

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 4 March 2025

Present:- Councillor Pitchley (in the Chair); Councillors Baggaley, Bower, Brent, Foster, Garnett, Harper, Monk, Ryalls and Sutton.

Apologies for Absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Blackham, Elliott, Fisher, Hughes and Knight.

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

59. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 28 January 2025, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

61. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items of business on the agenda that required the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

62. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

63. KINSHIP CARE OFFER UPDATE

This item provided an update on the Local Kinship Care Offer, which included an overview of the recent national developments relating to Kinship Care and how these were applied locally.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Jane Wood, Head of Service for Children in Care and Chris Macdonald, Service Manager for the Central Locality Teams and Family Activity Base.

The Chair invited the Service Manager for the Central Locality Teams and Family Activity Base to present the presentation, during which the following was noted:

The National Context-

- The Department of Education definition of kinship care was “any

situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term”.

- There was a focus on kinship care through new Statutory Guidance, which was published in October 2024, via the Department of Education. The focus in this area began following an Independent Review of Children’s Social Care in 2022.

The Rotherham Family Approach-

- What mattered most and guided work with families:
 - That children could understand what the service were doing, could tell their story and be seen by the local authority as unique individuals.
 - That families could feel involved, respected and choose their solutions where possible.
 - That the local authority would see children as located in a network, which would be more than their household, recognising the importance and contribution of family, friends and school.
 - That the service would do all that they could to support families to stay together safely, with a clear vision of how to get there.
 - That all social workers would have consistent, reliable supervision and management oversight.

Routes to Kinship Care-

- Kinship fostering, either temporarily or long term.
- Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.
- Informal arrangements and private fostering.

Kinship Fostering-

- Kinship fostering was where a looked after child would move to live with a “connected person”. Regulation Twenty-Four permitted placing the child after an initial assessment, but before full fostering panel approval, for up to a 16-week period.
- The local authority had parental responsibility, rather than the carer. Almost all kinship carers approved as foster carers continued to secure their own order.
- There was a statutory requirement to support.
- Fostering panel could approve kinship carers for the specific child, for the long-term only.

Child Arrangement Orders-

- Child Arrangement Order's provided the holder with parental responsibility and specified that the child would live with them.
- It was not specific to family and/or friends, and it was the same order used to settle disputes between parents about where a child should live.
- Where the carer was a kinship carer, parental responsibility was held equally with the parents.
- Although there was no statutory requirement to provide support, the Council's policy included a financial allowance in situations where the child was looked after, or would otherwise have become looked after, with specific criteria to assess against.

Special Guardianship Orders-

- Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) could only be made to non-parents. The order gave the holder overarching parental responsibility which was shared with parents.
- Where the child was looked after before, it entitled the holder and child to an assessment of need from the local authority.
- There was a statutory requirement to provide support, this was set out in the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.
- Professional foster carers could sometimes apply, but the vast majority of SGOs were made to family and/or friends of the child.

The National Context-

- The Department of Education's Kinship Care Statutory Guidance, October 2024, required the local authority to:
 - Nominate a senior officer as the lead for kinship.
 - Publish and regularly review the Kinship Local Offer.
 - Offer family group decision making to all families before care proceedings.
 - Request that the Virtual School nominate an officer for educational outcomes for children in kinship care arrangements.
 - The draft Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill that was before Parliament included much of the above and included a duty to publish a Kinship Local Offer within two months of the bill becoming law. It was estimated that Rotherham would produce their Kinship Local Offer for Rotherham, by May 2025.

The Local Context and Progress-

- The local authority updated their Kinship Care Practice Guidance in November 2024.
- The service had nominated an officer to lead on kinship care, this was the Service Manager for the Locality.
- The role of the Virtual School Headteacher was to provide advice and guidance regarding children in kinship care, and children with a social worker, this was already established.
- The service was utilising the Department of Education Means Testing Model, with effect from January 2025.
- Family group-decision making was exceptionally well-embedded. Approximately 60% of all families within the locality, including children in need and child protection planning, had engaged in family group decision making.
- There was a comprehensive pathway for kinship foster carers which drew on the local authority's therapeutic service and community resources.
- The local authorities Engage Crisis Intervention Service supported kinship carers through their most challenging periods, where needed.
- There were long-running support groups for all kinship carers to attend together, these were held monthly and included online and social media groups.

Current Focus of the Service-

- The service was focusing on developing and publishing a Kinship Local Offer. This would be presented to Cabinet in July 2025. In order to develop the local offer, the following activities include were on-going:
 - Capturing and analysing data and demographic forecasting to understand the cohort.
 - Completing consultations with kinship carers.
 - Coordinating partnership offers of support.
 - Responding to research and evidence.
- The service aimed to ensure a straightforward pathway to support children and kinship carers, which would respond to their individual level of need.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during the discussion:

- A challenge faced by the service whilst implementing the new

guidance on kinship care, was ensuring a balance between services being unique for kinship carers, whilst making sure that kinship carers were not isolated from mainstream services and resources.

- Elective home education was an option for any child and any parent or carer. There were recommendations being considered in relation to children subject to child protection plans and whether additional safeguards were required in this area, or oversight from the local authority, to prevent that cohort of children from being electively home educated. As part of the kinship assessment process referred to during the presentation, the children and carers would work alongside the team who would encourage school placement and socialisation. The team would also explain the respite that school could provide to a carer for six hours a day.
- The kinship local offer would be developed by July 2025.
- There were two Virtual School Headteachers, one for primary and one for secondary age. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill required the Virtual Headteacher to provide advice and guidance. Part of this was strategic and required the Virtual Headteacher to work with schools, to understand the specific needs of kinship children and kinship carers. For some families there would often be advice and guidance provided by the Virtual Headteacher directly to kinship carers. The Virtual Headteachers attended the Kinship Support Group on a quarterly basis to provide support and guidance. Any kinship carer could access support and guidance from the Virtual School, via their professional network.
- Regulation twenty-four was helpful statutory guidance which allowed the service to make emergency and thorough assessments. An example was provided of immediate police checks that could be completed when required, to assist with placing a child quickly but safely.
- There were two types of informal kinship arrangements. One was an informal arrangement between a parent and close relative, such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle. In this situation the parent retained parental responsibility and the ability to make decisions. In these situations there was no requirement to notify the local authority of the informal arrangement. The other type of informal arrangement was where a parent would make an agreement with an individual who was not classed as a close relative, such as a family friend, great aunt and/or uncle. In these situations, there was a requirement for the parent to notify the local authority, and a duty

on the local authority to assess whether the arrangement was suitable via the private fostering process. There was clear data relating to private fostering arrangements, however capturing data on informal arrangements with close family members was a challenge as there was no requirement to notify the local authority. The service was working with schools to establish how common informal arrangements were within the borough.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Considers the content of the report and associated presentation and acknowledge the updates in Kinship practice.
- 2) Requests that the Rotherham Kinship Local Offer be presented to the Commission, in advance of being presented to Cabinet.
- 3) Requests that a written response is provided to members relating to whether specific data is available on the number of children and young people electively home educated, who are looked after or in kinship arrangements.

64. YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE

This item provided an overview on His Majesty Inspectorate Probation (HMIP) new Inspection Framework Standards for Youth Justice Services, as well as an update on the proposed work being undertaken in preparation for an inspection under the new framework.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member of Children and Young People Services (CYPS), Kelly White, Interim Assistant Director for Early Help and Business Support and LINK Officer for the Commission, and Zulfiqar Shaffi, Youth Justice Service Manager.

The Chair invited the Youth Justice Service Manager to provide the presentation, during which the following was noted:

Inspectorate Aims When Changing the Framework-

- Ensure children and victims would be at the forefront of its inspections.
- Be proportionate, responsive and agile in its inspection activity.
- Ensure inspections would have a positive impact, drive effective practice and improvement.
- Look at the quality of work based on the needs of the child rather

than the type of disposal they received.

- Ensure a greater focus on the service victims were receiving, many of whom were also children.
- Increase the frequency with which inspections occurred, to avoid long delays between inspections.

The Critical Changes-

- The new framework considered the impact of contextual safeguarding and how best to promote positive outcomes.
- There was a significant change of language and focus throughout, which was positive and was compatible with the language of the child first, and child first principles.
- It highlighted the importance of the Youth Justice Service Partnership and the Board.
- It had a greater focus on victims.
- All work with children was combined into a single domain. There was a clearer focus on the child's needs and not the disposal and/or outcome they received.

Introduction of Two Types of Inspection-

- The first type was an Inspection of Youth Justice Services (IYJS), which would last for two weeks and would focus on practice and governance. This type of Inspection would include the Partnership Board and governance, approximately 15% of inspections would be this type.
- The second type was an Inspection of Youth Justice work with children and victims (IYJWCV). This type of inspection would last for one week and would focus mainly on practice and children and victims only, approximately 85% of inspections would be this type. Previously the inspection only looked at certain children based on their pathway; the inspection would focus on all children within the service.

The Two-Week Inspection, Based on Domains One and Two-

- This would be completed over two weeks, week one of the inspection would require a presentation, case inspection (children and victims), and children's, parents and carers participation. Information from week one would then inform the themes for week two.
- Week two would be triangulation meetings, focus groups, multi-agency case discussion sessions and meetings with the Youth Justice Board, Board Chair, and employees.
- There would be a three-and-a-half-week announcement period, an

example was provided of how the inspection would be announced on a Wednesday, a planning meeting would then be arranged for the Friday or Monday.

- Work delivered to children and victims would be at the forefront of this inspection.

The One-Week Inspection, Work with Children and Victims Only-

- Inspectors would be on-site Monday afternoon to Friday morning for this type of inspection.
- The inspection would include a meeting with the Head of Service and a presentation from the Chair of the Management Board, on the Monday afternoon.
- The inspection would include some focus groups, a showcase slot for good practice examples, and two multi-agency case discussion meetings, to provide positive examples of partnership working.
- It would include children, parents and carers participation, and an opportunity for them to engage through a variety of methods during the week.
- Leadership and governance, staffing, partnerships, facilities and services would be inspected through the lens of the work delivered with children.

Inspection Outcomes-

- The outcomes were the same as the Ofsted outcomes and were as follows:
 - Inadequate
 - Requires Improvement
 - Good
 - Outstanding.
- Rotherham was last inspected in 2020, and the outcome at that point was Requires Improvement.
- Since the last inspection, all actions on the associated action plan were completed and significant work had been undertaken, including the following:
 - A Peer Review in 2022
 - A Quality Assurance Review of Out of Court Work in 2023
 - Practice Discover Day by the Youth Justice Board, in 2024.

On-going Work-

- There was a new board induction in place and membership of the board had been reviewed, alongside agreeing a Vice-Chair for the board.

- The service was working with Remedi, who had completed their Self-Assessment Victim Standards.
- The service was working with the Performance Team to ensure inspection readiness.
- The service was reviewing the Youth Justice Service policies and protocol's, updating documents where required and collating them in preparation for an inspection.
- The Partnership Board would hold a Focus Workshop in February 2025, to consider priorities and inspection readiness.
- The service introduced a new Mandatory Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool to support assessments.
- The service was leading on the creation of a Regional Out of Court Practice Scrutiny Panel, with neighbouring South Yorkshire local authorities.
- Employees engaged in training on constructive resettlement for children leaving custody.
- The service was gathering good practice examples via audit activity.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during the discussion:

- In relation to external partners, Youth Justice Service Manager's audited the activity of external partners such as Remedi on a monthly basis. The service chose which cases to audit and moderated all work undertaken for each case. Remedi delivered victim work and one-to-one reparation work.
- The Local Authority delivered all group work, via evidence-based programmes.
- Reassurance was provided that the service would be prepared for an inspection if the call was received.
- The CHANCE Group was continuing as a group. The CHANCE group attended the Children's and Young Peoples Partnership Board which linked with the Rotherham Together Partnership Plan. An invitation was extended to all members of the Commission, to attend the Children's and Young People's Partnership Board.
- All local authorities were due an inspection, including Rotherham, this was due to a pause in the Inspection Framework. The local authority would receive three and a half weeks' notice of the inspection. The inspectorate would decide which type of inspection

a local authority would have out of the two options available; this would be based on information that they held about the local authority. An example was provided of if a local authority area had a high knife crime rate, the inspectorate may want to visit that area sooner.

- There was a network which informed the service of where the inspectorate was at in the country, at that point in time. The inspectorate was currently inspecting a London borough. The service would contact the London borough after their inspection, to gain their feedback on the process. It was likely that most local authorities would receive a one-week inspection, 15% of local authorities would receive the two-week inspection.
- The Youth Justice Service were holding fortnightly Inspection Ready Meetings in preparation for an inspection. The service was working alongside the Performance Team to collect the data required for an inspection. The Youth Justice Board had implemented a showcase slot within their agenda, to focus on finding examples of good practise to celebrate, in readiness of the inspection.
- There was a detailed action plan developed as a result of the last Youth Justice Service Inspection, which detailed plans of how the service would progress from the “Requires Improvement” inspection outcome. All actions from the plan developed in 2020 were completed within the last five-years since the Inspection. The completed action plan was presented to the Commission at the previous Youth Justice Service update in 2024.
- Early Intervention to prevent children from entering the Youth Justice Service was an area of focus for the service. There had been a reduction in the re-offending rate over the last twelve months. The level of re-offending rates was below the national average and regional partner averages. Low First Time Entrance (FTE) rates resulted in a low re-offending rate.
- The Partnership Board held a workshop in February where the Board looked at developing their next Youth Justice Plan for the next year. The plan could often be local authority heavy, so the Partnership Board focused on encouraging partner participation in this. The workshop was well attended and promoted good discussions around current pressures and priorities for the service. Discussions took place during the workshop, relating to the following:

- How to prioritise the sharing of online images and how to engage the partnership and schools in this area of focus.
- How to understand disproportionality within the Youth Justice Service, it was noted that more than a third of the young people engaging with the service had additional needs, several of these young people had un-diagnosed additional needs.
- How to focus on prevention, in particular the broader offer available via the Family Help Team and Family Hubs Service.
- The priorities relating to youth violence.
- The actions obtained from the workshop would be imbedded into the Youth Justice Service's Plan which would be produced by June 2025. The Youth Justice Board agreed that a longer plan could be developed moving forwards, rather than a yearly plan.
- The service commissioned a speech and language worker to screen young people entering the Youth Justice Service for speech and language needs. Trained practitioners would also identify any additional needs whilst working alongside young people within the service.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Considers the content of the report and associated presentation, and acknowledges the progress made to date.
- 2) Requests that a written response is provided to the Commission on Rotherham's statistical neighbours.

65. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme, and the following was noted:

- The Commission's Work Programme was included within the agenda pack for members information and initial discussions.
- At the next meeting in April, the Commission would receive an update on the Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- The Revised Elective Home Education Policy Update that was

scheduled for the next meeting, was rescheduled as a result of a request from the service.

- Members were invited to attend a hybrid workshop on the 1st May which would focus on the following:
- The Prevent Programme
- Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- An additional session focused on capturing members views on the revision of the Elective Home Education Policy, was recently well attended by members of the Commission. The summary notes would be circulated to members shortly.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme for 2024/2025 be approved.

66. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - SUB AND PROJECT GROUP UPDATES

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

67. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.