

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 17 March 2026

Present:- Councillor Monk (in the Chair); Councillors Adair, Blackham, Brent, Clarke, T. Collingham, Elliott, Garnett, Harper, Hughes, Ismail, Pitchley, Ryalls, Sutton, Ms. L. Hickey, Mr. M. Hemmingway and Mr. J. Newman.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Bower and Fisher.

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

38. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 10th February, 2026 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. 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.

41. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

42. COMMUNITY RECOVERY FUND - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report as submitted and the Chair welcomed Councillor Cusworth - Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader, Rachel Jackson - Early Help Outreach and Engagement Co-ordinator, Amanda Needham - Service Manager, Fiona Radford - Manager and Ann Foxley-Johnson to the meeting.

Councillor Cusworth introduced the report and provided an update on the delivery of the Community Recovery Fund projects in Children and Young People's Services over the past twelve months following how in late July and early August 2024, a wave of violent anti-immigration riots occurred across the UK, including a public disturbance in Manvers, Rotherham. These events had significant personal, professional, and community impacts across Rotherham.

In response, the Government created a £15 million Community Recovery Fund (CRF) to help affected areas recover. Rotherham received funding

from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support community cohesion and assist communities impacted by the disorder.

As part of this programme, two Children's Services projects were approved and delivered: Building Bridges and Together for Tomorrow.

Reference was made to the report which provided in-depth information about the projects, their success and progress.

The Chair invited Fiona Radford, Manager and Ann Foxley-Johnson to begin the first half of the presentation which highlighted:-

- Community Recovery Fund CYPS Projects.
- Project 1 - Together for Tomorrow.
- Why Together for Tomorrow.
- Strand 1 – Conversations about Faith.
- Strand 2 – Picture Trail.
- Strand 3 – Ambassadors.
- Strand 4 – Curriculum Links.
- Strand 5 – Together for Tomorrow Song.
- Strand 6 – Places of Worship.
- Strand 7 – Online Safety.
- Project 8 – Schools Linking Project.

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

- Inclusion of faiths and way of life within the project including Humanism.

The Cabinet Member confirmed all faiths and ways of life were represented on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education and were included as part of the consultation.

- Was there a good spread of schools and had the project captured the right schools.
There was a good spread of schools and at this stage no school had been particularly targeted. However, there were some hotspots that would receive a targeted approach from September.
- Were current participation levels such as 43% of schools involved and the numbers of young people engaged sufficient to achieve expected outcomes and what plans existed to widen reach?

It was noted that it was 43% of schools and not 43% of pupils and whilst not all schools were involved there were some of the majority of academy trusts. It was hoped this information would then get disseminated accordingly.

- How was the project delivered across year groups and did it target a specific year group.

The project covered Early Years into KS3 and it was hoped that the project would become embedded to ensure sustainability even once the funding was exhausted. It was hoped the good work would not stop. In addition this now formed part of SACRE and this would help to maintain longevity.

The Chair invited Rachel Jackson, Early Help Outreach & Engagement Co-ordinator, to continue with the presentation which covered:-

- Project 2 – Building Bridges Together.
- Purpose of the Project.
- The Offer.
- Consultation.
- Key Milestones 2025/26.
- Engagement To Date.
- Young People’s Feedback.
- Cohesion Celebration Event – 21st March at Coleridge School.
- Final Project Evaluation.
- Community Cohesion Workshop.

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

- Information sharing from children to parents to counteract misinformation.

As part of the consultation staff were attempting to work with children so they could make informed choices about their beliefs and it was hoped this would then transgress into educational conversations with parents.

The Restorative Youth Justice Team were also doing some work with parents and children and whilst some were not making a connection to the unrest, the significance was important.

It was further important for the key narratives were drip fed through Early Years to forge strong beliefs and eradicate fear and ignorance.

- Was the work of Building Bridges Together ongoing or was it done in cycles and what key points were provided for pupils and parents.

The reach of this project was extensive with the inclusion of a number of partners, the voluntary and community sector and workshops being held for hard to reach children. A pilot project was

also being held on Community Cohesion in special schools tailoring programmes for need and engagement.

- How as community awareness and understanding of the project measured.

The impact was measured via a number of workshops and outreach sessions which highlighted greater awareness of hate crime in young people and significantly strengthened understanding of what hate crime was, where to seek help and report incidents.

- Evaluation questionnaire and feedback from 118 young people.

Feedback indicated strong positive outcomes across key cohesion, extremism awareness and hate crime. Participants agreed that people from different backgrounds could live together peacefully with more young people indicating an increased understanding of extremist narratives and greater confidence in reporting extremist views.

- Could other Community Groups be involved in the work of this project.

The involvement of other groups was welcomed and it was suggested groups leaders make contact.

The Chair thanked those present for their informative presentations.

Resolved:- That the progress made against the delivery plan for the Community Recovery Fund be received and noted.

43. CHILDREN NOT ACCESSING THEIR FULL EDUCATIONAL ENTITLEMENT AT SCHOOL

Consideration was given to the report and associated appendices which were introduced by Councillor Cusworth as they provided information and assurance regarding activity in relation to Children Not in School in Rotherham to enable the Commission to receive an update regarding this area of work. The Elective Home Education, and Exclusions dashboard, therefore, provided a breakdown of the characteristics of the respective cohorts to enable scrutiny by the Commission and provide assurance to the commission on processes for children who did not access a school setting on a full-time basis. This included children in the following groups:-

- In receipt of local authority commissioned provision (Section 19 provision - provision set out in Section 19 of the 1996 Education Act) as they are medically unable to attend school, have been permanently excluded from school or have an Education Health Care Plan and are Educated Otherwise than at School,
- children experiencing suspension,

- in receipt of part time school provision,
- accessing school commissioned alternative provision,
- experiencing poor school attendance,
- who are known to be electively home educated,

The Chair welcomed Niall Devlin, Service Director, and Sarah Whitby, Head of Access to Education, to the meeting.

By way of a presentation delivered by the Head of Access to Education, a copy of which was included in the agenda pack, the following was highlighted:-

- Interventions already in place for children not in school:-
 - ❖ Early Intervention for Elective Home Education.
 - ❖ Support of a return to school in line with family's wishes.
 - ❖ Support to schools to explore alternatives to exclusion.
 - ❖ Scrutiny of exclusions paperwork and challenge.
- Service Developments:-
 - ❖ Revised Elective Home Education Policy.
 - ❖ Appointment of two Elective Home Education Officers and a Service Support Assistant.
 - ❖ School Attendance Team embedded in Access to Education.
 - ❖ Appointment of three School Attendance Monitors.
 - ❖ Review of Training Offer.
- Partnership Working:-
 - ❖ Working with Secondary Schools to support inclusion.
 - ❖ Oversight by the School Governance Group.
 - ❖ Termly sharing of exclusions and suspensions.
 - ❖ Participation in Inclusive Leadership Programme.
 - ❖ Work with Outreach and Engagement.
 - ❖ Key Stage 2 "Step Out" at Rotherham Aspire.
 - ❖ Exclusions Working Group support.
- Key Areas of Focus:-
 - ❖ Further development of Rotherham's shared vision.
 - ❖ Reducing exclusion and suspension of children with SEND and FSM.
 - ❖ Supporting children to remain in school in Years 10 and 11.
 - ❖ Working towards provision of Key Stage 3 "Step Out" at

Rotherham Aspire.

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

- The right to elective home educate by parents.

The Education Act 1996 placed a duty on every parent of a child of compulsory school age to ensure they received an efficient, full-time education. Parents have the legal right to remove their children from a school roll and provide their education and the Council must ensure that children who were home educated were in receipt of a suitable and efficient full-time education.

- What could the Council do when parents were ill equipped to provide education leading to the increase in numbers returning to education in Year 11.

Often parents did not realise they had to pay for examinations where children were elective home educated and there were a small number of young people returning to be educated in school in Year 11. Every effort was made to ensure this transition provided the least disruption as possible for all concerned and appropriate steps were taken in collaboration with professionals and schools.

- Did the Elective Home Education Team only work term time and what provision was available if support was required during the summer.

The majority of children who were elective home educated preferred visits in term time and often followed holiday periods.

The newly recruited Support Assistant was able to triage and offer support to families. Two Elective Home Education Officers had been recruited to provide dedicated support, but this focused on term time only.

- Page 54 of the report stated "Suspensions continue on an upward trend year on year and there was work ongoing to understand and respond to this." Was this work particularly in relation to white males and in Year 9, and how was the success of this intervention measured?

A number of initiatives were signposted and included funding support to primary and secondary schools to deliver training, behaviour management, alternative provisions for young people at risk of exclusion or suspension, use of Fair Access and training specialists. Work was also taking place with outside agencies to make a real difference.

For young people where there were particular trends direct support would be offered and work was also taking place with Aspire with a view to increasing the “Step Up” support in Key Stage 3.

An approach to how males, particularly those in receipt of free school meals, may learn was being targeted with the intention of increasing the target to 73.3% by 2028. Whilst this was hovering around the 68% area, there was more work to do.

Engagement was key with emphasis in early years to avoid disengagement by Years 10 and 11. A whole suite of interventions were strengthening reception/foundation years giving all young people the best start in their education.

- Pupils in receipt of medical tuition and out of school, where did the responsibility lay to ensure they were educated.

The Local Authority would tailor an offer to meet the needs of the young person who could not attend school due a medical condition and this was kept under regular review by a named Officer.

- The report indicated an increase in the number of pupils supported by medical tuition, what was the reason for this leap.

The increase in numbers was quite small and the medical reasons differed. A more detailed response would be provided.

- Children excluded from school contributed to the numbers of children electively home educated, but what were the other reasons.

The reasons for children being removed from school by their parents varied. Only 2% of children at risk of exclusion were removed to be elective home educated and numbers were higher where parents were dissatisfied with the educational provision offered.

It was noted multi-academy trusts had their own policies in place with a complaints process should a parent be dissatisfied with their educational provision. On the positive side work was ongoing and this had resulted in 248 children kept in school rather than them being removed.

- Did the data reflect the same children/families experiencing disruptive education at the beginning of Terms 1 and 2 when they may have received support or integrated back into education in Term 3. Numbers indicated a drop and then an increase in number, were these the same children.

Only a small number of children were reflected and may be subject to a School Attendance Order.

There was some evidence of children moving in and out of school and this made following the curriculum very difficult resulting in chunks of missed education. As parents had a choice of how their child was educated there were various reasons as to why elective home educating was chosen, as mentioned previously with the highest reason being dissatisfaction.

- Was the use of part-time timetables compliant with expectations.

The use of part-time timetables was strengthened by robust guidance and were tailored specifically for wellbeing and risk. Support and challenge was offered in line with school provision. This temporary provision had clear expectations with moving towards reintegration/intervention.

It was the Local Authority's view that part-time timetables were used as a short-term measure with a move to involving the child in a full-time education as soon as possible.

- There appeared to be a large spike in Year 10 of children, mainly boys, of moving to being elective home educated. Was this systemic and what consultation was being done to drive this down.

This was being monitored by the DfE Round Table which included a collection of Chief Education Officers in the region and an action plan with RISE. Research showed this to be across the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and this was being worked upon from early years upwards to give a good education foundation.

Research also showed that it was often some of the rigidity of education moving into secondary education that was often the barrier for boys moving forward, such as uniform. A meeting with the LGA was looking at giving children the best start within a local plan.

- Transitions were important and often it was the culture shift that had an impact, particularly on the behavioural approach. Uniform was a good example so was there more support that could be provided to not create bumps in the system.

The Local Authority were acutely aware of the need to provide support where it was required.

- What options were there available to exclusion.

Locality Panels were able to explore a range of options on a partnership basis with various schools represented. Initiatives like managed moves or off-site provision were considered. Every effort was made to working effectively with young people to promote positive changes.

Schools would be supported to ensure they were not working in isolation.

- Many young people moving from primary to secondary school were simply not ready for the transition, especially those with additional needs or who become overwhelmed easily. Often this then left the option to elective home educate, There needed to be a window of opportunity to effectively prepare children to avoid them not being in an educational setting.

A range of initiatives were in place to support children at the time of transition including:-

- Secondary Head Teachers meeting three times a year to work together for an agreed provision.
- Learn days for a positive transition with a seven-minute guide prepared for schools providing an enhanced transition.
- Transition trials/sessions. Lunchtimes were often areas that could cause disruption with timings and the numbers of pupils.

The Chair wished to thank everyone involved in this item and suggested that if any Member had any further questions to forward them to the Clerk to seek a response.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That further details be provided on the reasons for the increase in medical tuition and what may have led to this leap.

44. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROTHERHAM STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Annual Report of the Rotherham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) for the academic year 2024–2025. It summarised advice to statutory bodies, the standards and quality of Religious Education (RE) and collective worship in Rotherham schools, the work of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and SACRE’s contribution to wider council priorities.

Councillor Cusworth described how the report highlighted strengthened membership (notably secondary RE specialists), successful CPD and interfaith engagement, progress towards reviewing the local Agreed Syllabus, and one determination (Thornhill Primary School).

The Commission were asked to note the Annual Report and endorse the forward actions for 2025–2026, including enhanced subject leader support, the South Yorkshire RE Conference, and development of school visits/visitors’ guidance.

The Chair welcomed Niall Devlin, Service Director, and Hannah Lambert, Chair of SACRE, to the meeting and invited them to deliver the presentation.

The presentation highlighted:-

- Purpose and Assurance to Improving Lives Select Commission.
- Key Headlines from the Annual Report.
- SACRE as a statutory body mandated to the Local Authority.
- Areas for Development.
- Publication of the Annual Report.
- Content of the Annual Report.
- Financial Position.
- Forward Plan 2025-26.
- Recommendations to Improving Lives.

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

- Inclusive membership and the basis of a good foundation.

SACRE now had a broader and more knowledgeable membership ensuring that discussions are informed and professional.

- Collective worship and fulfilling statutory duties.

Collective worship was not actively monitored due to the collaboration of academy trusts, but maintained schools were unless they applied for a determination.

Broad definitions of Christian assemblies still continued to reflect collective workshop.

Resolved:- (1) That Rotherham's SACRE Annual Report for 2024–2025 and its key findings be received and noted.

(2) That SACRE's forward plan priorities for 2025–2026, including continued CPD, annual RE conference, RE awards and the development of educational visits/visitors guidance be supported and endorsed.

45. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2025/26 and the remaining items scheduled for the last meeting of Improving Lives for this municipal year.

The Chair also drew attention to a suggestion which required volunteers meeting with the Children and Young People's Partnership Board made up of young people who have reviewed their programme of work. The young people were developing a strategy to underpin their agreed priorities going forward and the rationale, the potential impact and outcome measures and the presentation of the strategy itself much the same way pre-decision scrutiny had worked before.

The session was scheduled to take place at the next meeting of the Children and Young People's Partnership meeting on Tuesday, 28th April, 2026 at 4.00 p.m. in the Town Hall.

Resolved:- (1) That the Work Programme be approved.

(2) That volunteers meet with the Children and Young People's Partnership at their next meeting on Tuesday, 28th April, 2026 at 4.00 p.m. and that an invite be extended to Councillors Brent, Clarke, Harper and Sutton, along with co-opted members, Mr. M. Hemmingway and Mr. J. Newman.

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

The Chair provided a progress report on the ongoing review about the impact of secondary school policies on school attendance levels and ensuring an education for vulnerable children and/or trauma experienced children, and how this impacts the Council's broader duties of safeguarding and school attendance.

In January 2026 a questionnaire was sent to all secondary schools in the borough to seek background information relating to how they supported children who were vulnerable or have experienced trauma. Despite repeated attempts by officers only a small number of responses were received.

The Chair wished to place on record her thanks to the schools that did respond and the information provided was extremely useful, and in some cases very detailed, providing a high level of assurance that those schools were operating in a trauma-informed way. The schools were to be written to directly to thank them for their responses and congratulate them on their work.

The lack of engagement did mean that continuing with the review was not possible at this time. However, a Cabinet Member working group was

being explored with a range of partners and if this proceeded then members of Improving Lives and Health would be invited to join.

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

47. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.