

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 4 November 2025

Present:- Councillor Brent (in the Chair); Councillors Ismail, Adair, Blackham, Clarke, T. Collingham, Elliott, Fisher, Harper, Hughes, Pitchley, Sutton. n

Apologies for Absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Bower, Garnett and Monk.

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

10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 4 November 2025, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12. 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.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

14. THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2023-2027 UPDATE

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

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, the Cabinet Member for Children's and Young Peoples Services, Helen Sweatton, Joint Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance and Mark Cummins, SEND Transformation Project Lead.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:-

- The Looked After Children's Sufficiency Strategy focused on what was known about Rotherham's children and young people, including their voices and information about local homes for children.
- The strategy provided the latest data trends and what the priorities were on the delivery plan. The strategy set out how Children and Young People Services would fulfil its role as a corporate parent and meet its Statutory Sufficiency Duty, by providing good quality care, effective parenting, and supporting children and young people in care and when they left care.
- The report and presentation would provide an update on the delivery of the strategy over the past 12 months, including the transformation programmes, such as foster care recruitment and residential children's homes.

The Chair invited the SEND Transformation Project Lead to present the PowerPoint, during which the following was noted:-

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 would meet the needs of children and young people in care. This included fostering placements, residential placements and accommodation for care leavers.

Key Priorities 2023-2027-

- More young people would be able to be cared for safely in their families and communities within Rotherham and achieve independence successfully.
- Children and young people would have access to a range of homes, 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 needed when they needed it, because 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, Young People, their families and carers would be able to access Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

assessments and interventions when needed.

- Children, young people, families and carers would benefit from additional social value in Rotherham, for example more employment opportunities.
- More children, young people and families would benefit from additional support to improve outcomes and to access employment.

Children In Care Trends-

- The numbers of children in care had reduced from 505 to 464. This followed a steady downward trend over the past two years.
- The number of in-house placements across all types of available provisions, predominantly in-house fostering, residential and sixteen plus had stayed consistent across the period measured, however it was increasing as an overall percentage, as the overall number of children in care reduced.
- Placement stability was strong, with 60% of placements being consistent.
- Placement moves had reduced, this suggested that the plan that was in place was working.

Leaving Care Trends-

- Leaving care would be a focus area for the service over the next year, specifically reviewing sufficiency arrangements, including the in-house offer to foster carers.
- The number of care leavers had stayed consistent with a slight reduction. There was a larger number of children aged 11-15 who would enter leaving care over the next few years and would require leaving care accommodation.
- There had been continued development of the in-house residential homes provision. The service currently operated seven homes, with a further four expected to become operational shortly.

Residential Case Study-

- The case study was from a short stay home single occupancy home. The home was used in situations where a young person required accommodation quickly and where other options were not available at that time.
- Background information was obtained through the initial referral form and gathered further by a matching meeting. The Service Manager met child D at their Children in Care Review.
- The service was sensitive to their experiences and their life chances. The remit was to create a secure base where workers could further explore their risks and prepare them for independence as part of their step-down plan.
- Positive relationships were formed and evidenced by the following:-

- Sharing sensitive information including past experiences and their hopes for the future.
 - Decreased frequency of going missing and when they were missing, they would stay in contact with the team.
 - Increased family time.
 - Engaged with numerous direct work sessions a month.
- The service supported their transition into a further placement outside of Rotherham, in line with their Step-down and Safety Plan.
- D visited this placement since leaving and expressed that it was the only place that they felt safe and cared for.

Children's Home One and Two-

- The service opened several residential homes over recent years and were keen to highlight the high quality of the homes. Young people were involved in the development of the residential homes, examples were provided of how young people were involved in the naming of the homes, interviewing senior employees within the residential service and had helped to pick the furniture and bedroom colours.

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. The marketing and brand was more prominent due to the work completed over recent years; this included the support from elected members. The aim of the marketing campaign was to grow the in-house offer, to ensure that more children in care would be in family-based settings, and that there would be an in-house provision delivering better value for placements.
- Fostering Rotherham worked with local foster carer heroes who offered up their homes and hearts to young people in and around the community. The service worked with over 120 fostering families from across Rotherham and South Yorkshire, to improve the lives of local children and young people.
- Every day, the Fostering Team and carers lived the Rotherham Council values that were at the core of the local authority. These were honesty, accountability and always being respectful. The service was ambitious and aimed to make a real change for all of Rotherham's looked after children and were proud of what they did.

Foster Carer Retention-

- Building a stronger, connected community.
- Providing regular opportunities for carers to connect, learn and feel valued all year round.
- Monthly activities for carers included the following:

- Coffee afternoons, which offered informal peer support and connection.
- Foster carer breakfasts, which recognised and celebrated carers.
- Quarterly forums, which offered opportunities to learn and strengthen relationships across the fostering community.
- Quarterly wellbeing Sessions, which promoted foster carer wellbeing through activities like 'paint a pot', pamper sessions, wreath making, jewellery workshops and walking with Alpacas.
- Partnerships activities, for example working with local organisations such as the Arc Cinema, Wentworth Woodhouse, Grimm and Co and Rotherham United, to offer free or discounted experiences for families. There were also businesses that had financially supported some of the services activities.

Celebrating the Foster Carer Community-

- Highlights from the last 12 months included the following:
 - The launch of a short fostering film called 'Everything', which was shown at the Arc Cinema in October 2024.
 - Free tickets provided for Wentworth Woodhouse to see 'T'was The Night Before Christmas' and free tickets for a Christmas Pantomime for fostering families in December 2024.
 - An Easter Egg Hunt and 50 Years of Fostering Celebration in April 2025.
 - The first Fostering Rotherham Festival and a fostering trip to Bridlington in May 2025.
 - The first Fostering Rotherham Olympics and Colour Dash in July 2025.
 - A story making workshop for children in care in August 2025.
 - Afternoon Tea with the Mayor of Rotherham and a celebration of foster carers in October 2025.
 - The varied programme of celebrations recognised commitment, built communities and ensured every foster carer would feel part of the Rotherham Family.

Challenges-

- There were recruitment challenges for the residential workforce, as the recruitment remained extremely competitive. As more in-house residential homes became operational, more employees were required, recruiting employees was a national challenge. This would be an area of focus to increase marketing in this area.
- Recruitment and retention of foster carers remained an ongoing challenge due to the competitive nature of the market. There was

also an ageing foster carer population in Rotherham, this mirrored a national challenge.

- An emerging area of focus and priority was the shortage of available, externally commissioned placements across fostering, residential and sixteen plus accommodation. There was a cohort of children in care who would soon become care leavers, therefore the service was reviewing their local offer for care leavers and assessing the sufficiency of placements, to see what options were available to develop further in-house provision to support care leavers.

Opportunities-

- Ensuring continued and improved awareness and local support for looked after children, especially when developing new provision.
- Developing place-based marketing to increase recruitment and complement the online presence.
- Continuing to promote what's working well and share good new stories.

The Chair thanked the relevant officers for the update and opened the meeting up to questions, during which the following was noted and discussed:

- CAMHS generic waiting lists for services such as Getting Advice, Getting Help and Psychological Therapies, were at four to six weeks and children in care were not waiting a significant period for CAMHS support. The service reorganised the way in which they provided in-house therapeutic support to children in care, therefore in situations where children required additional support and before they reached the threshold for CAMHS support, the service Empower would assist. Empower aimed to support children in situations where either the trauma they had experienced or the emotional wellbeing needs they had were impacting on the home that they were living in, risking placement breakdown. CAMHS services supported the Empower service delivered by the local authority with clinical supervisions. More information on the Empower would be shared with the Commission in writing.
- The latest figures showed that there were 45 children in care on the waiting list for neurodevelopmental assessments. It was advised that being a child in care did not necessarily require prioritisation over another child. However, in situations where an assessment of needs would help the service to identify the right home for the child or would help provide support, this would be prioritised.
- In relation to page 42, the current 344 care leavers and the target of 98.2%, it was clarified that there were seven children and young people who were not in appropriate accommodation, this was because any care leaver in custody could not be classed as being in appropriate accommodation.
- There was a Service Multi-Agency Protocol in place to support children in care and care leavers, the policy ensured children and

young people in care would not be criminalised for behaviour such as criminal damage in residential homes.

- The support offered to care leavers was detailed within the Care Leavers Local Offer. The support for care leavers would not begin later than age sixteen, this was dependent on the young person. They would be consistently asked what support they would need in terms of preparation for adulthood. There were many programmes delivered by CYPS and other services such as housing and Employment Solutions, to transition a care leaver into independence. Personal Advisors offered support which covered anything that would be expected of a parent or carer offer, up until the age of twenty-five. Rotherham had a Care Leavers Covenant, a Care Leaver Offer and Care Leavers Charter.
- In-house residential homes were spread out in different wards across the borough. The main considerations when the service looked at purchasing a property were whether the home would be a good one for children, whether it had the right facilities and was in the right neighbourhood. A full list of the geographic location of in-house residential homes by ward basis would be provided to members of the Commission in writing. The Cabinet Member urged all elected members to support any applications at Planning Board which proposed an in-house residential home.
- The services ambition and aspiration were to have sufficient homes across the borough, including foster homes, residential homes and post sixteen supported accommodation, to be able to match each individual child to the right home. However, it was noted that was not the position the service was in. Since 2021, the service had not been in a position where there were too many suitable properties available for children and young people. When identifying suitable properties, the service looked at the size of the property and whether it would be big enough to house two children comfortably, alongside a staff team, whilst replicating a home environment. Outside space for the children and young people was also considered, alongside whether the property was in a reasonable distance from education provisions. The properties also needed to be within an area that the police would recommend and be priced within an allocated budget.
- At times the service struggled to find appropriate properties which would meet all the relevant criteria, however, the service had purchased a range of property types. Examples were provided of properties purchased from the open market, council homes and existing council assets, such as caretaker properties that were refurbished to ensure the right standards. The service worked well with Strategic Housing and Asset Management to look at accommodation requirements and utilising properties that the council already had.
- The service received significant investment from Cabinet into services such as the in-house residential and in-house fostering services, this had enabled the service to continue to grow in-house provisions.
- Private sector providers were leading the market, in 2024 the top ten

private providers made a combined profit of three hundred million pounds in profit alone.

- In relation to fostering, although the service had not managed to significantly increase the number of foster carers, the council had maintained their number of foster carers, whilst regional and statistical neighbours had seen a significant reduction in numbers. The maintenance was attributed to a very clear marketing strategy and good level of investment to provide support and recruit good foster carers in Rotherham.
- The Commissioning Team worked hard to develop and grow relationships with private providers such as Independent Fostering Agencies and residential providers. This enabled the service to access available places when required.
- Additional investment for the services residential workforce was agreed to enable good quality, supportive homes for children. This also contributed to ensuring the right homes were available for children within Rotherham. 70% of children were placed within twenty miles of their home.
- On a monthly basis, the Joint Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance chaired the Children and Care Sufficiency Board, which fed into the Children's and Young People's Services Change Management Board, chaired by the Strategic Director of Children's and Young People's Services. There was an action plan which aimed to increase the places and homes available for children to live in, to promote fostering and encourage more in-house foster carers to work with the Council to grow the in-house residential service, and to explore what in-house supported accommodation was required for care leavers aged sixteen plus.
- There was a cohort of foster carers who were ready to retire and often positive foster care endings. Examples were provided of foster carers who decided to adopt their foster child or agree to a Special Guardianship Order, which was a positive ending for the child, but the loss of a foster carer for the service. The service agreed to share a profile with members of the number of newly approved foster carers and the number of de-registrations over the last two years. Some foster carers had a break from fostering for many reasons such as a placement end, a child returning to their birth family or a baby moving onto adoption.
- The service would provide members with additional information on the financial support available for children on Special Guardianship Orders, specifically any financial support available for higher education.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:-

- 1) Considered the progress made against the delivery plan for the Looked After Children's Sufficiency Strategy.
- 2) Requested that additional information be provided to the Commission on the Empower Service.
- 3) Requested that additional information be provided by a ward basis,

on the locations of residential homes across the borough.

- 4) Requested that the specific data be provided on how many children are in care currently and the comparison to the number of places available for allocation.
- 5) Requested that specific data be provided relating to the current number of newly approved foster carers, the current number of fostering de-registrations and the comparison data to other local authorities.
- 6) Requested that additional information be provided on whether there is any financial support available for higher education, for young people in a Special Guardianship Order arrangement.

15. DRAFT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2026-2029 UPDATE

This item provided a high-level overview of the draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy via a PowerPoint presentation, for pre-decision, ahead of it being presented to Cabinet.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, the Cabinet Member for Children's and Young Peoples Services, Helen Sweaton, Joint Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance, Cary- Anne Sykes, Head of Service for SEND, Mark Cummins, SEND Transformation Project Lead and Jayne Fitzgerald, Strategic Director of Rotherham Parent Carers Forum, who was in attendance to represent and share the voice of Rotherham Parent Carers.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:

- The update would share the progress made on the planning for a new SEND Sufficiency Strategy and would include the current position, future needs analysis and the outcome of stakeholder engagement. The current SEND Sufficiency Strategy was detailed as part of the Safety Valve Agreement and Implementation Plan, and had been in operation since 2021.
- The new SEND Sufficiency Strategy would be presented to Cabinet for consideration and/or approval in February 2026, ahead of a proposed implementation from April 2026 onwards. The proposed Strategy was underpinned by the Four Cornerstones of Co-production, which were welcome and care, value and include, communicate and work in partnership.
- Through seven core aspirations, the strategy would seek to ensure more pupils could be educated within Rotherham beside their peers, utilising a range of locally available education provision.
- Local authorities were waiting for the outcome of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which had been delayed until 2026. It was recognised nationally that the SEND system required improvement, however, it was noted that Rotherham were doing well in the area of SEND.

The Chair invited the SEND Transformation Project Lead to present the PowerPoint, during which the following was noted:

Background-

- The current SEND Sufficiency Strategy which was detailed as part of the Safety Valve Agreement and Implementation Plan, had been in operation since 2021 and would run until the end of 2025-2026.
- A longer-term strategy was required to identify sufficiency requirements beyond the Safety Valve from April 2026.

Engagement-

- As part of the preparation of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, stakeholder discussion and feedback was completed with mainstream schools, special schools, post 16 providers, health colleagues, parents and carers and young people.
- SEND Sufficiency discussion's took place with education leaders at the Schools Forum, wider education and school improvement partners and at SENCO network events.
- Discussions focused on what was working well and on areas for improvement across core areas including SEND provision, graduated approach and Outreach Services.
- Alongside engagement completed specifically for the development of the new SEND Sufficiency Strategy, young people's and parent and/or carers views were captured as part of established quality assurance processes across all the SEND provision.
- The Rotherham Parent Carers Forum were heavily involved in the stakeholder discussions and had led on some of the engagement in this area.
- The aim of the engagement was to understand the progress that had been made during the Safety Valve period and identify future priorities for a longer term SEND Sufficiency Strategy.
- The service also engaged with a variety of governance groups, such as the SEND Executive and SEND Partnership. The service often spoke to young people to gather their feedback on the current provisions, sought the views of teachers and employee's and parents and carers.

Introduction-

- The Council had a responsibility to create enough education provision to meet the needs of all pupils, this was called sufficiency.
- This included support to mainstream schools to meet a wider level of SEND need and providing sufficiency of education where it was determined specialist provision was required.
- The SEND Sufficiency Strategy identified local needs and provision requirements so that all pupils across the SEND continuum would

be able to access appropriate education provision.

- The focus of the Safety Valve Agreement was to grow the in-borough provision, to provide a range of different education options which moved towards mainstream education via a graduated response, this mirrored the national position and priorities.

Vision-

- The service had a strong clear vision, Rotherham were just as ambitious for children and young people with SEND, as they were for every other child. The clear vision would ensure consistency and ambition.
- It was noted that the SEND Sufficiency Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Rotherham SEND Strategy, My Life My Rights 2024-2028, the two documents worked closely together and included several shared priorities on education and sufficiency.

The Four Cornerstones-

- Everything in Rotherham was underpinned by the Four Cornerstones of Co-production, which were welcome and care, value and include, communicate and work in partnership. The key focus of the service was how they worked and engaged with all partners in relation to SEND.

Progress Since the Last SEND Sufficiency Strategy (Safety Valve)-

- More children were supported to access education within or close to their local community.
- Additional good and outstanding local provision was created, this increased the amount of young people educated locally and reduced reliance on the private sector, such as independent non-maintained and ISP providers.
- The Graduated Response in Rotherham.
- The development of a SEND School Improvement Offer and Quality Assurance, this ensured consistency across mainstream settings.
- The Specialist Inclusion Team (SIT) were created to increase the amount of time that they provided outreach services, this increased the support available to all schools within Rotherham.
- Continuing to create good and outstanding local provision was an aim for the service, alongside continuing to implement a consistent graduated response and continuing to look at the outreach offer, to provide more support to schools as and when they required it.

Rotherham Data-

- This data was taken from the census and highlighted the range of young people accessing a variety of education provisions at

different key stages. Overall, the data mirrored national data and highlighted an increase in demand for specialist provision, which was attributed to an increase in requests for Education, Health and Care Plans and assessments each year (EHCP's).

- In relation to children in Rotherham Schools, Rotherham had 57,453 children aged under eighteen that represented 21.7% of the local population. There were 45,763 children and young people attending Rotherham's schools as at the January 2024 School Census. There were 465 children in a maintained nursery school, 24,661 pupils in primary schools, 19,303 pupils in secondary schools, 1,194 pupils in special schools and 140 pupils in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).
- There was a growing number of requests for Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment each year. Half of the special schools in Rotherham were regularly full or over their commissioned number, and the alternative provision places at the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were close to capacity since January 2024.

The National Position and Comparison-

- Slide ten detailed the national position against the Rotherham position, across all different education provision types. This included resource provision and special schools. A resource provision would be situated on a mainstream school site and provided the opportunity for young people who could access mainstream education, alongside some additional support. The slide also detailed mainstream schools, independent non-maintained and ISP's. Independent specialist provision was predominantly post sixteen and independent non-maintained was for the pre-sixteen age range.
- The difference between the local and national position guided the services thinking and planning for the next SEND Sufficiency Strategy. Rotherham provided more special school places than national averages by approximately 7%, some of that was attributed to the work completed to date which had reduced the independent non-maintained population to sit 2% below the national level. This was a result of the growth of special school places and resource provision places. In terms of mainstream schools, less children were educated there compared to national levels; however, work had been completed to improve the figure such as increased training, recruitment of employees and increased support.

Needs Analysis-

- Key Documents considered were as follows:
 - Safety Valve Monitoring Dashboard, this was included within the quarterly returns and looked at the data in further detail.
 - SEND statutory returns information which identified current demand and place planning. The service focused heavily on

place planning to plan directly on a case-by-case basis for young people, this included what their destination looked like and their next step into education, to identify the right provision and any gaps.

- Local SEND provision map.
 - Performance monitoring analysis for the Outreach Services.
 - EHCP trends and the comparison to the national picture.
 - National Strategy links where appropriate.
 - SEND Strategy and KPI dashboard.
 - Partnership data, such as from Health Partners and the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum (RPCF). The RPCF provided data and feedback from parents and carers, the Strategic Director of RPCF also sat on the SEND Executive and SEND Sufficiency Board.
- Key Areas identified were as follows:
 - EHCP Growth, the projects and forecasting for EHCPs were based on a needs change basis. The service was slightly ahead of the forecast at the time; the forecast would be renewed ahead of the strategy seeking approval at Cabinet.
 - Primary need understanding, this provided a breakdown of primary need types. The most prevalent primary needs related to autism spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health, these were the two areas with the most growth in Rotherham. There was also growth within speech, language and communication needs.
 - Place planning forecasting, if the demand continued to grow, this would require a number of additional places, including up to 380 more places needed in mainstream schools by 2028, this mirrored the national picture and was the equivalent of 40% of the cohort of mainstream by 2030. 161 additional places within special schools would be required by 2028, which would continue to grow to 300 more by 2030. 78 more places within the ISP settings would be required by 2028, growing up to 128 by 2030.

Aspirations-

1. More young people would be able to be educated locally, in their communities with mainstream peers.
2. More young people would be able to start their education journey successfully with a plan for their next phase of education.
3. The service would work with the network of special schools to identify gaps in current provision and make best use of the places available across our special schools.
4. Mainstream Schools would be able to access a range of support and best practice guidance to create a more consistent offer to SEND pupils.
5. The mainstream and special schools would be more accessible places for SEND learners.

6. More young people would benefit from additional support to improve outcomes at post-16 and access employment.
7. The service would ensure that the network of local specialist provision would be utilised to its fullest and would continue to deliver good outcomes.

Measuring Success-

- There was a combination of output measures relating to activity completion, and impact measures relating to the outcomes for children and young people.
- Progress would be monitored through the SEND Sufficiency Board and SEND Executive Partnership Board.
- There would be an annual scrutiny update and a Cabinet update.
- A separate session would be arranged to provide an update to the Commission on the Thresholds of Needs document.

The Rotherham Parent Carers Forum Update-

- The RPCF was commissioned by the local authority to gather voice of parent carers and young people and had just under 3000 members across all wards in Rotherham, although they engaged with up to 6000 families online who were not full members.
- The RPCF completed a survey to all families on an annual basis in March, the survey asked the families what their priorities were at that point in time. In March 2025, SEND Sufficiency and supporting education were the fourth priority identified, and number two was EHCP's. Access to therapies and SEND transport were also priorities for families. The survey was a snapshot in time and the priorities of families changed frequently.
- The RPCF worked in partnership with the local authority to deliver the priorities identified.
- The survey captured positive experiences relating to being listened to and treated with respect, clear and honest communication from schools and practitioners, early intervention and timely support and employees understand my children's needs and genuinely care.
- The survey captured barriers and challenges, these were inconsistent support between schools and settings, delays in appropriate placements or support, support plans or EHCPs not being fully implemented, this was felt to be inconsistent between schools and education settings.

The Chair thanked the relevant officers for the update and opened the meeting up to questions, during which the following was noted and discussed:

- There had been significant innovation in health over the past twenty years, which had increased the number of children with very complex needs who were likely to continue to survive into

adulthood and require an education that would nurture them. The number of children with SEND requirements had disproportionately increased to the population increase.

- There was a bold increase in EHCPs for years nine, ten and eleven, this was attributed to a direct impact of the pandemic. The Element Two funding provided to schools was attributed to the rise in EHCP's, the funding hadn't changed its core value in monetary terms since 2014, which was currently £6,000 for SEND support, if this had risen with inflation this would be at £12,000. Although there was no direct evidence of this, the service advised that they felt that the financial impact of this impacted on schools being unable to provide the support needed for some young people which the service felt was driving the need for EHCP's.
- The Threshold of Needs Document was a key driver in ensuring consistency of allocation, decision making around thresholds and levels of need and expectations of a graduated response across every school. This assisted with driving down the demand of EHCP's.
- The secondary curriculum was felt to be a driver in EHCP's as schools lived in a battle between data, Ofsted and the curriculum against reasonable adjustments, equality and SEND Support.
- A core part of the Safety Valve was around growing the local authorities resource provision, moving towards the mainstream and delivering an additional 100 places combined across primary and secondary education. There was an element that required provisions to be created quickly to meet the demand. The next phase which has been worked on over the last two years has focused on the consistency of support across resource provisions. The provisions were registered with the Department of Education and went through a significant change process and a formal registration.
- The service had strengthened contracting; service level agreements were in place with all resource provision which set overarching requirements. There was a commissioning model in place, all resource provisions were provided by multi-academy trust partners, these were supplemented with quality assurance. Good practise was also shared with schools who were wanting to learn, and additional support was provided by the Specialist Inclusion Team to new resource provisions.
- Places in resource provisions were offered on an individual pupil basis and could not be shared across pupils, this was because the space and requirement were individualised to that specific young person. An example was provided of how a young person may be fine in a mainstream provision for 70% of the week but may need to be withdrawn at any point in time. Although places could not be split between pupils, schools did use the spaces flexibly and managed and co-ordinated them well.
- Every school in Rotherham would have a strategic plan in the next year, which would focus on what their SEND offer was, this would include their whole school special needs offer, classroom offer, and

individual pupil offer around every area of need. Support was being provided by SENDCO's to each school for this. The Specialist Inclusion Teachers were an important presence in schools to ensure a clear understanding of the system and the young people moving through the system.

- Funding for private nurseries was included within Childcare Sufficiency, historically this included three levels of funding, this was anticipated to change. A written update would be provided to the Commission on the funding available for nurseries.
- The SEND Service were working with the Early Years Team to complete a data tracking exercise and place planning from the age of 0. This would provide a trajectory for children at a younger age and allow for better planning and support through the system. There was also a Specialist Inclusion Team that worked within the early years provision to join up the system and enable better transitions from a younger age. The Thresholds of Needs document also included a lot of information for nurseries and childminders.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Considered the update on the development of the draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026-2029.
- 2) Requested that a separate session be arranged to provide an update on the Thresholds of Needs document.
- 3) Requested that a further update be provided in writing on childcare sufficiency and the funding available for nurseries.

16. WORK PROGRAMME

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

- The work programme was included within the agenda pack, for information and discussions.
- There was the following suggested changes to the work programme for members consideration:
 - Children's and Young People's Services requested that the Response to the Prevention of Future Deaths Report be delayed from today's meeting and be presented to December's meeting.
 - It was requested that the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Assurance Report be presented to December's meeting.
 - As a result, it was suggested that the Community Cohesion Projects Update scheduled for December's meeting, be moved to March 2026.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme for 2025/2026 be approved.

17. 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.

18. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.