

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 28 January 2025

Present:- Councillor Pitchley (in the Chair); Councillors Knight, Blackham, Brent, Elliott, Fisher, Foster, Garnett, Harper, Hughes, Monk and Sutton.

Apologies for Absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Baggaley, Bower, T. Collingham and Ryalls.

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

50. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 3 December 2024, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

52. 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.

53. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

54. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) OFSTED AREA INSPECTION UPDATE

The agenda item provided an update on the outcomes of the Ofsted Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Area Inspection.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member of Children and Young People Services (CYPS), and Niall Devlin, Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member of Children and Young People Services to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:

- In July 2021, Rotherham Council's Children and Young People Service was inspected and areas for improvement were identified, this led to the development of a written statement of action, which aimed to improve the local SEND offer.

- By September 2024, significant progress had been made, though further work would continue. The 2024 inspection outcome was positive and reflected the hard work of the Service, despite the national challenges to the SEND system.

The Chair invited the Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion to present the update and presentation, during which the following was noted:

Aims of the presentation-

- The presentation would set out the progress made towards the Written Statement of Action (WSOA).
- The presentation would provide an overview of the findings and consequences of the 2024 Inspection Report.

The 2021 SEND inspection-

- The inspection identified thirteen areas of strength and sixteen areas that required improvement. To address the areas requiring improvement, the local area was required to produce a WSoA which prioritised the following four areas-
 - Quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)
 - Communication of Local Offer
 - Preparation for Adulthood
 - Graduated Response.
- The local area had made significant and sustained progress in relation to the following-
 - Improved the variability in the quality of EHCPs, including contributions from health and partners.
 - Improved the effectiveness of the graduated response to meet young people's needs, especially in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
 - Improved the quality of provision for young people's preparation for and transition to adulthood.
 - Improved communication with parents and carers with SEND about the Local Offer.
- A lot of progress was made from August 2022 to August 2024, during which-
 - Completed actions increased from 7 to 71

- Actions on track decreased from 43 to 2
- Actions in progress reduced from 13 to 0
- Actions with no progress decreased from 3 to 0
- Actions not due to start reduced from 9 to 2.

The 2024 inspection-

- Significantly different from earlier inspections, it was more rigorous and lasted three weeks.
- The new inspection involved a broader range of participants, including a Lead Inspector from Education, a Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspector, and, for the first time, a His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) who evaluated the entire partnership.
- Unlike previous narrative-based inspections, this inspection introduced a grading system with three levels, which were as follows-
 - Grade 3: Indicated significant weaknesses that required intensive monitoring and reinspection within 18 months.
 - Grade 2: Reflected variability, with both strengths and areas needing improvement, requiring a follow-up inspection within 18 months.
 - Grade 1: Significant consistent positive experiences and outcomes for families and young people, this was achieved by a very small number of authorities nationally.
- Rotherham Council was graded as Grade 1, this highlighted its consistent positive impact on families and young people.

Effective Practice-

- **Leadership and Strategy-** Leaders had a clear strategy based on rigorous data, focusing on four cornerstones which were, welcome and care, value and include, communicate, and work in partnership.
- **Voice of the Child-** Leaders gathered views from children and young people through surveys and groups such as 'Guiding Voices.'
- **Co-production-** Stakeholders worked together to improve services, making the best use of resources.
- **Parental Feedback-** Parents reported positively on the support their children received and appreciated accessible information.
- **Attendance-** Innovative strategies were in place to support attendance, including emotional preparation packages.
- **Early Help-** Early Help Practitioners provided timely intervention

and support, working with various services.

- **Specialist Support-** Effective provision was in place for children with visual and/or hearing impairments.

The area partnership needed to improve in four key areas-

- **Quality and Specificity of EHC Plans-** There was variability in the quality of EHCP's. Often, the voice of the child or young person and their families was not well reflected, leading to generic outcomes without clear steps for achievement.
- **Detail in Post-16 Provision-** While leaders were effective in helping young people access post-16 provision, this success was not always mirrored in the EHC plans. The plans often lacked detailed strategies for transitioning to adulthood, including vocational training and independent living skills.
- **Holistic View in EHC Plans-** Despite improvements, many EHC plans did not provide a comprehensive view of the child's needs across education, health, and social care. There was a need for better systems to share information across these sectors.
- **Timely Access to Services-** There were delays in diagnosing neurodevelopmental needs and accessing occupational, and speech and language therapy. Although there were action plans to address these delays, it was too early to see their impact.

Next Steps-

- The next full area SEND Inspection would be conducted within approximately five years.
- Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) asked that the local area partnership update and publish its strategic plan, based on the recommendations set out in the SEND Ofsted Inspection Report.

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

- The CQC Inspector spent significant time working with health services, challenging them to demonstrate their investment in neurodiversity assessments. A detailed plan was made to reduce autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and neurodiversity assessment times, to 18 weeks by December 2026, which was scrutinised and approved by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- There were milestones and financial investments set to reduce waiting lists, with significant progress already made. Efforts

included improved early support and identification through Family Hubs and resource hubs, schools reported positive impacts from the Orchard provision.

- The partnership aimed to challenge the misconception that a diagnosis was needed for an EHCP. A graduated approach was being developed to provide support at the lowest level while waiting for diagnosis, with a focus on needs like speech and language therapy.
- A new resource provision at Hillcrest was introduced to support speech, language and communication needs, and a school-led diagnostic referral process was established to speed up triage and improve the quality of referrals. This process had a success rate of over 90% for diagnoses.
- Rotherham had a higher-than-average number of young people with EHCPs post-16, and efforts were made to improve transitions for those with learning difficulties, even if they didn't have EHCPs.
- The Rotherham Parent Carers Forum, along with adult social care, health partners and the local authority, had developed a Preparation for Adulthood Handbook and associated pathway to support the transition.
- A NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) group was established, involving providers like the RNN Group (higher-education group), ROC Group, and other Early Help services, to improve communication and pathways between secondary and post-16 education.
- Minimum communication standards between schools and post-16 providers were being developed, with the RNN Group leading the creation of a pro-forma for essential information transfer, which would be discussed with secondary school head teachers in February.
- The Council worked closely with post-16 providers and non-traditional organisations, such as United Community Sports, to explore additional opportunities for young people.
- The NEET Group included a broad range of providers, ensuring a comprehensive approach to meeting the diverse needs of young people, including those with autism.
- There was a strong commitment from providers to collaborate and develop joint solutions for young people's transitions, including non-education establishments like ROC and others.
- The significant improvements in SEND services in Rotherham were noted, with the current progress described as revolutionary compared to the past, and congratulations were given to everyone involved in achieving these changes.

- The report highlighted unclear information regarding post-16 pathways, and it was acknowledged that more work was needed to clarify this. Since the Ofsted Inspection Report, efforts had been made to improve and clarify information with the Parent Carers Forum, with the final draft of the revised version scheduled for review at the next SEND Partnership Executive Board in February.
- Over the past two years, efforts were made in Rotherham to ensure data sharing agreements were fit for purpose, and the service worked closely with partners to address any issues. While some bureaucratic challenges still existed, the system had processes in place to escalate and resolve them quickly.
- There were 600 children in Rotherham who were electively home educated, and while support within schools was available, those outside the school system, including home educated children, faced challenges accessing services like Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Efforts had been made to address barriers for non-attending children, but interim support mechanisms were still needed for those awaiting intervention, particularly for universal services like CAMHS.
- Efforts had been made to improve the early identification of special educational needs through strategies like the Early Years Education Strategy, which aimed to identify needs early, reduce exclusions, and improve the quality of support and referrals across schools.
- New initiatives were implemented, such as the Inclusion Support Grant, outreach services, inclusion panels, and the development of a "threshold document" to ensure consistent support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and to address gaps in EHCP referrals, with substantial progress in the early years sector.
- Efforts were made to monitor the use of funding for children with EHCPs, including tracking progress through annual reviews and collaborating with schools on SEND progress, such as attendance and exam performance. A new portal was being developed to improve accountability.
- Concerns about the misuse of SEND funding in other areas were acknowledged, with plans to increase accountability and transparency in how funds were spent. Parents were encouraged to access support through services like Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS) and the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum. Improvements in the local offer and communication were made to support families.

Resolved:- That members of the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Acknowledge the outcome of the SEND Area Inspection and the

associated report.

- 2) Request that the Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion provides an update on the progress of the area's identified within the Inspection Report as requiring improvements, such as the variation of Quality and Specificity of EHC Plans and the delays in diagnosing neurodevelopmental needs and accessing occupational, speech and language therapy.
- 3) Request that the Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion provides provide a written response containing further information relating to the CAMHS services and the interim support available for children who are electively home educated.

55. FAMILY HELP UPDATE

This item provided an update on the Family Help Strategy 2024-2029, which was approved at Cabinet in March 2024. The Strategy was in the design phase and a further update on the Strategy was due to be presented to Cabinet March 2025.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member of Children and Young People Services (CYPS), Kelly White, Assistant Director for Early Help and Anne Hawke, Head of Service for Performance and Quality.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member of Children and Young People Services to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:

- The Strategy aligned with the Government vision, which was to transform Childrens Social Care. The Strategy focused on Family Help, to ensure timely and effective support for families.
- There was an emphasis on a collaborative whole system approach, which involved various services to support families. The Strategy aimed to provide support at the earliest opportunity, to avoid escalation of concerns and reliance on statutory services.
- The Strategy would give special consideration to the challenges faced by teenagers and their families.
- The Strategy was implemented through co-location arrangements in the Family Hubs, which offered a range of services and support. An example was provided of the recent launch of the baby packs at Brookfield Family Hub. The focus of the Family Hubs was building resilience in families and supporting them through problems independently, through supportive working ways and the co-location of services and advice provided.

The Chair invited the Assistant Director for Early Help to provide the

presentation, during which the following was noted:

- There had been a lot of work completed across the Partnership, such as engagement with service users, children, families, partners and beyond.

The Key vision and Key Principles-

- Early Help was a shared responsibility and was everyone's business. Early Help was not a Council run offer; it was a partnership approach.
- Children, young people and families would receive the right support, at the right time, in the right place, from the right person. It was important to recognise the right person to support a family and this was often not a council officer.
- Early Help had purposeful conversations and provided support to improve outcomes.
- Early Help worked restoratively with children, young people and families.
- Prevention and Early Help support was better than late intervention.
- Public, voluntary and community sector organisations had combined to create the Early Help system and worked together to meet the needs of children and their families.
- Family Help provided the right support at the right time so that children could thrive with their families.

Shared Responsibility-

- The service had an Early Help Assessment which was used by the Council and all partners across the partnership, such as schools. This was a standalone assessment, if a family was required to escalate to social care intervention, this was another separate assessment. This was assessed as difficult for families as they were required to tell their story twice, because of this a new revised assessment had been developed called a Family Assessment of Need.
- The new revised assessment document could be undertaken by partners, Early Help employee's and Social Workers, if there was a statutory intervention required. The benefits of the new assessment document were that partners could use it to demonstrate their intervention, it could be added to as children moved through the services, which would avoid duplication, and it would be familiar document for families.
- There were eight Early Help Teams across the borough, who were

aligned with the Council's Social Care Teams.

- There was a new Early Help specification which outlined the family support offer to children and families. The benefits of the new specification were that it provided clear service standards, would ensure a consistent and transparent approach to support for families, would ensure families receive the right help when they need it and that all offers of help would be provided before stepping up to Social Care.
- A toolkit had been developed for Integrated Working Leads (IWL's) to support partners, particularly schools, this would continue to help families where this was the best option for the family. The benefits of the toolkit were that it reduced reliance on RMBC Early Help allowing the team to work with more intensely with targeted families and improved school confidence and resilience.

The Right Support at the Right Time-

- Social Care Advanced Practitioners would provide consultation, help and advice to Early Help Teams where they were looking to escalate families to social care. In situations where the threshold was clearly met, there would be no delay. However, where further support could be offered to a family, the advanced practitioner would assist in attending joint visits and would provide oversight. The benefits of this arrangement were that it was locality based, so decisions were made by those who best understood the family and culture, it ensured all options of help would be explored prior to stepping up to social care and would reduce reliance of social care. The arrangement offered additional oversight and would prevent unnecessary step-up and straight back down, ensuring a greater consistency for the family.
- The co-working framework was reviewed to ensure it provided clear criteria. There were some situations where a family would have a Social Worker and a Family Support Worker, which could be overwhelming for families. This had been reviewed to identify in what circumstances this would be appropriate. The benefit to this was that it would reduce the number of professionals a family would be expected to engage with, which would free up some Early Help capacity, to offer more intensive support to targeted families and reduce escalation to more costly statutory services.

Teenagers-

- The service was building on the pathways that were already available, such as, developing a new step-down process for children exiting the Youth Justice Service and/or the Evolve Programme, to ensure on-going would be planned and understood.
- Engagement and focused work were on-going with young people in Year 12 and Year 13, whose Employment, Education and Training

destination was 'Not Known'.

- Direct work was on-going with young people who were not in employment, education or training, to support them with engagement into employment, education or training.
- There was an offer of a 'Keep on Track' Group programme in secondary schools across the Borough, for an identified cohort of year 11 pupils who had been identified as being at risk of becoming not in employment, education or training.
- The service delivered regular street-based, detached work with young people, this could be in response to areas of identified need within communities, as part of a wider partnership approach.
- The Service led the delivery of Operation Keepsafe, which was a multi-agency assertive outreach programme in response to intelligence, and/or to meet an identified need, such as anti-social behaviour (ASB) or child exploitation (CE) and other concerns related to young people's wellbeing and safety.
- There were targeted youth groups within localities, which were based on areas of locally identified need.
- There was universal youth work across the partnership.
- There was a greater promotion of online support through the Evidence Based Hub, such as Triple P Teen, which was available in person and online and the Solihull Approach School Years Teen Life.
- The benefits to all this work were that there was early intervention prior to young people becoming not in employment, education or training, a greater level of wrap around support to prevent re-offending and Anti-Social Behaviour, a warm step down for children exiting Evolve and a reduction to escalations into Social Care services.

Summary-

- Social Care assessments remained with Social Workers, however Section 17 support was provided by both Early Help and Social Care, depending on the required level of need, with checks and balances in place.
- Need-led work was undertaken across the partnership and support was provided to partners via Integrated Working Leads, to ensure that partners were doing all they could to support.
- Early Help would exhaust all options of support, prior to escalation to Social Care, except for concerns of significant harm.
- The service was building in additional safeguards to support Early Help to continue the work in line with the Working Together 2023

Framework.

- There was a new assessment tool for all assessments to prevent a 'stop start' with families.
- There was a new teenage pathway which would recognise their vulnerabilities.
- There was the promotion of the Family Hubs and an online offer of support.

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

- The Early Help service was based on consent; therefore, people were required to want to work with the service. However, the introduction of the Advanced Practitioners enabled the service to help people who did not want to consent, before it would be escalated to Social Care. For example, there would be circumstances where people did not consent to Early Help support, however there was other safeguards in place, and it was deemed safe for Early Help to step away. In other circumstances where there were no other safeguards in place, this would be escalated to Social Care. There would be a section 47 meeting under the Children's Act, if the service had any concerns around potential harm or significant harm.
- The service aimed to work restoratively with families, restorative practise and Signs of Safety had been the operating model in Rotherham for a long time, and the service were skilled in this area. It was apparent how many families the service had conversations with, which had led to the families wanting to engage as they could see the benefits of engaging. The service often completed work by proxy, by supporting other professionals who had an established relationship with the family, such as a drug and alcohol Councillor, to agree the engagement with Early Help moving forward.
- The Lead Professional would be identified and agreed during a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Assessment (MASH). The Lead Professional would co-ordinate the work for the family, this could be the school who would undertake the Early Help assessment and become the co-ordinator and reviewer of that plan, or often this could be a family support worker. There would be regular Team Around the Family Meetings (TAF's), which would bring the family together and all the partners offering support to the family. If there were any safeguarding concerns, the Lead Professional would be a qualified Social Worker.

- A written response would be provided which would contain further information on the training offer that was available to the voluntary and community sector, and the accessibility of the training offer for the voluntary and community sector, if they were not members of the Children's and Young Peoples Consortium and were not paying a fee to Voluntary Action Rotherham.
- The service was focused on improving the Family Hubs online offer and were aiming to build on their audio and visual online offer.
- The Strategy was a public document and was as accessible as possible, so that young people could read and understand the Strategy. A new glossary sheet would be developed to sit alongside the Strategy and this would be shared with the Commission.
- Schools were the most significant contributor to the Early Help Assessment, alongside Council employees. The service had good relationships with schools across the borough, Early Help Managers linked in with all schools and held regular meetings with schools.
- The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance within Children's Services had a jointly funded role with the Council and the Integrated Health Board, this ensured a strong link between the two services. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance within Children's Services was completing a piece of work to reduce the waiting lists within the CAMHS service.
- The new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and associated documents were circulated to members of the Commission for questions and comments, in January 2025.
- Section 11 arrangements were still in place for partners and Rotherham was the second highest nationally in relation to partners undertaking Early Help Assessments, this provided a strong foundation to build on.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Consider and acknowledge the update provided.
- 2) Request that the Assistant Director for Early Help provides a written response with further information relating to the training offer and accessibility of the training offer for the voluntary and community sector.
- 3) Request that the Family Help Strategy document be circulated to members.
- 4) Request that a new glossary sheet relating to Family Help is

developed and shared with the Commission.

56. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme, and the following was noted:

- At the next meeting, the Commission would consider reports and updates on the following items-
 - The Kinship Care Offer, including new procedures, policies, and the local offer.
 - An update on the Youth Justice Service, including an overview and update on the new inspection framework.
- A future workshop would be arranged for members of the Commission, to consider the following items:
 - An update on the Prevent Programme.
 - An update on the protest recovery response.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme for 2024/2025 be approved.

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

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity, during which the following was noted:

- The Preparation for Adulthood Spotlight Review Recommendations that were presented to Cabinet, were all been accepted by Cabinet. Members and officers present at the Cabinet meeting thanked the Commission for their work on the review and stated how important the work had been.
- Members of the Commission were asked to consider whether there were any potential areas for review activities that they would like to suggest. Members were asked to email any suggested review topics to the Governance Advisor.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

58. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.