

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 22 July 2025

Present:- Councillor Monk (in the Chair); Councillors Brent, Blackham, Bower, Clarke, Elliott, Fisher, Garnett, Hughes, Ismail, Pitchley, Ryalls, Sutton, Hemmingway and Newman.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Adair, T. Collingham and Hickey.

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

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

10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 17 June 2025, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12. 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.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

14. CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE ANNUAL OUTTURN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024-2025

This item included the performance outturn for the reporting year of April 2024 to March 2025, for Children and Young People's Services. Including areas of performance that were working well, alongside other areas where a continued focus was required.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children's and Young People's Services, Helen Sweatton, Joint Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance, Cathryn Woodward, Performance and Business Intelligence Manager, Monica

Green, Assistant Director for Children's and Young People's Services and Stuart Williams, Head of Children's Provider Services.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for CYPS to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:

- The report included a narrative report and associated data scorecard, which contained performance information across children's social care, family health, education and inclusion. The report described how all services were performing against local and national targets.
- There were some positives and improvements during the timeframe that the report included.

The Chair invited the Joint Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance and the Performance and Business Intelligence Manager to give the presentation, during which the following was noted:

Overview-

- Performance was considered against local targets, including associated red, amber and green rated tolerances.
- The scorecard was reviewed annually, and the targets and measures were reset on an annual basis, based on available national and statistical neighbour benchmarking data, as well as the local authority's performance levels.
- The performance measures for statistical neighbours related to a group of ten local authorities which were all similar, to ensure that a comparison could be like for like.
- There was robust governance and accountability in place. This included a monthly Performance Board, which identified any areas requiring further focus, as a result, the service would then deep dive into the relevant data for the identified areas of focus, report back to the Board on their findings and put actions in place to improve performance levels where required. There was quarterly Assurance Boards, which looked at the quality of the data and audits. Service Level Performance Clinics were in place with managers and Practise Learning Days were also held. Alongside the annual Performance Report, members of the Commission also received a quarterly performance scorecard via email. All of the above linked to the Council Plan and the Year Ahead Delivery Plan.

Scorecard Overview-

- Benchmarking indicators were used on the scorecard, to provide the ability to compare with other local authorities, there was also activity indicators and local indicators.
- The scorecards could offer a monthly breakdown of the data, as well the quarterly break down and an annual breakdown, to provide a high-level overview of performance over different periods of time. The scorecard attached provided the annual data breakdown for 2024-2025.

Family Help, What Was Working Well-

- Family Help was the new terminology for Early Help.
- 36.1% of contacts coming through the front door were identified as Family Help, compared to 33.8% in 2023/2024.
- There was an increase in families engaged from 637 to 817, with timeliness of engagement maintained at 91.4% within 3 days.
- There was improved assessment timeliness to 92.6% completed within 45 working days.
- 98% of children in deprived areas were registered with Children's Centres, with 82.9% accessing activities.
- There was a reduction to 4.7% of young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) or not known, this was an improvement from the previous year and well within national and statistical targets.
- There was a reduction in youth re-offending rates to 13.2%, this was below national and statistical neighbour averages.

Children's Social Care, What Was Working Well-

- The rate of Children in Need (CiN) reduced to 310.7, this was below statistical neighbour and national averages.
- The rate of Child Protection Plans was at 54.2%, this was in line with statistical neighbours and above the national average.
- The rate of Children in Care (CiC) reduced to 83.0, this was the lowest since 2016.
- Contact Timeliness improved to 86.8% with a decision within 1 working day, this was following completed work to improve

processes. The target for this was 88%, therefore work was ongoing to continue to improve this figure.

- There was a reduction in re-referrals from 22% down to 17.3% this year, this was an area of focus of the Performance Board last year and resulted in case audits to identify causes and trends.
- There was improved assessment timeliness to 92.5% completed within 45 working days, this was good in relation to national data.
- There was a reduction in Child Protection Plans over 2 years, from 4.6% to 0.6%.
- There was an increase to 95.8% of Children in Care plans that were reviewed within timescales.
- There were significant improvements in adoption timeliness with 345 days between entering care and placement; and 107 days between Placement Order and matching to a family.

Education, What Was Working Well-

- 85.7% of eligible 2-year-olds were taking up early education places, research showed that education at an early stage had a significant impact on future education.
- There was a high percentage of children allocated to one of their top three school preferences, this was 99.2% for primary and 97.1% for secondary schools.
- There was slight improvements in primary school attendance to 94.6%; and secondary attendance remained stable at 90.5%. Whilst there was a slight improvement, this remained an area of focus and challenge for the service.
- 95.6% of Children in Care had an up-to-date Personal Education Plan. The plan looked at a child's needs, aspirations and support required at school. The plans were updated on a termly basis and were a live document. The data provided was Term 2 data as Term 3 had not yet concluded.

Inclusion, What Was Working Well-

- The service continued to improve compliance, with 85.8% of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) issued within 20 weeks, an improvement on 59.8% in the previous year. This was a continued area of focus for the service.

- EHCP Primary Transition Reviews completed by the statutory deadline reached 99.5%, an improvement on 95.8% in 2024.
- Secondary Transition Reviews completed by the deadline reached 93.6%, a significant improvement on 79.1% in 2024. Both were an improvement on the previous year.

Areas of Challenge and Focus-

- Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) within 15 days of a Section 47 was 80%, with a target of 86%. There was a drop in performance within this area, this was challenged at the Performance Board and as a result detailed work was completed into every case over 15 days.
- Children on a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time within 2 years was 17.3%, this was an increase against a target of 8%. This was also challenged at Performance Board and detailed work had been completed to understand the closures.
- In relation to placement stability for children in care, long term placements were at 62.1%, with the target set at 70%. Placement moves were 12.7%, with a target of 8%, this was a continued area of focus for the service.
- In relation to the percentage of up-to-date health and dental assessments, health assessments were at 84.5% and dental were at 66.7%, with both targets set at 95%. As there was a delay in the local authority receiving data, it was advised that the current data for this measure was now 91.2% for health assessments, and 90% for dental assessments.
- Supporting schools to increase attainment through CPD opportunities was a continued area of challenge and focus.
- Continuing the Elective Home Education preventative offer to reduce increasing numbers was on-going, with the current level at 747, compared to 523 at the same time last year.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and opened up to questions, during which the following was discussed:

- The health and dental assessment statistics included children of all ages, such as older children who may have refused an

assessment.

- In relation to the rate of children in care, the rate counted was per 10,000 children. There were 457 children in care on this day. The rate per 10,000 provided a good comparison against other local authorities. This was the lowest level for the local authority since 2016. The figure also included un-accompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), the Cabinet Member advised that they were happy that they had the ability to welcome those children, support them and still continue to reduce the overall numbers of children in care. The children in care figure fluctuated, as children entered care and left care.
- The Strategic Director of CYPS met with other regional directors to analyse data on children in care. The Cabinet Member also attended lead member regional meetings to benchmark and share best practise. Officers within CYPS were involved in sector-wide improvement, which was an opportunity for officers in similar roles to meet and complete benchmarking, at least once a year this meeting included discussing their performance, the other local authorities would then provide recommendations to the service.
- The service also kept up to date on Ofsted reports from other local authorities who were judged as outstanding, this allowed the service to identify what other local authorities were doing and take best practise from the reports.
- Reducing the number of children in care was a whole partnership approach, school played a significant role in identifying concerns for children with vulnerabilities. The police were also a significant contributor to front door referrals.
- Family Network Meetings were a good tool for early intervention with families and provided any required support.
- In relation to the audit on Child Protection Plans and the identification of the need to strengthen areas of multi-agency

collaboration, this mainly focused on cases that involved domestic abuse. As a result of the audit, work was completed with relevant services to reduce waiting lists for domestic abuse support. The other area of focus following the audit was on mental health support and drug and alcohol support, work was completed with the relevant agencies to ensure their programmes were effective in reducing the risk that children faced, as a result of the above.

- There was a monthly performance meeting within CYPS, where the service looked at where they were in comparison to other local authorities and national measures. At the most recent performance meeting, every measure was within the tolerance range for high performing authorities.
- In relation to children on child protection plans (CPP), it was felt that it was quite invasive for a child to stay on a plan for a long time, therefore the service aimed to work with families to reduce the risk where possible and step down. The number of children on CPP for a second or subsequent time had been an area of focus for several years, the service had completed a lot of work to identify whether the current interventions were correct.
- In relation to the Good Level of Development (GLD) figure which was 3.3% lower than the national average, the primary and secondary heads met regularly with education colleagues. The service was also in the process of establishing a Partnership Board which would focus on driving improvements relating to educational attainment. The Family Hubs work encouraged families to take up early education placements, this was contributing to improving the GLD figure. Early Years had worked hard to ensure all early education settings were trained in delivering basic speech and language support for children.
- There was a previous drive for “Rotherham Loves Reading”, this had continued over recent years. There had recently been grant funding available for reading libraries at primary schools, an

example was provided of Badsley Primary School, who had received 500 brand new books as a result of the grant funding.

- The Elective Home Education Team had worked with parents and carers, to prevent 214 children and young people being removed from a school roll in the past year. The service could only work within legislation and statutory rights and had no right to enter the homes of electively home educated children without consent. Although the numbers of children electively home educated were rising, the figures were in line with statistical neighbours and national figures. The team was recruiting more visiting officers, who would be in place by September 2025.
- In relation to sibling groups, in instances where siblings were required to be separated, the service worked hard to ensure their relationship and bonds continued. Siblings were separated as a last resort, if there was no suitable fostering arrangement available. In these instances, the service completed a Together and Apart Assessment, which would identify the impact of separating the siblings, support would then be put in place to mitigate the potential impacts.
- Members were concerned about the lack of statutory right's that the local authority had to visit electively home educated children without parental or carer consent. This had been a national issue, and local authorities had lobbied government for some time to address this concern. The upcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill if approved, would include a national register for electively home educated children, which would allow the service to track children who were electively home educated. It would also potentially provide increased powers to assess the suitability of home education and restrictions for children in care who were known to be vulnerable to be home educated.
- Members were advised that if they were witnessing school aged children who were not at school and were involved in anti-social

behaviour during the school day, they should report this to MASH. Any concerns identified by elected members similar to the above should be reported to the MASH Team.

- The service would attend the Commission again in the future, to provide a further update once the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was approved. The future update would provide members with a summary of the Bill and what the Bill would mean for children and young people in Rotherham.
- There was a robust system in place for elective home education in Rotherham, given the confines of which the local authority had to work in. The Team had a positive relationship with the majority of home educators and visits were consented too by the majority of families who electively home educated. In situations where families did not consent to visits, annual contact was made as a minimum to receive assurance that the children were receiving an adequate and suitable education. Enforcement action would be pursued in any situation where this was required. The team also worked closely with multi-agency partners where there were any concerns. Contact details for the support first offer within the team would be provided to elected members, to share amongst residents if required.
- In relation to the 36.1 % of contacts coming through the front door identified as Family Help, this required consent. In these instances, the service worked with families to encourage them to engage, if the family choose not to engage, the service would identify work for the school to lead on, or other agencies. In rare instances where the service had concerns that required escalation, statutory processes would be initiated through Social Care involvement.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Considered the CYPS Annual Performance Report and

accompanying scorecard for the outturn 2024/2025.

- 2) Requests that a summary of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill be provided for all children and particularly for children in Rotherham.
- 3) Requests that a breakdown of figures be provided on engagement with Family Help.
- 4) Requests that further information be provided on Suspension and Exclusion rates.
- 5) Requests that further information be provided on the upheld figures for Education and Health Care Plans.

15. DRAFT ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION POLICY

This item included an update on the draft Rotherham Elective Home Education Policy, which was presented to the Commission for pre-decision scrutiny, ahead of it being presented to Cabinet for consideration.

The Chair invited to the meeting Sarah Whitby, Head of Access to Education and Rebecca Braithwaite, Senior Officer in Access to Education.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for CYPS to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:

- The Elective Home Education (EHE) Policy was last updated in 2021.
- Although there were some changes proposed nationally via the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the service felt that the policy review should still go ahead, as only minor changes were expected if the bill was approved at a later date.
- The review of the EHE Policy provided the service with a good opportunity to engage positively with home educators across the borough, and to update and refresh the policy in advance of any potential national change. The service aimed to ensure the new policy would be easily understandable and would dispel myths relating to the proposed bill.
- The consultation on the EHE Policy had provided positive feedback and the proposed draft policy was being presented to scrutiny for

pre-decision work, in advance of it being presented to Cabinet for a decision.

- In relation to key changes, information within the policy had been simplified, the responsibility of all partners involved in the process, and an explanation of those responsibilities had been set out clearly in the policy. The action the service would take if they believed that a child wasn't receiving a suitable education was also set out clearly in the policy. Information on flexi-schooling had been added into the policy, this was a legal arrangement where a child would be registered at a school and would attend part time, with the rest of their education provided at home.

The Chair invited the Head of Access to Education to give the presentation, during which the following was noted:

- The agenda pack included a written report, the full consultation response summary, a copy of the proposed policy being presented at the meeting and a copy of the presentation.

The need for a policy-

- The EHE Departmental Guidance was issued in 2019, this was non-statutory guidance for local authorities.
- The Department for Education recommended that every Local Authority had 'a written policy statement on elective home education, which is clear, transparent and easily accessible by using different formats as necessary, is consistent with the current legal framework and preferably drawn up in consultation with local families who educate children at home so that it can reflect both the challenges and rewards of educating children in this way'.

Rotherham's Policy-

- The policy was last updated in 2021 and was found to be unnecessarily wordy and was often difficult for parents to navigate.
- Although the new Children and School's Wellbeing Bill proposed some changes for Elective Home Education Policies, it was felt that the policy review presented a good opportunity to collaborate with home educators. Any changes brought about by the Bill could be assimilated into the policy at a further date and were not predicted to fundamentally change the Rotherham approach.
- The service felt that parts of the policy were unnecessarily wordy

and potentially difficult for parents, carers, children and young people to navigate.

What had been done-

- Informal engagement had been held with home educators, all were invited to attend sessions at Riverside Cafe on 21 and 27 January 2025, both events were held at different times of the day to maximise attendance, three attendees were present at the two sessions. Home educators were also asked to provide their views in alternative ways, if they did not wish to attend an in-person event, as a result five additional emails were received by people unable to attend the sessions. Views were also sought via home visits and contacts.
- A stakeholder event was also held with key partners on the 27 January 2025, seven partner agencies attended the session and this included health colleagues and the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum (RPCF). RPCF provided the views of 49 parents to the session who had responded to a survey they issued.
- An engagement session took place with the Improving Lives Select Commission on the 28 February 2025.
- Formal consultation took place via the Council's webpage between the 16 April and 17 June 2025. The consultation was available on the council's website and was promoted via neighbourhood bulletins, directly with home education groups across local schools and through the RPCF. 11 responses were received from the online consultation.

Feedback-

- The majority of responses to the consultation events were positive and were in agreement with the proposals put forward.
- Where there was disagreement, some of this was in relation to duties sitting outside of the statutory role of the local authority, for example the funding of examinations.
- Examples of feedback were as follows:
 - "Rotherham seems to have a good balance & way of working with Home Ed families. Keep up the good work!"
 - "I think it's vitally important that the EHE team remain approachable and working with Home Educators rather than

against them”.

- “More could be done to support EHE as a positive choice. For example, supporting EHEs with exam provision arrangements or holding events at transition points - accessing higher education or apprenticeships for example”.
- “Frequent visits, communication and stronger guidelines for parents and care givers”.
- “I prefer to keep my correspondence in writing and have had nothing but polite, professional and respectful communication”.
- “My experience of the EHE team & policy has been very positive”.
- “The EHE policy still appears weighted towards EHE being a negative choice which is viewed with suspicion...More needs to be done to demonstrate EHE in a positive light”.

Next Steps-

- The policy was on the forward plan for Cabinet consideration in October 2025.
- Any changes mandated by changes to the national framework would be assimilated into the policy by way of further update.
- The revised policy would be launched with schools and other stakeholders in November 2025, subject to agreement. The policy if approved, would be promoted via the Communications Team and the School Attendance Matters Pathway Forum, which was a forum that all schools within the borough were invited to, and it was attended by key stakeholders. This combined would provide a good opportunity to present those changes that were made and to launch the new policy, if agreed by Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and opened up to questions, during which the following was discussed:

- In relation to flexi-schooling, the child would remain on a school role, therefore by remaining on the school role the school would remain responsible for public examinations and formal testing, in the same way as they would be for a child attending their school full-time. Schools were not legally required to agree to flexi-

schooling, however the EHE Team provided schools with a balance of information relating to the potential consequences and implications of flexi-schooling.

- It was felt that the information on flexi schooling within the policy was too short and further detail could be provided within the draft policy. The service would consider the option of providing an additional document containing information on flexi-schooling, which could sit alongside the EHE Policy.
- The service was aware that in terms of home education, there may be several parents and carers who were wary to talk directly with the team. As a result, informal feedback was sought during visits. The views members shared on the Communications Strategy for the consultation period would be considered for any future consultations.
- The aim of the draft revised policy was to present a balanced and factual view of home education, this included the local authority not encouraging or discouraging elective home education. Where parents and carers chose to home educate, the service would ensure that the right support would be provided to them. The strength of the team's work was the prevention work completed with parents and carers who were considering home educating. The local authority's duty to parents, carers, children and young people was to provide information, support and challenge where required, to ensure the best outcomes for all children and young people across the borough.
- Drop-in sessions across the borough were being considered by the service, as a result of the consultation feedback received.
- It was the choice and right of parents and carers to decide whether to home educate. In situations where elective home education was a positive choice and a suitable education was provided, the local authority would not seek to prevent parents from home educating. The local authority would not support situations where a child was removed from a school role and would not be provided with a suitable level of education, every child was entitled to a suitable education and that was their right.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- 1) Considered the contents of the report and the draft Elective Home Education Policy and endorsed the proposed revised Elective

Home Education Policy to go forward for Cabinet approval.

- 2) Requests that a written responses is provided to any additional questions submitted by members via email following the meeting.
- 3) Requests that consideration be given to Flexi Schooling and how it would sit alongside the Elective Home Education Policy.
- 4) Requests that a future update is provided to the Commission on an annual basis, or at an earlier point if there are any significant material changes, such as the outcome of the upcoming bill.

16. WORK PROGRAMME

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

- The Work Programme was attached for members consideration.
- Following the work programming meeting with the Commission, all agreed items were added to the attached work programme. There were some items left to schedule, due to awaiting date confirmation from the service.
- The Chair reminded members to provide any suggestions for potential topics via email to the Chair and Governance Advisor.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme for 2025/2026 be approved.

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

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity which included the following:

- A training session had been arranged with the Family Works Charity. The session would be bespoke and would be held on the 4th August at the Town Hall. The session would be in person only due to the nature of the training. An invite had been issued to all members and members were asked to respond.
- The Chair encouraged members to attend the training session, which had been specifically designed to assist with the potential up-coming review relating to trauma and children missing education. Therefore, it was important that any members who would like to be part of the review, attend the session.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

18. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.