

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday, 14th January, 2020

Present:- Councillor Jarvis (Vice-Chair in the Chair); Councillors Beaumont, Elliot, Marles, Pitchley and Buckley

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Clark, Marriott, Price, Senior and Fenwick-Green.

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

43. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON OCTOBER 29, 2019

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 29 October 2019, be approved as correct record of proceedings.

Matters arising:

There were no matters arising.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Buckley declared a non-pecuniary personal interest in agenda item 7, 2019 Education Performance Outcomes as he was a governor at Brinsworth Academy and Whitehill Primary School.

Councillor Pitchley declared a non-pecuniary personal interest in agenda item 7, 2019 Education Performance Outcomes as she was Chair of Governors at Aughton Early Years.

Councillor Jarvis declared a non-pecuniary personal interest in agenda item 7, 2019 Education Performance Outcomes as she was a governor at St Anne's Primary School.

45. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

46. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

47. COMMUNICATIONS

The Vice-Chair welcomed Sally Hodges, Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services to her first meeting of the Commission and introduced Martin Elliott, the new Governance Advisor who would be supporting the Commission and Katherine Harclelode, Governance Advisor to the meeting.

The Vice-Chair noted that there were a number of items to outline to the committee on the work programme.

Persistent Absence

The Vice-Chair advised that following concerns raised by members about poor performance, a sub-group had met in November to receive a briefing on persistent absence. At this meeting Officers had brought members up-to-date with planned actions to ensure consistency across schools in relation to how poor attendance was approached and communicated to parents. The Vice-Chair noted that it had been a very positive meeting and members had been assured by the actions that were being taken to address the issue. It was noted that a follow-up meeting would be held in early summer.

Safeguarding

The Vice-Chair advised that she and the Chair had met with the independent chairs of the Adult and Children's safeguarding boards in December 2019. The Vice-Chair noted that this meeting had resulted in a very positive discussion about their respective priorities and challenges, and that the outcomes of these discussions would be fed into the work programme for 2020/21.

Lifestyle Survey

The Vice-Chair advised that a meeting had been organised for Tuesday 21 January at 10.00am in order to discuss the findings of last year's survey and also to make an input into the future shape of the survey.

Pre-proceedings

The Vice-Chair advised that after the meeting of the commission held in 2019 where court processes for care proceedings were discussed actions to improve performance had been outlined, a follow-up meeting was scheduled for February to assess if these improvements had been embedded, with Invitations to be sent out in due course.

48. 2019 EDUCATION PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working and the Assistant Director – Education attended the meeting to present an overview of the provisional, unvalidated educational outcomes of children and young people in primary, special, secondary schools and academies in Rotherham for the academic year ending in the summer of 2019.

The Deputy Leader in introducing the report emphasised that the figures included in the report were still provisional and would not be finalised until February. The Deputy Leader advised that since the report had been prepared new data received regarding Key Stage 2 (KS2) had made a positive improvement to the provisional figures included in the report. The Deputy Leader also noted that it was difficult to compare 2019 performance directly with performance in previous years due to changes in assessment methods.

The report provided information of provisional outcomes for:

- The proportion of Rotherham Schools judged as good or outstanding.
- Performance in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
- Phonics testing for Year 1 children.
- Performance at Key Stages 1,2,3, 4 and 5.

A summary of the key issues that the provisional outcomes presented that included:

- The decline in outcomes in the primary phase in 2019. The national average had declined in some areas but the outcomes in Rotherham had declined more than the national average.
- Ensuring that Multi Academy Trusts worked collaboratively beyond their own trust to support performance and achievement across Rotherham.

The report also included a summary of priorities for Education for 2019/20, which included:

- To increase the number of children and young people attending (Ofsted) good or outstanding schools and increase the number of good or outstanding schools in Rotherham.

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- Improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils by addressing wider issues than only academic outcomes and preparing young people for life after school to enter the workplace.
- To improve the performance of our pupils at the end of Key Stage 2.
- Continuing to improve performance at KS4, in particular for achievement in English and mathematics to be at or above the national average.

The full 2019 Education Performance Outcomes data was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

The Assistant Director – Education noted the disappointment of the service that overall education outcomes had not improved in 2019 and advised that work had been conducted to fully investigate the reasons for this. This work had led to the development of a broad and deep action plan designed to address issues identified, and the Assistant Director reassured members that the issues that had led to the dip in performance at KS2 in particular could be addressed successfully. The Assistant Director in summarising the performance data noted the good performance at Key Stage 4 and the above national average performance at Key Stages 5.

Members asked what would be done differently in future to improve performance at KS2. The Assistant Director advised that there was no need for any significant changes to delivery at KS2 as he was confident that strategies to improve performance that had already implemented would start to deliver results. The Assistant Director noted that it was essential in order to improve performance and attainment that activity was focussed on the key basics which would have the most impact on performance and not on peripheral activities that had less impact on performance.

Members asked that with regard to the under performance in Early Years provision whether there should be an increased focus on creative activity and less of a focus on reading and writing. The Assistant Director advised that in Early Years there should not be an over emphasis on reading and writing but noted that Government guidelines with regard to their provision needed to be adhered to. Members acknowledged this requirement but noted that the teaching of reading and writing in Early Years could be done in numerous and creative ways. Members also asked around activity regarding breakfast clubs and other activities that ensured children were ready to learn when school started. The Assistant Director advised that information on this type of activity could be collated and presented in

future reports. The Deputy Leader noted that it was widely acknowledged that supporting activities did have a positive impact on children's performance, but such provision was harder to deliver with fewer resources available.

Members asked for further information on the Attendance Pathway initiative that had been detailed in the report. The Assistant Director advised that the strategy had been developed with headteachers and other stakeholders to monitor non-attendance and to challenge and support families with the issue. The Assistant Director stated that he was confident that the strategy would be effective in improving attendance, but that as the strategy had only recently been introduced performance would be monitored and reported on after a year of operation.

The Chair asked about the collaborative and partnership working that was taking place with schools and other strategic partners. The Assistant Director provided information on the partnership working that had been taking place and noted that levels of engagement from academies had increased greatly.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Assistant Director – Education for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the format of the Education Performance Outcomes data presented to members in future years be reformatted in the style of the Council Plan update to make it easier to understand and interpret.

49. IMPLEMENTATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Joint Assistant Director of Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion attended the meeting to provide a progress report on the implementation of the Rotherham Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy.

The Deputy Leader noted that the Rotherham Looked After Children (LAC) Sufficiency Strategy 2019-2022 identified the challenges that the borough faced in relation to providing care and accommodation to its Looked After Children that was high quality, enabled children to achieve the best outcomes and provided value for money. The Deputy Leader

noted that the Strategy had been approved by Cabinet in June 2019 and that the report provided a progress report for the priority actions as detailed in the strategy.

The Joint Assistant Director of Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion in introducing the report advised that all figures included in the report provided a snapshot of the data, and that the current figures would have changed slightly from when the report had been prepared. The Joint Assistant Director advised however that over the long term the trend for all the data included in the report was travelling in the right direction and was showing a positive improvement.

The Joint Assistant Director noted that the timescales associated with delivering key areas of work, including the recruitment of additional in-house foster carers, and the development of in-borough residential provision, that would deliver better value for money, had meant that the children's sufficiency budget remained significantly overspent. It was noted however that the actions being taken in these areas, due to their nature would take time to deliver the required outcomes.

The Joint Assistant Director provided the committee with a progress report on each of the key priorities identified in the LAC Sufficiency Strategy that included:

Increasing the number of in-house foster carers

It was noted that the previous recruitment strategy for in-house foster carers had not generated the level of interest that was required and as a result a new approach had been sought with Rotherham entering into an agreement with Bright Sparks to fundamentally change the way that the foster carer recruitment strategy was operated. The Joint Assistant Director provided an overview of the activity that had been carried out by Bright Sparks, including a purpose-built website to promote the Rotherham offer and social media activity. It was noted that the new activity had generated increased levels of enquiries and assessment visits than in previous years, and that this would consequently lead to the recruitment of more foster carers than in previous years.

Development of in-borough residential provision

The Joint Assistant Director provided information on activity to increase the amount of in-borough residential provision, including activity to reduce Rotherham's reliance on the private market and increase local sufficiency by opening in-house residential homes. It was noted that further in-house provision would also reduce pressure on the placements budget and would also provide increased opportunities to support children with complex needs by offering joined up working opportunities with other services including schools and the child and adolescent mental health system.

Maintaining a clear understanding of sufficiency needs and value for money

It was noted that maintaining a clear understanding of sufficiency needs and value for money required joint working between commissioning, social care, performance and finance teams. The Joint Assistant Director advised that processes were now in place to ensure that finance and commissioning information was cross-referenced on a regular basis to retain an accurate picture of the current position. It was also noted that a new IT solution was being implemented to enable payments to providers to be made via the LiquidLogic system that would improve efficiency and also provide detailed performance information.

Exploring opportunities for regional collaborative working arrangements

The Joint Assistant Director provided information on regional collaborative working. It was noted that Rotherham continued to work with other authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber as part of the White Rose Framework.

Reviewing the Rotherham Fostering Framework to ensure that it continued to deliver high quality placements and value for money

The Joint Assistant Director advised that to ensure that Rotherham was in a position to work through a formal procurement route that offered choice, quality and value for money, it has been agreed that the authority would join the White Rose Framework from 1 April 2020. It was noted that this action would provide Rotherham with further placement stability and increase the number of agencies with a wider pool of foster carers whilst allowing the authority to continue its strong working relationships with local providers.

Implementing a Dynamic Purchasing Framework to achieve sufficiency for Rotherham care leavers

The Joint Assistant Director advised that a new Dynamic Purchasing Framework was being put in place. It was noted that following consultation with young people and providers, a specification was developed and put out to tender, but that due to the number of questions in the tender and the high response rate it was anticipated that the awards would now be finalised by the end January 2020.

Working in partnership with Adult Care and Housing to ensure that sufficiency is achieved for vulnerable 16- and 17-year olds

The Joint Assistant Director advised that following a tendering process the contract to deliver this service had been awarded to Roundabout who began delivery in Rotherham in August 2019 and provided details of the support that Roundabout offered.

Members noted the low numbers of foster carers that were registered with the authority and expressed concern that this could result in children being placed in residential care instead of with foster carers. The Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services advised that the preferred care setting for children was always with a foster family but that in some cases a residential care situation was more suitable for some children who would find a foster care placement too challenging. The Joint Assistant Director advised that the majority of care was provided with foster families, but that due to the lack of Rotherham registered foster carers, some foster placements were not arranged with in-house foster carers, but with foster agencies. It was noted that as these placements were more expensive for the authority, recruiting more in-house foster carers was a priority for the authority.

Members asked how the quality of provision by third party providers was ensured and monitored. The Joint Assistant Director advised that children were always placed with high quality providers and that a child's social worker would continue to work with a child once placed and ensure their care aligned with the Rotherham Family approach.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Joint Assistant Director of Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion for attending the meeting and answering their questions.

Resolved: -

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Chair and Vice-Chair agree with Officers a timescale for the Improving Lives Select Commission to receive a progress report on the implementation of the Rotherham Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy.

50. CYPs DIRECTORATE WORKFORCE STRATEGY

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working, the Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Head of Safeguarding Quality and Learning attended the meeting to provide a progress report on the implementation of the Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy. The Deputy Leader noted that the strategy had been presented to the commission at a previous meeting and that the report provided an update on how the strategy was being implemented with a focus on the Rotherham Family Approach and Rotherham Learning Academy.

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The Head of Safeguarding Quality and Learning provided an overview of the Rotherham Family Approach noting that it incorporated three methodologies; Signs of Safety; Restorative Practice and Social Pedagogy and advised that over the past three years the leadership team and Learning and development Team had worked to ensure the approaches and the key ethos was embedded in all work and decision making with children and their families. The Head of Safeguarding also advised that the Rotherham Family Approach was built around the question that was central to all work carried out with children and their families in Rotherham of “Would this be good enough for my child and family?”.

The Head of Safeguarding Quality and Learning made a presentation to the meeting on the Rotherham Learning Academy. It was noted that the Rotherham Learning Academy had been launched in 2017 and sought to coordinate existing training and to embed the Rotherham Family approach in all Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) activity across the authority. It was noted that the key aims of the Rotherham Learning Academy were:

- to offer a clear development pathway across the Children Young People Services for the entire workforce.
- to provide support, challenge, clarity and continuity, as well as opportunity for progression and development
- to support a virtual learning environment
- to provide up to 15 working days of training, learning and development activities to practitioners.

The presentation provided information on how the training would be delivered and coordinated and how it would enable the further deliverance and embedding of the Rotherham Family Approach across the authority.

The Head of Safeguarding Quality and Learning advised that the Learning Academy was having a positive impact across the service, noting the significant reduction in agency staff employed across CYPS, and the stability and capability that this provided for the service. The Deputy Leader advised that the percentage of agency staff employed at Rotherham was far below the national average and noted that the average number of days absent by staff in CYPS was below both the Rotherham and national averages. The Deputy Leader welcomed how the implementation of the Learning Academy was further embedding new ways of working and the Rotherham Family Approach across CYPS.

Members asked how the 15 days training would be delivered and whether it would be mostly online, or whether there would be other training methods used. The Assistant Director of Children and Young People’s Services advised that the training offer was a “blended” offer that would include many different methods of training. Members also asked whether the training accessed would be certificated and whether the training would count towards formal training. The Assistant advised that the training

would be certificated and for social workers the training could be used when they reapplied to continue to be registered social workers. The Head of Safeguarding Quality and Learning noted that some of the training offered could be used as credits for formal qualifications, but that this would depend on individual circumstances.

Members enquired how the delivery and uptake of training would be monitored and its impact evaluated. The Assistant Director provided details of how the training completed would be recorded and advised that this monitoring activity would then be used to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the training and to assess if any changes to the training offer needed to be made.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Head of Safeguarding Quality and Learning for attending the meeting and answering their questions.

Resolved: -

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That it be noted that the Improving Lives Select Commission supports and endorses the CYPS Workforce Strategy and notes the integral part of the Rotherham Learning Academy of supporting the delivery of the strategy.
- (3) That a progress report on the delivery of the CYPS Workforce Strategy be brought back to a meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission in 12 months' time.

51. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to report.

52. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 3 March 2020 at 5:30pm.