

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION**  
**Tuesday 21 December 2021**

Present: - Councillor Cooksey (Vice-Chair in the Chair); Councillors , Andrews, Aveyard, Bacon, Barley, C Carter, Elliott, Griffin, Haleem, Monk, Singleton and Thompson.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Browne, Collingham, Hughes, Khan, Pitchley and Wilson.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**51. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 26 OCTOBER 2021**

**Resolved:** - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 26 October 2021 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

**52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**53. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press or public.

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

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

**55. COMMUNICATIONS**

The Vice-Chair provided an update on the issues covered at the most recent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

**56. EDUCATION RECOVERY - EDUCATION REVIEW - 2020/21 ACADEMIC YEAR**

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director – Education attended the meeting to provide a presentation on how the Education service had been working to deliver the education recovery in the Borough during the 2020/21 Academic Year. The report also provided an overview of activity and a review of key areas of education across the Borough in the current academic year including Elective Home Education.

The Assistant Director - Education made a presentation that provided information on:

- Early Years provision.
- Primary and Secondary education provision, including recovery activity and the ongoing impact of the pandemic.
- the activity that had been carried out by the Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership to address the challenges across the education system created by the pandemic.
- the work that had been carried out in engaging with school leaders across the Borough to drive forward the education recovery.
- School attendance during 2020/21 and how it had been impacted by large numbers of children and young people isolating due to Covid-19.
- the Rotherham Inclusion Pathway.
- Elective Home Education and the increase in numbers of children and young people being home educated, the challenges that this presented, and the action being taken to address these challenges.
- the engagement activity that had been carried out with parents and carers.
- the surveys that had been carried out with pupils across the Borough on the impact of the pandemic and the activity being carried out as a result of the information gathered.

The Assistant Director provided information on the key challenges with regard to delivery of the education recovery across the Borough including:

- the increasing number of pupils and students with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs.
- the impact on School leaders and staff wellbeing as they faced the daily uncertainty of staffing levels in schools.
- the impact of staff absence on the delivery of catch-up interventions.
- ensuring that the breadth of the curriculum was not reduced for the most vulnerable pupils as they attended reading, writing or maths catch-up activities.
- ensuring that pupils and students who were self-isolating had the opportunity to keep up with their studies.
- the long-term impact of the pandemic on the education of vulnerable children and young people.
- the development on social interaction skills in early years as children learnt to interact with others after long periods of isolation from children and adults outside of their immediate family.
- the lack of assessment for primary children that had inhibited the understanding of the impact of the pandemic on educational attainment and progress of children and young people throughout the education system.
- notwithstanding the impact of the pandemic on school improvement, the need to increase the number of schools judged by Ofsted as being good or better.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services noted her concerns around the lack of formal assessments that had been able to be carried and how this impacted on the ability of schools to measure the progress that pupils had made. The Cabinet Member also expressed her concern around young people who had received centre assessed GCSE and A Level grades and how the related grade inflation may be perceived negatively by potential employers.

The Cabinet Member noted the Year of Reading that was currently taking place across the Borough and encouraged all members to get involved with activities in their local areas.

Members asked for further information around the use of supply teachers during the pandemic and whether there had been sufficient numbers available in order to ensure that catch-up activities in English and Maths were delivered. The Assistant Director advised that ensuring access to high quality supply provision had been challenging but advised that retired teachers had been encouraged to return to the classroom in order to increase the number of staff available to cover absences.

Members noted the concerns that had been detailed in the presentation regarding the disproportionately negative impact that the pandemic had had on already disadvantaged children and young people and asked for further information on what was being done to address this. The Assistant Director advised that during periods of "lockdown" that it had been a key priority to ensure that the most disadvantaged pupils had access to the full school offer in order as far as possible to mitigate the impact on their learning. The Assistant Director noted however that not all disadvantaged pupils had attended school during periods of lockdown and advised that these pupils, along with all disadvantaged pupils were a priority for schools in the delivery of their catch-up activities. The Assistant Director also noted the numerous education recovery projects across the Borough that aimed to support the most disadvantaged children catch-up with their learning.

Members noted the impact of parent/carer anxiety during the pandemic and the impact that this had on school attendance with parents/carers not sending their children to school. Members asked how this situation was being managed in order to ensure that all children attended school. The Assistant Director advised that parent/carer anxiety about the sending their children to school was managed and reduced by ensuring clear channels of communication between the school and parents/carers that provided timely, clear and consistent messaging, as poor communication and unclear messaging acted to increase anxiety for parents/carers and consequently impacted on pupil absences.

Members noted their concern about the growing numbers of children in receipt of Elective Home Education and asked that a report be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission on the impact of the revised Elective Home Education Policy that had been introduced in

2021.

Members asked for further information around the concerns that had been expressed in the presentation and by the Cabinet Member around the impact on centre assessed grades for the young people who had been subject to this method of assessment. The Assistant Director noted that an area of particular concern was around young people transitioning to Further Education and how the gaps in their learning would impact on that transition. The Assistant Director advised that it was currently difficult to assess the full impact and how long this impact would last across all cohorts of children on their education and subsequent life chances. The Assistant Director confirmed that this uncertainty was a significant challenge that would need to be addressed.

Members noted their approval for the wide ranging Covid Surveys that had been carried out with children and young people across the Borough in order to gather their experiences of the pandemic and how it had impacted on their lives and education. Members noted their concern on the number of children and young people who had stated in the surveys that that had felt were unable to ask for the help that they needed and asked how this issue would be addressed. The Assistant Director noted that there would have been a wide range of reasons why children and young people had stated this but assured members that the level and amount of support that was available in schools to support children and young people had increased greatly since the start of the pandemic. The Assistant Director assured members that the findings from the surveys had been shared with schools so that action could be taken to address areas of concern that the surveys had highlighted. The Assistant Director advised that in the light of the pandemic that the Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs of pupils was an area of particular focus for schools with schools increasing levels of pastoral support to support the needs of their pupils.

Members noted the phonics assessments that had been taken in primary schools and noted with concern the gap in attainment in these tests between children who were in receipt of free school meals and those who were not. Members asked what action was being addressed this gap in attainment. The Assistant Director confirmed that phonics was a national priority, and that additional support was being provided in schools to those pupils who required extra support as part of the programme of catch-up activities. The Assistant Director advised that attainment in phonics testing had been impacted by the lack of socialisation and the development of social skills by children who had spent a substantial part of their life isolated from adults and children outside of their family group. The Assistant Director advised that full details on the phonics assessments would be circulated to members as soon as the final results had been validated.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director – Education for attending the

meeting and answering member questions.

**Resolved: -**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That information detailing the results of the phonics testing carried out with Year 2 children across the Borough be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission once available.
3. That a briefing note be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission on the impact of the revised Elective Home Education Policy.

**57. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION PROJECT GROUP REPORT ON POST CSE SUPPORT SERVICES**

Councillor Clark attended the meeting to present a report on post-CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) support that had been carried out by a sub-group of the Improving Lives Select Commission.

The sub-group had consisted of Councillors Victoria Cusworth, Councillor Maggi Clark and Councillor Jenny Andrews. It was noted that during the period of the review that Councillor Cusworth had been Chair of the Improving Lives Select Commission. Councillor Cusworth, who had been a member of the sub-group was in attendance at the meeting for this item to support Councillor Clark answer member questions about the review and its recommendations.

In introducing the report Councillor Clark thanked all of those who had been involved in the review including officers, officers and elected members at the other local authorities that the sub-group had spoken to and the representatives of the providers of the commissioned services that they had met with.

Councillor Clark emphasised that the purpose of the review had been to gain assurance on the services that were in place in Rotherham to support survivors of CSE rather than the historical or current issues of CSE in Rotherham and the Council's response to CSE in the Borough.

Councillor Clark detailed the circumstances and context that that had led to the formation of the sub-group to scrutinise post-CSE support in Rotherham.

The report noted that in summer 2016 the Council had commissioned support services for young people and adults who had experienced child sexual exploitation, with these additional services acting to supplement the core support offer that was available to any adult who had ongoing support needs provided by the Council through its Adult Safeguarding

provision. It was noted that the contracted arrangements had ran from 1 July 2016 to 31 March 2019 with an option to extend for a further two years, with the contract being extended until 31 December 2020.

The report stated that to inform the imminent re-commissioning of services, members of the Improving Lives Select Commission had conducted a short benchmarking exercise during August 2019 on the services provided by other local authorities to support survivors of CSE. The results of this exercise had subsequently been fed into the development of a needs analysis that had been used to underpin the anticipated re-commissioning process. Councillor Clark advised that because of circumstances beyond the Council's control the commissioning process had been delayed and that due to the extension to timescales, members of the sub-group agreed that further work should be undertaken to enhances its review and to gain further assurance about the level of support offered to survivors of CSE in Rotherham. Councillor Clark noted that it had been resolved at the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 3 March 2020 that the benchmarking work should be resumed, with the results detailed in standalone scrutiny report on post-CSE support and the delivery of commissioned support services.

Councillor Clark advised that in conducting the review that the sub-group had met with senior officers, officers and elected members at other local authorities who were responsible for managing post-CSE support as well as the providers of the commissioned services in Rotherham. Councillor Clark advised that this work had enabled the sub-group to establish a sound understanding of the services that were being delivered in Rotherham to support survivors of CSE and how these compared to services provided elsewhere. Councillor Clark noted that prior to the review that they had not felt that they were fully informed about the level of support that was provided to survivors in Rotherham.

Members took the opportunity to ask Councillors Clark and Cusworth several questions regarding scope of the review, the methods of research used and on the recommendations that had been made. Members sought particular assurance that the "voice of the survivor" had been considered throughout the review. Councillors Clark and Cusworth assured members that from the discussions that had been held with the providers of the commissioned services, who had extensive experience of working with survivors that the "voice of the survivor" that they had utilised their professional skills and expertise to access and to learn from the voices of survivors.

The Vice-Chair thanked Councillors Cusworth and Clark for presenting the report to members and for their hard work in conducting the extensive member led scrutiny review.

**Resolved: -**

- 1) That the report be noted, and the following recommendations be submitted to OSMB and Cabinet for approval: -
  - a) That post-CSE services are transferred to the Adult Social Care, Housing and Public Health directorate to enable the greater integration and coordination of support pathways that are available to adult victims of trauma as children.
  - b) That further work is undertaken with relevant partners and survivors to improve the ways in which survivors' voices are captured to inform future reviews of post-abuse services (for example drawing on the research from Sheffield Hallam University, the development of voice and influence groups or other survivor's forums).
  - c) That consideration is given to appropriate governance arrangements to enable elected members to provide a steer on the activity that is taking place within the Borough to stop CSE/CCE and support survivors. d) That the Improving Lives Select Commission continue to monitor the provision of post-abuse support to survivors of CSE.
  - d) In relation to recommendations c) and d), that consideration is given how survivors' voices to inform these processes.
  - e) To emphasise the shared responsibility of all elected members, that an annual training event/workshop is delivered. This is to ensure that all elected members are kept up to date with the activity within the Borough to protect young people from being at risk of harm from CSE/CCE and support adult survivors to move forwards in their lives.
  - f) That the relevant Strategic Directors explore options for sharing best practice with other local authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber Region.
  - g) Drawing on the good practice from Durham County Council, that consideration is given is given to the language used in the provision of post-CSE support to ensure that it is positive and inclusive of the needs of those accessing services.
- 2) That the response of Cabinet to the recommendations be reported back to Council within two calendar months of its submission.

**58. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its Work Programme.

**Resolved:** - That the Work Programme for 2020/21 be approved.

**59. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

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

**Resolved:** - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 25 January 2022 at 10am at Rotherham Town Hall.