

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
17th September, 2019**

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Jarvis, Clark, Fenwick-Green, Ireland, Khan, Marles, Senior and Julie Turner.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atkin, Beaumont, Elliot, Hague, Marriott, Pitchley and Price.

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

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Atkin, Beaumont, Elliot, Hague, Marriott, Pitchley and Price.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to report.

23. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items requiring exclusion from the press or public.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

25. COMMUNICATIONS

PAUSE PROJECT

Cllr Clark provided an update to the Commission on the Pause Pilot Project in her role as a member of the Pause Board. She highlighted progress since the project commenced in August 2018. 40 women were prioritised, with 20 currently on the programme many of whom had complex and inter-linking needs, including experiencing domestic abuse, mental ill-health, substance misuse, homelessness or insecure housing. A significant proportion of the cohort were previously looked after children. It was estimated there was cost avoidance of approximately £1.3m associated with the successful completion of the programme, with a potential to avoid costs of approximately £2.1m over a five year period.

Cllr Clark gave examples of the positive outcomes for Pause participants and the value of the project to enhance quality of life. It was noted that the programme had entered into a transitional stage and Cllr Clark asked that consideration be given to the future sustainability of the project when budget options were discussed.

The Chair and Deputy Leader thanked Cllr Clark for her contribution to the Pause Board and her championing of the project.

PERFORMANCE DATA – PERSISTENT ABSENCE

The Chair requested that a report be submitted to the meeting scheduled for October 29, 2019 (or as soon as was practical) on steps taken to address persistent absence in schools.

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 19TH JULY, 2019

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 19 July, 2019, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

Matters arising: Cllr Cusworth advised that in relation to Item 14, that the review of Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) would be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel and circulated to the Commission in due course.

27. COUNTER EXTREMISM IN SCHOOLS

The Chair welcomed Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive, Pepe Di’Lasio, Assistant Director for Education, Ian Stubbs, Community Engagement Co-ordinator, and Sam Barstow, Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services to the meeting.

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the briefing paper which detailed the proactive work Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council was undertaking in schools and colleges across the Borough to counter extremist narratives and build the resilience of young people to reject extremism, intolerance and hatred.

The paper outlined that the distinction between Counter Extremism (CE) and Counter terrorism (PREVENT) was difficult to make. PREVENT was a safeguarding process for individuals vulnerable to radicalisation like any other safeguarding process whereas Counter Extremism worked with communities rather than individuals, to challenge extremist narratives and build resilience within communities to reject hatred.

Extremism was defined by government as the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

The key pieces of work developed in accordance with statutory guidance and undertaken with schools and colleges to counter extremism included:

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION – 17/09/19

- Holding the “Harms of Hate” event for schools and developing teaching resources which have been recognised nationally as good practice.
- Delivery of assemblies on extremism in secondary schools.
- Delivery staff training on the current far right threat.
- Delivery of work with primary schools.
- Work with partners to develop CE projects including some delivered in schools.
- Development and sharing of teaching resources to challenge extremism.

It was stated that RMBC was in a strong position to lead on CE work. There was a strong correlation between the Council’s Building Stronger Communities (BSC) action plan and actions covered in the Government’s integrated communities’ strategy. The BSC and thriving neighbourhoods strategies are both recognised in recent Local Government Association (LGA) reports as good practice. The Local Authority had successfully applied for funding to support the CE initiative across the Borough.

The current national climate was such that the extremism risk, especially from the far right was unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. It was highlighted that the threat of extremism in Rotherham reflected the national picture.

It was outlined that positive relationships had been developed with schools and colleges across the Borough to deliver this initiative sensitively. Partners included South Yorkshire Police, Rotherham United Community Sports Trust and other voluntary sector organisation were engaged in this agenda and were committed to its ongoing delivery.

The Strategic Director gave details of future developments including work with adults with particular reference to neighbourhood working and engaging people in dialogues about their communities. He noted that there were challenges in relation to hate crime and stressed the importance of strengthening the relationship with police and other partner agencies.

A short video was shown from the “Harms of Hate” event which took place in 2018. Over 400 children from 10 Rotherham schools participated in the event and at the request of Secondary Heads, another event had been planned for later in the year.

The Chair welcomed the work undertaken to date and was assured by the work undertaken in schools and colleges to challenge the extremist narrative at the earliest opportunity.

Members sought information on what basis the work undertaken had been judged as good practice. It was outlined that it was difficult to evaluate this work as it was hard to measure, in the short term, how perceptions and behaviours have changed. However, the request to hold

a second “Harms of Hate” event by schools was seen to be positive and the work had generated interest from other Local Authorities. The Assistant Chief Executive and Assistant Director for Education committed to exploring how the impact in schools can be evaluated qualitatively. It was reported that there was a reduction in the number of hate incidents in schools reported to the local authority recently.

Training was offered to staff identified by schools. This included teaching staff, support staff or lunch-time supervisors as appropriate. An element of the training focused on safeguarding and ensuring that staff were alert to concerns relating to CE and these were referred appropriately. It was recognised that children and young people had other influences outside of the school environment and schools were also linking with the wider community to ensure concerns were flagged. Reference was made to a recent terrorist attack in New Zealand and work undertaken with faith communities within Rotherham to address concerns, promote cohesion and manage consequences. Assurance had been given to local communities, particularly around the reporting of hate crime and how such incidents were responded to.

Work with parents and carers was not specifically delivered as part of this project. However, it was recognised that this could be an important area for development, as part of the broader neighbourhood engagement work.

It was noted that the main focus of the counter extremism work focused on countering far-right activity, which was considered to be the greatest current threat. Assurance was sought that agencies were alert to other forms of extremism and plans were in place to address them. In response, it was outlined that Safer Rotherham Partnership examined local intelligence and risks and threats and there was an action plan in place co-ordinated by the ‘Prevent Silver Group’ to ensure that resources were targeted appropriately.

It was noted that the Community Engagement Coordinator’s post was funded until March 2020, however discussions were underway with the Home Office about the future sustainability of the initiative.

Clarification was sought on the schools which had not fully engaged in the counter extremism work and what action was taken to address this. The Community Engagement Co-ordinator outlined that engagement with schools was an improving picture. Whilst there were three schools which had had little or no engagement currently, the Assistant Director for Education was brokering meetings to begin this work with headteachers.

A request was made that a further report be provided to the Commission outlining how the local authority was meeting its Prevent duty and an update given on its counter extremism work as part of 2020/21 work programme.

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

(2) That a report be submitted to this Commission as part of 2020/21 work programme outlining how the local authority was meeting its Prevent duty.

(3) That an update on its counter extremism work be submitted to this Commission as part of 2020/21 work programme.

(4) That this update includes an evaluation of the work in schools and further details of the work with adults and neighbourhoods and any specific work with parents and carers.

28. CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION, CARE AND HOME

The Chair welcomed Cllr Gordon Watson; Ailsa Barr, Acting Assistant Director for Safeguarding; Rebecca Wall, Head of Safeguarding, Quality and Learning and Dean Fenton, Head of Service, Access to Education to the meeting.

Officers gave a short presentation to outline the different legislative frameworks which guide the response to children missing from care and home and missing from education. Reference was made to research which highlighted that missing from care and home could indicate wider contextual safeguarding concerns outside the family such as criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation or honour based violence.

In respect of missing from education, Local Authorities were required to ensure that Children Missing from Education (CME) were identified, reported and tracked, and where appropriate, suitable educational providers found. The term CME referred to children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and who are not receiving a suitable alternative education. A suitable education can be approved via alternative provision such as home tuition or appropriate Elective Home Education.

The presentation outlined areas which were working well, areas of concerns (what are we worried about) and actions to address concerns (what are we going to do about it).

In respect of areas which were working well, the following measures were highlighted. The Missing Team was now on a permanent footing with a dedicated Team Manager to support the number of Return Home Interviews offered. There was a Missing from Home and Care Scorecard is produced monthly and provided a clear understanding around the Missing Cohort and identifies patterns and trends. There were strong established links with a range of internal and external partners in relation to CME. The success in reducing the number of children missing from home and care reflected excellent multiagency partnership and improved practice.

At the end of the reporting period there were 160 active cases that remained open to CME which highlighted a 24% reduction from Quarter One. There were 166 resolved cases in Quarter Four, which showed a significant increase on Quarter One when 120 cases were resolved in the period. Cases of CME needed to remain open until the child was found or until all enquiries had been exhausted and this can mean that cases remained open for extended periods.

In relation to exclusions, the invalidated data for 2018/2019 reflected a stabilisation in permanent and fixed term exclusions in secondary settings; whilst in primary settings fixed terms exclusions had stabilised, there had however been an increase in permanent exclusions.

The presentation highlighted areas of concern – what are we worried about? Looked after children were the largest cohort of missing children, accounting for over recorded episodes. After the Looked After population, the largest Missing group was children and young people who were not currently known to services. The Return Home Interview (RHI) offered an opportunity to explore why the young person went missing and reduce future missing episodes. There had been a seasonal increase in the number of episodes which had meant a decline in RHI completed.

There had been an increase in new CME referrals which highlights an increase when compared with the previous Quarter. It was reported that a number had been known to have previous episodes of CME that were closed. Evidence suggested that this recurrence was largely due to families being transient and then returning to Rotherham intermittently rather than key concerns related to vulnerability and/or safeguarding issues.

Of the newly identified cases of CME, 39.2% of children were from the Central area of Rotherham at the time of the referral, which correlates to the transient nature of families. This had a financial impact on both schools and council services due to the additional resource required to support CME. The majority of children CME were classified by ethnicity as Roma by their parents (44%) and a further 33% were unclassified. Parents do not have to complete ethnicity as a mandatory declaration and many choose not to do so.

Areas for improvement (what are we going to do about it?) were highlighted. Actions included the development of an Inclusion Performance Scorecard to cross reference child level data with the current Missing Scorecard. Joint work with South Yorkshire Police (SYP) would be continued to strengthen the joint responses to young people missing out of the Rotherham area. There was a planned joint review of complex cases to maximise response and preventative action.

Clarification was sought on information sharing particularly in relation to children missing and if concerns had been identified about hotspots, adults of concern, businesses etc and if Child Abduction Warning Notices

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION – 17/09/19

had been utilised. It was noted that abduction notices had been used successfully as a deterrent in other parts of the country. Assurance was given about information sharing protocols across agencies when cases of concern were discussed. Examples were given of how information from RHIs was shared and analysed to identify trends and inform responses.

It was noted that in respect of the data sets, the scorecards gave good oversight to establish if there was commonality across the groups of children who have missing episodes or were missing from education. This could ensure prompt action was taken to address concerns. Cllr Watson gave assurance about the governance structures in place to ensure that oversight and challenge was provided on a timely and proportionate basis.

Officers clarified the difference between missing from education which meant a child was not registered on a school roll and not receiving a suitable alternative and persistent absence, which may incur parental fines. It was noted that there was collaboration with other authorities to share information about registration, particularly if there was confusion about local authority boundaries.

Questions were asked to establish how risks were assessed and escalated if a child was missing from education and had been identified as being at risk of forced marriage etc. It was confirmed that in such instances, or if a disclosure is made as part of a RHI, safeguarding procedures would be applied regardless of parental consent.

Further details were sought on the increase of numbers of children at risk of CSE who had missing episodes. It was reported that although there was often a seasonal variation, there was good oversight in relation to the Missing and CSE teams. Both individual and group work had been delivered to understand circumstances to disrupt activities. Steps to address missing episodes for children placed out of authority were explored, particularly in respect of capacity to undertake RHIs and the role of advocates to support children appropriately.

It was noted that there had been a rise in the number of permanent exclusions at primary school. The Assistant Director committed to providing data on the number of exclusions to the Committee later in the year as part of the Educational Outcomes report. It was outlined that SEND strategy was having impact in reducing exclusions and schools were committed to taking a personalised and proactive approach to keep pupils in schools.

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

(2) That a further update on progress be provided to the Commission as part of its 2020/21 work programme.

29. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The Chair welcomed Marie Boswell, Deputy Head of Access to Education to the meeting who presented the item in conjunction with the Head of Access to Education.

Cllr Watson briefly introduced the item and highlighted some of the challenges of ensuring that children who were electively home educated received a good standard of education. Elective Home Education (EHE) was the term used to describe a legal choice by parents to provide education for their children at home - or in some other way which they choose - instead of sending them to school full-time. This was different to education provided by a local authority (LA) otherwise than at a school - for example, tuition for children who are too ill to attend school.

The Head of Access to Education outlined that the Department for Education Guidance was being refreshed and the Directorate would be consulting with parents and other stakeholders on a revised policy in due course.

An overview was given on the role of EHE Officers who conducted home visits to discuss the education a child in EHE was receiving and review samples of work, progress made and future plans. Where there were concerns about the suitability of the education being provided the EHE Officer discussed alternative options with parents/carers e.g. amendments that could be made to improve the education being provided or returning to mainstream or other education setting.

The EHE team was part of a regional network which co-ordinated responses to consultation. However there was no requirement to collate and publish data in relation to EHE so there is little in the way of comparative data available. It was reported that EHE team linked into the Operational and Strategic Missing Groups.

The Officers outlined areas of concerns (what are we worried about) and actions to address these concerns (what are we going to do about it).

There had been a rise in the number of parents requesting information about EHE or considering alternatives to current schools. Without sufficient EHE Officer capacity to discuss issues rapidly, local knowledge and school admissions/other service links, many families would have elected to home educate without a full understanding of the implications of this decision or the education options and support available to them, often at a time of crisis. It was highlighted that a small, but increasing number of families had declined EHE Officer visits or refused to send actual evidence in support that their child was receiving a 'suitable education' when requested.

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION – 17/09/19

Parents did not have to inform the Local Authority if they chose to home educate. Current legislation appeared to conflict with other Government strategies for protecting the rights of children. Although the legislation had not changed, the new, clearer Guidance to LA's and parents was welcomed.

Concerns were raised about access to public examinations. Whilst progress to further education (FE) and training without evidence of qualifications was possible, children may be disadvantaged if they are required to evidence academic achievement for other employment or training.

Rotherham had had its first formal case of a primary school agreeing to a Flexi-Schooling arrangement with a family starting on a trial basis in late Summer 2018. Flexi-Schooling was legal and was at the discretion of the headteacher and governors. A Flexi-Schooled child remains solely on the school roll. School maintains full responsibility for outputs and achievements but an agreement with parents was in place about the times when a child was educated by the parents.

In respects of actions to support improvement it was outlined that staff capacity was monitored to ensure that EHE Officers can act as quickly as possible to give advice to parents about EHE and other options. Liaison with Local Colleges and Early Help Services in relation to Y10/11 children, was undertaken to support progress and transition to post 16 education or training. A watching brief was maintained in relation to regional and national forums and Rotherham continued to contribute to consultation, changes to legislation and research.

Members queried if there had been any identifiable trends in the rise in EHE applications. It was outlined that none had been identified but this was monitored. A further query was raised in relation to how children were prepared for transition into adult life and work and/or education. The links with colleges and the work undertaken with parents to ensure transition readiness were explained, however it was stressed that engagement was through parental choice.

In response to a query about monitoring progress, the Local Authority was not allowed to undertake formal assessment. However, through regular visits, judgements were made about progress albeit on an informal basis. If EHE students progressed to post-16 provision, outcomes were monitored through formal routes. Those not in education, employment or training were recorded under 'NEETs' data and preventative measures put in place to support them.

Assurance was sought that measures were in place to properly safeguard children and if concerns were raised (for example around radicalisation), these could be escalated appropriately. Members referred to the death of a child in Wales who had been home educated and asked if any learning had been applied from this tragic event. In response assurance was given

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION – 17/09/19

about the purpose and scope of the Overview and Accountability Group and its links to safeguarding, health and early help services.

The Deputy Head of Access to Education stressed the importance of building and maintaining relationships with parents within the boundaries of legislation relating to elective home education. It was outlined that parents could refuse access however, if safeguarding concerns were raised these would be escalated appropriately.

The Chair reflected on the challenge of parental rights to home educated and the local authority's responsibilities for safeguarding. There was assurance that there were good levels of information sharing between agencies. The Chair shared concerns in relation to the limitations of legislation and commented that these should be addressed at a national level. Officers were thanked for their work and for the report.

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

(2) That an update is provided at the end of the 2019/20 academic year.

30. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

Consideration was given to the Improving Lives Work Programme. An update was given in respect of work undertaken, progress in relation to recommendations and future work.

The Chair invited Members to submit any comments to the Governance Advisor.

Resolved:- (1) That the contents of the report and the Work Programme detail be noted.

(2) That updates be provided to each meeting of this Commission on the progress of the work programme and further prioritisation as required.

(3) That a report be submitted to the meeting scheduled for October 29, 2019 (or as soon as was practical) on steps taken to address persistent absence in schools

31. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to report.

32. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday, 29 October, 2019 at 5.30 p.m.