

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION  
12th December, 2017**

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Beaumont, Cooksey, Cusworth, Elliot, Jarvis, Khan, Marriott and Short.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brookes, Hague, Ireland, Marles, Senior and J. Turner; and also from Commissioner P. Bradwell, Councillor Watson (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services) and Mrs. S. Wynne (Rotherham Rise).

**99.           DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Jarvis declared a personal interest in Minute No. 103 (**DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE**) as she is an unpaid trustee for Rotherham Rise.

**100.          QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

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

**101.          COMMUNICATIONS**

**Visits to Barnardo's ReachOut and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

The Senior Adviser (Scrutiny and Member Development) reported that a visit to the ReachOut Project would take place on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2.00-4.00pm.

Members had been contacted by email to seek expressions of interest for the visit to the MASH which would take place in February. Confirmation of details would be communicated in due course.

**102.          MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 31ST OCTOBER AND 14TH NOVEMBER, 2017**

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meetings of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2017 and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2017, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

**103.          DOMESTIC ABUSE UPDATE**

Cllr Hoddinott, Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety introduced this item, with Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) Lee Berry, South Yorkshire Police. Sue Wynne (Rotherham Rise) was to provide further details of how the voice of the victim was being reflected in the strategy and its implementation, but unfortunately could not attend due to illness.

Cllr Hoddinott outlined to the Committee that tackling domestic abuse remained a key priority for the Council and its partners, through the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP).

This report followed a previous report made to Improving Lives Select Committee (ILSC) on the 25th July 2017. Since the Commission last considered this issue, work had commenced on the development of a Domestic Abuse Strategy which had been approved by the Safer Rotherham Partnership. The strategy was underpinned by a delivery plan, supported by an active Domestic Abuse Priority Group. Cllr Hoddinott reported that in developing the strategy they had undertaken in-depth work to identify gaps and areas of weakness; this included the Local Safeguarding Children's Board conducting a number of audits into cases of domestic abuse where children have been present and actions arising from a Domestic Homicide Review. Immediate action had been taken to address waiting times for services at Rotherham Rise.

Cllr Hoddinott summarised the gaps and areas of weakness as follows:

- Responsibility for tackling abuse does not sit with one agency with the police, local authority, health and voluntary sector partners having different roles. Whilst there were pockets of good practice (with Rotherham Rise and Council's Housing Services cited) this was not sufficiently co-ordinated. It had been the priority of the Community Safety Manager to bring this work together with the Domestic Abuse Priority Group (DAPG).
- Use of risk assessments was inconsistent amongst partners. Whilst high risks cases were handled well, this was not always the case for those identified as a lower or medium risk or in cases requiring escalation/de-escalation. The Community Safety Manager was developing a Domestic Abuse Charter to establish expectations about information sharing and service standards.
- There was a lack of clarity about which services/support are available and the pathways for the receipt of services should they be required. Mapping work had commenced to address this.

Cllr Hoddinott and DCI Lee Berry gave further details of progress in relation to the following areas:

- Voice of the Victim; previous feedback from this Committee had identified that the "voice of victim" was not routinely captured in the strategy. Led by the voluntary sector, work has commenced to ensure that the views of people using domestic abuse services were fed into the strategy and SYP have committed that police officers will also meet victims and survivors to inform improvements.
- Peer Review; Bradford City Council had been engaged to undertake the peer review of the strategy and direction of travel. This would take place in January 2018 and the Committee was requested to participate in the peer review.

- Perpetrator Programme; the programme had been commissioned jointly with Sheffield and Doncaster Councils and funding identified for a two year programme, commencing in March 2018. Learning from recent work had identified that it was often difficult to distinguish between the perpetrators and victims, as roles may not be clearly defined within abusive relationships. SYP had introduced a new vulnerability strategy to ensure that the right response was given to the victim (making every contact count) and alongside this a complete victim care package had been introduced. In addition, a police officer has been located in Rotherham Rise to address offending behaviour of perpetrators at an early stage.
- Women's Empowerment/Education; it was recognised that this area was least developed and the Committee's input was requested.
- PEEL Review; direct face-to-face training has been undertaken by police officers and rolled out across the force and further work has been undertaken on civil orders to safeguard victims and families. An outline of satisfaction levels were given to the Committee and further details provided of the work undertaken to improve these. SYP were aware of the number of domestic abuse incidents which were outstanding and levels of vulnerabilities. An awareness campaign, 'Cut the Strings', was being rolled out to increase reporting.
- Peak Period Action; additional funding had been provided by the local authority to identify repeat victims and high-risk perpetrators to ensure that there was a timely response. This service is provided by Rotherham Rise and SYP. This would be rolled out in the run-up to Christmas.

Cllr Hoddinott concluded that the report, strategy and delivery plan demonstrated the progress made and positive direction of travel.

Discussion ensued on the report with the following issues raised/clarified:-

How would the "voice of the victim" be reflected in the strategy? – It was outlined that the strategy would be adapted to reflect the feedback from victims and survivors and the outcomes from the peer review.

The delivery plan referred to ensuring appropriate access for all communities and individuals including to "those less able". Clarification was sought on if it was understood who were "less able" in order to ensure that services were targeted appropriately. - This had been identified as an area for further development to understand who was accessing services and any gaps in provision and risks.

In relation to the perpetrator programme, what were the measures to ensure that value for money was achieved? The tender would be shared with members.

Further details were sought on how agencies would make every contact count and avoid 'missed opportunities' to work together to identify victims and risks. – It has been identified that not all frontline workers may recognise domestic abuse when they have contact with the public or know how to refer issues on. The DAPG has a key role in ensuring that each partner agency has identified gaps and ensure that staff were trained appropriately and issues assessed consistently. Work was underway to develop pathways to ensure that victim's details were provided once and information shared with relevant agencies, including with schools where children were involved.

How confident were SYP and the Cabinet Member about the level of referrals from dentists and if training they had received was effective? – This would be referred to the DAPG for further exploration.

How did the redesigned pathway relate to the 'one front door'? – These issues were linked; there was a previous lack of clarity about how referrals were made and what services can be accessed. The work to develop the pathways would address this gap.

Clarification was sought on the work in schools and uptake of training. – It was recognised that this was an area for development. The compulsory delivery of Personal, Social and Health Education was welcomed. It was suggested that further questions could be asked about positive relationships in the annual "Voice of the Child lifestyle survey".

In relation to the perpetrator programme, a further explanation was sought about the pre-conviction intervention and if work be undertaken with other agencies to identify potential perpetrators? – If a related domestic incident has been reported (but no crime committed) and the individual has indicated that they wish to change behaviour, a referral would be made to the perpetrator programme. Work was also underway to reduce re-offending behaviour. This intervention was intended to stop incidents escalating at the earliest possible point. Referrals were received from other agencies.

The Chair requested that the Deputy Director for Safeguarding, CYPS liaises with the Community Safety Manager to identify the relevant accountable officers in relation to the delivery plan actions focusing on Early Help and Education.

In concluding, the Chair thanked Cllr Hoddinott and DCI Berry for their attendance and for the progress made.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the Committee contribute to the Peer Review, if required by the Assessment Team.

- 2) That an update is provided to this Committee in 6 months to include information about how the voice of the victim is captured in the strategy and its implementation.

**104. VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER REPORT 2017**

The Interim Virtual Head Teacher introduced the Annual Virtual School Head teacher Report 2017. The report outlined:

- the purpose and role of the Virtual School;
- places the school in its national and regional context;
- the current school age population;
- the key achievements of the last school year;
- progress since the last inspection;
- the main challenges for the future;
- the Attachment Friendly Schools' Project; and
- the use of Pupil Premium Plus.

It was stated that in September 2017 there were 337 looked after children, attending 194 different schools in 32 different local authority areas. A member of the Virtual School team would attend the each of the termly Personal Education Planning meetings which gave good oversight of the issues and progress of each child or young person.

It was explained that there is a major educational gap in the educational outcomes of children and young people in care and their peers who are not looked after. Intelligent interpretations of the outcomes of children and young people in care needed to take into account the numerous risk and protective factors which impact on educational attainment and progress.

These risks included:

- The high level of turnover of the virtual school population as a result of admissions and discharges;
- The disproportionate number of children & young people with special educational needs;
- The significant number of young people attending non-mainstream educational settings;
- The type and number of care placements;
- Recency of care; and
- Emotional wellbeing.

The analysis of GCSE outcomes for Rotherham LAC in 2017 showed that the biggest risk factor, in terms of progress, was type of care placement and recency to care. Of those who made less than expected progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, 5 out of 10 had been in care for less than 3 years and only 4 out of 10 were in foster care placements.

The greatest single challenge for the Virtual School, the schools that LAC attend, their carers, their social workers and other professionals is how to re-engage approximately 25 young people (at any one time), predominantly in Years 10 and 11 who are not in receipt of 25 hours education, and those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) post-16. Related and interconnected challenges were reducing fixed term exclusions and reducing persistent absence.

Work to address these challenges included:

- Developing a Creative Mentoring scheme;
- Exploring a wider range of alternative and complementary provision;
- The Attachment Friendly Schools' Project;
- The promotion of Emotion Coaching;
- Developing the use of the Solution Focused Staff meetings in schools.

Another significant issue faced by the Virtual School and its partners was the increased numbers of children and young people in care. Between March 2016 and March 2017 the number of LAC increased from 430 to 484 and the rate/10,000 of the under 18 population had increased from 68/10,000 to 76/10,000. This was higher than the regional trend and presented significant challenges in terms of the resources and their deployment in the Virtual School Team.

Discussion ensued on the report with the following issues raised/clarified:-

Further details were asked to establish if schools were using 'informal' exclusions to manage behaviour? – The Virtual School Team was undertaking work to ensure that fixed term exclusions adhered to the legal process.

Further clarification was sought about the use of Pupil Premium Plus and how this is accounted for. - The Virtual Head could determine how resources were used to achieve the best educational outcomes in accordance with the child's PEP. Examples were provided about input from educational psychologist and the engagement of creative mentors to work with young people. In addition, the Virtual School Governing Body maintained oversight of spend in schools to ensure that resources are used effectively to maximise outcomes for children and young people.

In respect of ensuring that a looked-after child attended a good or outstanding school, what consideration was given if a child had strong attachment to a school which was judged poor or requiring improvement? - It was explained that in such circumstances it would be established if the placement was in the best interest of the child. If the placement was to continue in a school not rated good or outstanding, attention would be

given to how any educational disadvantage could be 'compensated', for example by the use of extra-curricular support or activities.

(Cllr Cusworth assumed the Chair temporarily)

It was noted that there was a higher proportion of looked after children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) compared to the wider non-looked after population and many of those were in a non-mainstream educational setting. Are mainstream placements sought for looked after children with EHCPs? - It had been established through research that educational outcomes were better for looked after children who attended mainstream schools. Every effort was made to maintain mainstream placements wherever possible, which included the introduction of specialist training to schools to understand trauma and attachment so they could better support looked after children. Each child's PEP was reviewed termly and the most appropriate educational placement would be determined on this basis.

Clarification was sought on what changes had been made since the last Ofsted judgement in 2014? Assurance was given that the standard of work was much higher and the systems and processes underpinning the Virtual School team were robust.

Details were asked to establish the level of take-up of the attachment training in schools across maintained and multi-academy trust schools. – Take-up had been high and has been successfully implemented, with the support of headteachers and senior leaders. A more detailed analysis of take-up would be provided.

What work was undertaken with the designated governors for looked after children? – There was not a designated governors' network (although there were networks for designated teachers). There is a training session for school governors in February 2018 where this issue could be raised. It was suggested that the issue is referred to the Virtual School Governing Body for consideration.

Given the rise in number of looked after children, how confident was the Virtual Head in the capacity to support looked after children? – The rise in number had placed a pressure on resources, although this was mitigated to an extent through the use of the Pupil Premium Plus. However, recent changes to legislation brought post-adoption children and children who have special guardianship or residence orders under the remit of the Virtual School. It was suggested that a further update be provided to the Committee on the implications of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 once statutory guidance is issued. Further work was underway to examine how additional numbers could be managed on a risk-based approach.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the Committee accepts the report and endorses the key actions outlined in Section 3.
- 2) That the role of the Designated Looked After School Governor is raised with Virtual School Governing Body and its response is reported to this Committee
- 3) That a further update is provided to this Committee on the implications of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 once statutory guidance is issued.
- 4) That information is provided on the take-up of training by maintained schools and schools in multi-academy trusts.

(Councillor Clark resumed the Chair)

**105. REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY**

The Deputy Strategic for Safeguarding, Children and Young People's Service gave a verbal update on developments in respect of the Regional Adoption Agency.

At the meeting of Cabinet and Commissioners of 14 November 2016, approval was given for Rotherham Council to explore the potential to establish a South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). It was reported that the Government saw Regionalising Adoption as a key strategy to meet its aims of adoption reform.

Since approval was given, negotiations had taken place between Rotherham, Barnsley, Sheffield and Doncaster Local Authorities (LAs); and the Doncaster Children's Service Trust (DCST) to form part of a wider regional approach. It was reported to the Committee that because of legal and pension complexities, progress has been slow and therefore further details of the business case could not be provided at present.

A model has been in development and RMBC officers have negotiated a position underpinned by the following principles; that value for money was secured; outcomes for children and young people were improved and staff terms and conditions were maintained. However, because of concerns about the financial implications and the risks attached to the business case, further discussions were required. It was stated that these discussions were to conclude by the end of the 2017/18 financial year and a further report would be provided in due course.

Resolved: That the update is noted.

**106. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Resolved: That the next scheduled meeting be held on Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2018 at 5.30 p.m.