

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
1st February, 2017

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Allcock, Beaumont, Cooksey, Cusworth, Elliot, Fenwick-Green, Jarvis, Keenan, Marriott, Napper, Senior and Short.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Hague, Khan, Pitchley and Tweed.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

42. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

43. COMMUNICATIONS

The Select Commission discussed the following items:-

(1) Child-centred Borough - update

The six principles of a Child-centred Borough (adhering to UNICEF standards) are:-

- a focus on the rights and voice of the child;
- keeping children safe and healthy;
- ensuring children reach their potential;
- an inclusive Borough;
- harnessing the resources of communities;
- a sense of place.

The most recent meeting of the Working Group in January 2017 had considered:-

- Learning from other areas which have successfully achieved a child centred focus in their area and to help understand how this could look for Rotherham. An officer from Leeds City Council had agreed to attend a future meeting of the working group.
- Working with Co:Create (South Yorkshire Housing Association) to develop consultation and engagement activity with children, young people and their families across the Borough area, to understand what being 'child centred' meant to them and what would make their experience of living in Rotherham better.

- A questionnaire survey is being undertaken of children who live in Council housing.

(2) Corporate Parenting Panel - update

The forthcoming meeting of the Corporate Parent Panel will consider the following items : the health of looked After Children; the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2021; and financial support for Foster Carers.

(3) Rotherham Adult Safeguarding Board 2015-16 Annual Report

Further to Minute No. 38 of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 14th December, 2016, it was agreed that an item be placed on the agenda of the next meeting to enable Councillors to report on their forthcoming visit of inspection with the contract commissioning team (scheduled for 24 March 2017).

44. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14TH DECEMBER, 2016

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 14th December, 2016, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman, with the inclusion of the following amendment:-

The first sentence of the third paragraph of Minute No. 39 (Domestic Abuse Service Provision in Rotherham) shall be amended to read in full:-

“Progress had been made but the Partnership was not where it wanted to be as yet in relation to Domestic Abuse”.

(2) That written responses be issued to the individual Members in respect of the following matters:-

(a) (Minute No. 38 – Rotherham Adult Safeguarding Board 2015-16 Annual Report) – whether there was progress to report on consideration of the appointment to the Rotherham Adult Safeguarding Board of someone representative of the private, independent care sector (either residential, nursing or domiciliary care);

(b) Minute No. 39 (Domestic Abuse Service Provision in Rotherham) – a request for details of the outcome of the meeting of the newly reformed Domestic and Sexual Abuse Priority Group, which had been scheduled to take place during January 2017;

(c) Minute No. 39 (Domestic Abuse Service Provision in Rotherham) – a request for information about the Perpetrator Programme, including the method of evaluating this Programme and whether perpetrators were re-referred if further incidents occurred.

45. VOICE OF THE CHILD LIFESTYLE SURVEY 2016

Further to Minute No. 42 of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 28th January, 2015 and to Minute No. 7 of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 29th June, 2016, consideration was given to a report, presented by the Head of Service (Performance and Planning), containing the key findings from the 2016 Borough-wide Lifestyle Survey. The report stated that the Lifestyle Survey had been open to schools throughout June and July, 2016.

The lifestyle survey results provided an insight into the experiences of children and young people living in the Rotherham Borough area and provided a series of measures to monitor the progress of the development of a child-centred Borough and underpin the six themes:-

- a focus on the rights and voice of the child;
- keeping children safe and healthy;
- ensuring children reach their potential;
- an inclusive Borough;
- harnessing the resources of communities; and
- a sense of place.

The submitted report to this meeting included:-

- the 2016 Borough-wide Lifestyle Survey Report;
- the 2016 Trend Data Analysis provided to the Child-Centred Borough Group; and
- the press release about the 2016 Survey, issued by the Council on 7th January, 2017.

The Select Commission discussed the following salient issues:-

- requesting the non-participating schools to share the outcome of their own individual surveys of pupils, within their schools;
- the surveys are anonymous;
- support for young carers (who have rights in law to an assessment of their needs);
- the Voice of the Child process (eg: the Youth Cabinet; the Looked After Children Council; the Young Inspectors' programme, drawing from a broad spectrum of young people);
- ensuring the awareness of child sexual exploitation (eg: Sophie's Choice) within the school curriculum (Personal, Social and Health Education);

- the various reasons why children may not feel safe (eg: in school; when travelling; safety within the Rotherham town centre; the concern about the protest marches within the Rotherham town centre);
- the trends across the successive years in which the surveys have been completed.

Resolved:- That the report be received and its contents noted.

46. EARLY HELP AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Assistant Director, Early Help and Family Engagement, concerning Rotherham's Early Help and Family Engagement Service which had been launched on 18th January, 2016. The report included information about the Early Help Service priorities, current performance and progress against the budget savings proposals for 2016/2017. Reference was also made to the draft Early Help Strategy and to the outcome of the improvement visit made by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) on 19th and 20th April, 2016.

The Improving Lives Select Commission welcomed service users Neil and Michelle, who explained their family circumstances which culminated in their referral to Early Help and the assistance which the service was able to provide for them and for their families. They also answered several questions from the Members of the Select Commission.

The presentation at the meeting highlighted the following matters:-

- Early Help is concerned with identifying needs within families early and providing support before problems become complex and more costly;
- the importance of local agencies working together;
- service priorities and performance; use of exit surveys, completed by service users;
- the service demonstrating that it is able to make a positive difference to children and their families;
- Restorative Practice – working with people, rather than doing things to or for people;
- the establishment and role of the Early Help Review Board;
- compliance with Youth Justice Board standards;
- the focus on the whole family;

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - 01/02/17

- financial resources and constraints and the necessary budget savings;
- investment in and bids for funding for various projects (eg: family group conferencing; the pause project);
- service flexibility enabling changing responses to changing issues; the importance of casework oversight;
- support in localities (eg: parenting programmes; targeted youth programme; operation keepsafe).

The Improving Lives Select Commission discussed the following salient issues:-

- development of trust with partner agencies, especially with community and voluntary sector organisations; treatment of partner organisations as equals (eg: the example of the peer review by the Youth Justice Board); increasing familiarity with the availability of the service; confidence amongst service users that assistance will be available;
- the auditing (and re-auditing) of case files to assure the quality of practice and to ensure compliance with HM Working Together 2015 (WT15) and the Early Help and Family Engagement service standards;
- caseloads for individual case workers;
- Members of the Select Commission questioned the feedback being received by the service and asked to be provided with further details of the exit surveys completed by service users;
- continual development and review of the service and resources; the effectiveness of the service in coping with change and implementing new initiatives;
- management of sickness absence amongst staff;
- effectiveness of the referral process; use of online reporting forms;
- adherence to local targets – early contact with families (within three days).

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

(2) That a progress report on the Early Help Service be submitted to a meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission in twelve months' time.

47. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2017-2021

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Deputy Leader and the Deputy Strategic Director of Children and Young people's Services concerning the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy, which had been developed in line with the duty to provide or procure placements for Children Looked After by the local authority (Children Act 1989, Sufficiency Statutory Guidance 2010; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2011). This included a duty of 'sufficiency' that requires local authorities and Children's Trust partners to ensure that there was a range of sufficient placements which meet the needs of children and young people in care and to take steps to develop and shape service provision to meet the needs of all children and young people in care at a local level, as far as was reasonably possible.

The Strategy explained the way in which Rotherham Children's Services would fulfil its role as a Corporate Parent and meet its statutory sufficiency duty by providing good quality care, effective parenting and support to children and young people in and leaving local authority care. In addition, the Strategy described this Council's 'one market' approach to the commissioning and provision of secure, safe and appropriate accommodation and support to children in care and care leavers over the next four years (2017 to 2021).

The outcome of the Strategy would be safely and appropriately to reduce the number of young people requiring care by the local authority, responding to the challenges identified and improving outcomes for children. Whilst this Strategy was not primarily a financial one, it was expected that the commissioning and strategic intentions set out would provide significant cost avoidance and savings opportunities and were essential to the sustainability of improved outcomes and the Local Authority's budget.

During discussion, the Members of the Improving Places Select Commission raised the following issues:-

- the legal duty upon local authorities to publish a Sufficiency Strategy;
- poverty being one indicator of the likelihood of a child being taken into care; the impact of national issues upon local circumstances;
- statistics on discharge from care according to a young person's age;
- the various causes of foster placements which become disrupted;
- the health requirements of Looked After Children (including mental health);
- the need to minimise the number of out-of-Authority placements;

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - 01/02/17

- the continuing endeavour to increase the number of foster carers within the Rotherham Borough area;
- the HM Government definition of “suitable accommodation” for Looked After Children.

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

(2) That a further report on the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy be submitted to a meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission in six months' time, providing information about the budget monitoring of this Service.

48. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17 - UPDATE

Consideration of this item was deferred until the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, scheduled to be held on 22nd March, 2017.