calls. This had ensured that the right information was captured throughout referral conversations.
- The domestic abuse training was delivered online only and regular feedback on the training was reviewed at the Domestic Abuse Priority Group.

Resolved:-

- 1) That members of the Improving Lives Select Commission note the progress towards the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2027.
- 2) That hard copies of the Feel Safe Leaflet are provided to members for circulation.
- 3) That a visit to Rotherham Rise is arranged for members of the commission next year.

139. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme for 2023/2024 be approved.

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

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activities which outlined the following:

- There had been a successful visit to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) by members on the 22nd November.
- There had been a successful workshop held on the Early Years Strategy on the 27th November where Members provided feedback on the draft Early Years Strategy.
- The Chair and Vice- Chair visited the CHANCE Group on the 30th November, to capture user feedback and experiences.
- There would be an additional meeting on Monday 11th December, where the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum would present their Annual Report.
- There would be an additional meeting on Tuesday 12th December, where members could provide feedback on the Elective Home Education Consultation, as resolved in September's meeting.
- There would be an additional meeting on the 22nd January, where the Rotherham Safeguarding Childrens Partnership Board would present their Three Year Plan, as resolved in September's meeting.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

141. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

142. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on 30 January 2024, commencing at 10am in Rotherham Town Hall.