

Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board

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3rd April 2017

Councillor Maggi Clark
Chair, Improving Lives Select Commission
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Cllr Clark,

I am writing in response to your request of my observations concerning your review on the potential future arrangements for the delivery of children's services. My comments are based on observations made in my role as independent chair and on the evidence from the work of the LSCB since I came to Rotherham 17 months ago. I have used the action research into improvement in children's services commissioned by the Local Government Association to inform my response to you.

The appointment of permanent staff to leadership positions in the council has strengthened the co-ordinated sense of purpose for children's services. The council has embraced its responsibility for children's services as part of its overall functions. It has recognised the need to focus HR and legal services support to drive the necessary children's services improvements and taken action to ensure that its wider functions safeguard children. The plans to realise the ambition for Rotherham to be a child centred borough are as yet at an early stage but they have the potential to provide a powerful context within which children's services can understand the needs of the population of children it serves and be sensitive to their views.

Detailed performance information on children's services is now scrutinised by leaders and councillors, and is increasingly open to partners. There is a shared understanding of the improvements made in complying with statutory requirements and the need now to move to improvements in the quality of the services delivered. Children's services have also welcomed and made good use of external scrutiny and peer review as part of its improvement journey.

There are clear thresholds in place across the safeguarding system, from early help to child protection, and plans that will develop common language and understanding about levels of need across partners.

Relationships with partner agencies are developing but there is still significant progress to be made towards the degree of trust, transparency and challenge at all levels, from strategic to front-line, that drives good children's services. There are pockets of good partnership working but that is not yet consistent at all levels.

Progress since early 2016 has been rapid, with the pace maintained by determined leadership from the senior leaders appointed. The greatest change I have perceived since

coming to Rotherham has been in the culture of the organisation. Staff from across the council, as well as in children's services, display an increased sense of confidence and direction. Senior leaders in children's services make a point of regularly acknowledging the good practice of individuals, contributing to the development of confident professional decision-making and understanding of 'what good looks like'.

The progress I have observed in children's services is at a critical stage with crucial shifts taking place, for example, from compliance to quality in practice, from willingness to listen to children to a comprehensive engagement with children at strategic through to front line level and from openness to partnership working to a strong cohesive approach. All of these shifts require consistency and determination and anything that may cause distraction or diversion of energy should be avoided at this stage. I therefore support the conclusion of the ILSC review that the current peer practice partner model should be maintained at present.

The progress of children's services must and will of course be kept under review, both internally and by the inspectorate, and I agree that alternative future delivery models cannot be ruled out where there is evidence that these will better deliver the necessary outcomes. As LSCB chair I would want to be assured that any future proposed model could develop and sustain progress in partnership working across agencies and in particular with schools, which are crucial organisations in the safeguarding system, from early help through to child protection.

The further development of partnership working across the safeguarding system will be the focus for further improvement both through the current LSCB and its replacement as defined by the Children and Social Work Bill. The LSCB has an important role to play in securing improvements in children's services and the wider safeguarding system in Rotherham and I look forward to continuing engagement in gathering evidence on what is working and what requires further improvement.

Yours sincerely



Christine Cassell
Independent Chair to the RLSCB

C.C. Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive, RMBC