

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 2 December 2025

Present:- Councillor Monk (in the Chair); Councillors Adair, Blackham, Bower, Brent, Clarke, Elliott, Garnett, Harper, Hughes, Pitchley, Reynolds, Sutton and Ms. L. Hickey (Co-optee).

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors T. Collingham, Fisher, Ismail, Mr. M. Hemmingway and Mr. J. Newman (Co-optees).

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

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

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 4TH NOVEMBER, 2025

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th November, 2025.

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

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to report.

21. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for Minute No. 41 (Fostering Transformation Programme incorporating the Children's and Young Peoples Services Prevention of Future Death Reports) as defined in Paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual).

22. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

23. FOSTERING TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (INCORPORATING PREVENTION OF FUTURE DEATHS REPORT)

Consideration was given to the report which sought to address the need to review the current Fostering Programme in the light of changing sufficiency needs for children and young people in care in Rotherham. This incorporated the response of the Council to the tragic death of Marcia Grant and the formal Prevention of Future Deaths' report following the inquest in July 2025.

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, introduced the report highlighting how foster carers played a vital role in keeping children safe and helping them thrive. Their contribution was deeply valued by all, but sadly a foster carer, Marcia Grant, tragically died in the spring of 2023. Heartfelt condolences were again expressed to Marcia's family and to acknowledge the incredible work she did for the service and for Rotherham's children.

An inquest into her death took place in July this year, during which the Council was asked to address three key issues:-

1. How the Council could ensure there were enough placements available.
2. How the Council could manage the forms within the placement process.
3. How the Council could improve overall risk assessment in relation to placement decisions.

Nicola Curley, Strategic Director, outlined how the Council had responded to the Preventing Future Deaths report and how the Council had provided a detailed response. The Fostering Transformation Board would take the points forward to ensure lessons were learned and improvements continued.

By way of a presentation (included within the agenda documentation) the Strategic Director highlighted:-

- Fostering Overview.
- Fostering Transformation Board.
- Incident of Concerns.
- Findings and Prevention of Future Deaths Report.
- Action Taken in 2023.
- Action Taken from 3rd September, 2025.
- Next Steps.

Details were shared of the Learning Academy, serving the whole of Children's Services which was currently reviewing the training offer related to risk assessments. This included how risk assessments were managed, documented, and recorded. The updated training would be made available to all staff, as it was relevant not only to fostering but also to children's social work.

A discussion and a question-and-answer session ensued and the following were raised and clarified:-

- Reassurance that lessons have been learned.
- Action to increase foster carers against balancing those retiring and whilst none were lost to other fostering providers, recruitment efforts

meant numbers were being maintained rather than losing ground.

- The service had a dedicated team that actively monitored and projected numbers, looked at where improvements could be made with encouragement initiatives in place for anyone interested.
- Rotherham was successful compared to many other areas, but what is needed is a strong middle-age group of carers. This is being addressed and will hopefully improve over time.
- Need for reassurance that processes around seeking emergency placements were not compromised by end of day requests and the challenges facing placement capacity.
- Unregulated provision required senior sign off and a clear hierarchy for decision-making with robust mechanisms in place. The fostering service push back if there were placement concerns. This means that foster carers say they feel valued and respected in these processes.
- Balancing the needs of children and carers and involvement in matching decisions.
- The need for clear supervision and checks to ensure there were no outstanding tasks or gaps and for inclusion of supervision to be included in the action plan.
- Specific details shared that contributed to the unfortunate death of Marcia Grant which were picked up by the Assistant Coroner and whether had these been known earlier would this have led to a different decision around placement.
- Clarification provided on where collaboration and co-production started and finished in terms of the Fostering Transformation Board, the membership and the mechanisms of reporting into this overarching meeting.
- Request for an update to be brought back to Improving Lives following evaluation of the Fostering Transformation Plan and how this was going to be taken forward.
- Demographic changes in the population and how this could be adapted for the Fostering Service and any barriers removed.
- High level of promotion and activity for the approaches used to attract potential foster carers.
- Monitoring of the progress of the Fostering Transformation Plan and embracing best practice.

- Value of foster carers and the high regard from the service.
- Quality of handovers to foster carers and the ongoing work looking at detailed planning to support best possible matching in future
- System changes and the actions now being taken to embed individualised referral forms and processes.
- Assurance auditing and oversight by the Cabinet Member to shape practice.
- Sharing of best practice and liaison with other Local Authorities. Suggestion of a further seminar highlighting the importance of the role of Members as Corporate Parents.

The Chair advised of the need to consider the confidential Fostering Transformation Plan. In private session a discussion ensued on the contents and a number of points were made around:-

- Methodical communication and record keeping thus reducing risk.
- Confidence in improved oversight and reporting lines.
- Support for staff
- Review of areas of practice following Assistant Coroner's decision.
- Defined broader learning easily disseminated.

The Chair formally thanked officers for their attendance, the frank and instructive questioning by the Improving Lives Select Commission Members and to the other Members of the Council that took time to attend.

Resolved:- (1) That the Preventing Futures Deaths' response sent to the Assistant Coroner be noted.

(2) That the Fostering Transformation Action Plan created in response to the wider issues in relation to fostering sufficiency and actions required from the Preventing Future Deaths' report be supported.

(3) That an update report on the progress of the Transformation Action Plan be brought back to a future meeting in due course.

(4) That a Members' Seminar be arranged highlighting the role of Elected Members as Corporate Parents.

24. THE ROTHERHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORT 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the contents of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Assurance Report 2024/25 which provided

an update on the key partnership activity during the year, based on the strategic priorities. The impact of the work against these priorities was to be demonstrated alongside a summary of any activity by the key partner agencies.

This report also covered what the partnership had done as a result of the arrangements, including Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member, Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding, Practice and Supportive Services and Darren Downs, Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Independent Scrutineer.

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, introduced the report highlighting how everyone had worked together to keep children and young people safe in Rotherham.

By way of a presentation (included within the agenda documentation) the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Independent Scrutineer highlighted:-

- Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- Statutory Safeguarding Partners.
- Rotherham SCP Governance.
- Inspection of Partner Agencies.
- Progress against Strategic Priorities.

The Strategic Director was pleased to add that Darren Downs, Independent Scrutineer and Chair, was praised for his effective leadership. While many authorities have moved away from independent chairs and scrutiny, Rotherham had chosen to retain this position, which was reflected in the high quality of work.

Furthermore, this added to the work with the Chief Executive in fulfilling additional responsibilities across South Yorkshire as the Council's Lead Safeguarding Partner, following recent changes in the Working Together guidance. The collaboration was described as helpful and productive. Notable improvements included progress in the Vulnerable children in Education group and efforts around neglect, highlighted by a successful neglect conference during Safeguarding Awareness Week.

The Cabinet Member also reiterated that just to add an extra layer of assurance she met with the Safeguarding Partnership every three to six months.

A discussion and a question-and-answer session ensued and the following were raised and clarified:-

- Delivery of training and consistent approach to improving attendance.

- Number of home interviews offered for young people missing from home and return stood at 91.5% with the take up sitting at 84%.
- Consistency of approach by officers and keeping track through the various meetings.
- Communication and assurances provided to parents, carers and young people about the potential risk of online harm with the increase of enabled devices especially around this time of year with gifts.

The Chair thanked officers for their informative presentation and contributions.

Resolved:- That the update on the RSCP Annual Assurance Report 2024-25 be received and the contents noted.

25. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited consideration of the Improving Lives Select Commission's Work Programme. Since the last meeting the following was now noted:-

- Arrangements were in hand for a dedicated workshop session to review the Thresholds of Need document as part of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy.
- Children's Capital of Culture Workshop - Impact and Legacy for Children and Young People to be arranged late March/early April, 2026.
- Workshop confirmed relating to the support available for women who have had one or more child removed following cessation of PAUSE Project to be held on Monday, 2nd March, 2026 at 2.30 p.m. at the Town Hall.
- A slight change of agenda items for the February, 2026 meeting. The agenda would now include the recent Ofsted Inspection Report Outcome and Educational Attainment Update.
- The SACRE Annual Report (for information) would move to March, 2026 along with the Children Not in School Update and Community Cohesion Projects Update.
- Notice of an agenda item coming to the Health Select Commission on 22nd January, 2026 relating to the Safeguarding Adults Board Strategic Plan which also includes the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report. An invitation had been extended to include any interested Improving Lives Select Commission Members commencing at the earlier start time of 4.00 p.m.

Resolved:- That the updated Work Programme for 2025/26 be approved.

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

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity.

It was confirmed that the review into the impact of secondary school policies on school attendance levels, ensuring an education for vulnerable children and/or trauma experienced children and how this impacted the Council's broader duties of safeguarding and school attendance had now begun to progress with some questions being prepared for circulation to secondary schools.

Once responses have been received the review would be moved forward.

Resolved:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

27. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.