

Improving Lives Select Commission - Children and Young People's
Partnership Board
28th April, 2026

**Improving Lives Select Commission – Pre-Decision Scrutiny
Children and Young People's Strategy – Discussion at the Children and Young
People's Partnership Board**

Members Present:- Councillors Brent, Clarke and Sutton and Mr. J. Newman. Members were accompanied by Debbie Pons, Clerk to Improving Lives.

An apology was received from Mr. M. Hemmingway.

A warm welcome was offered to all present and introductions were made.

A copy of the draft Strategy was circulated and Members alongside the Children and Young People's Partnership Board were given the opportunity to read the content.

Angel one of the young people gave a brief overview of the strategy and highlighted:-

- What young people would like to see in the Strategy and how it should appear.
- What young people wanted in Rotherham.
- Statistics with highlighted issues that impacted on young people.
- What was important to children and young people in and around Rotherham.
- Safer Rotherham Partnership Strategy survey.
- Why Rotherham was a great place to grow up.
- Council communication and feedback.
- Suggestions of what young people like and places that they all visit.
- Rotherham as a family friendly borough survey and the results of what young people thought were important and what young people like doing.
- Survey suggestions for improvement and the top three answers.
- Suggested aims, action and how this may be achieved.
- Making a difference and how this can be demonstrated to young people.

Questions:-

Councillor Sutton welcomed the presentation and appreciated both the content and the way it had been presented. She asked about the letters sent to schools regarding locked toilets, querying whether any responses had been received and whether this could be reflected in the report, including whether responses had been positive.

Angel responded that some schools had provided valid reasons for locking toilets, although not all schools had given explanations.

Councillor Sutton highlighted the positive statistic from a school governor perspective, noting that 64.5% of children under five were at a good level of development. She asked what support was in place for the remaining 35.5% and whether they were being followed up or signposted. **She suggested that little more detail to some of the statistics to make them more meaningful for impact.**

Helen Sweaton added that children were supported at the time, with developing work alongside Public Health through the Best Start Plan to help children do better and achieve more. **She confirmed that this could be included in the report as a recommendation.**

Councillor Clarke praised the layout and clarity of the presentation and **asked for further detail on the statistic showing that under 40% of young people reported bullying, querying whether this referred to bullying in person, online, in school or outside school.** She also highlighted concern about the 17.3% of young people skipping breakfast, asking whether this related more to time, affordability, or access to breakfast clubs. She congratulated the team on the overall quality of the work.

Angel explained that breakfast issues were mainly linked to school provision. With a Free School Meals allowance limit of 80p, children often could not afford a full breakfast and sometimes received only a drink or a small portion of food. In some cases, children chose not to eat.

Helen Sweaton clarified that the statistics came not only from young people directly but also from the Lifestyle Survey. She noted that there was no formal verification of the data and acknowledged that this raised important questions about how issues were being addressed. **She suggested that this could be added to the forward plan and for young people to continue supporting and challenging officers across organisations through the Rotherham Together Plan, including further work on breakfast provision.**

James Newman made reference to the lack of access to breakfast or toilet facilities raised significant safeguarding and wellbeing concerns and felt this was an important issue.

Niall Devlin explained that he and colleagues from Public Health had engaged extensively with schools on toilet access, including involving young people and school nurses to explain the importance. Meetings with Head Teachers confirmed toilet access was ultimately a school-led decision and there were some schools still that remained resistant to keeping toilets open.

Nicola Curley noted that responses came from young people completing the survey and that there was no firm data to confirm whether breakfast issues were related to school or home.

Councillor Cusworth raised lunchtime congestion and highlighted that short lunch breaks resulted in queuing for both food and toilets. She advised that both herself and Facilities Management would be presenting this feedback to secondary Head Teachers in June and that work was ongoing to influence better arrangements, such as alternative food provision.

Councillor Brent referred to page 11, section 6, noting the information was useful but asking for clearer narrative context around the figure of 159 to strengthen the report.

Helen Sweaton explained that during the Rotherham Show, 259 people responded, and 36% of those 259 said they wanted more fun things to do. She agreed the wording could be improved for clarity.

It was noted by one of the young person that the percentages on the graph exceeded 100%.

Helen Sweaton explained that respondents were allowed to select more than one answer. JS Note may be add a line in about this.

James Newman commended the presentation and asked whether threats experienced by young people were physical, online or both.

Angel shared concerns that young people reported feeling intimidated in public spaces, with people approaching them for money, which affected their sense of safety.

Helen Sweaton advised that the Community Safety Team had attended meetings and work was underway to improve street lighting and bus station safety. She acknowledged that while cycling was being encouraged, young people did not always feel safe. **She committed to providing feedback at a later meeting, noting that this information had come directly from young people. JS note – SRP**

A young person queried whether free-text answers had been included in the statistics.

Helen Sweaton confirmed she would check this.

Another young person elaborated that “more things to do” meant accessible social spaces, people to talk to, youth groups and activities beyond traditional youth clubs.

Helen Sweaton confirmed this feedback had been shared with officers and had influenced decision-making.

Kelly White explained that youth provision had shifted away from building-based clubs towards outreach models, with many activities available. She acknowledged that better communication was needed and referenced a website listing activities, inviting ideas on how to improve awareness suggesting that information be shared widely and in perhaps a more accessible way.

A young person suggested organised days out and group activities as a way to connect people, rather than traditional youth clubs.

Helen Sweaton said she would explore whether the council could support this through new mobile provision.

Kelly White explained that older outreach vehicles were outdated but funding had now been secured for new vehicles. These would support community-based engagement, including work on healthy relationships and vaping. She noted that some day trips were already taking place to such as to Gulliver’s and Crowden, but awareness remained an issue and needed to be improved.

Helen Sweaton highlighted work to better link groups, curricula, and resources across the year, alongside efforts to secure more funding for youth sessions borough-wide.

A young person also asked if some of the images used by the communications team were stock images and Helen Sweaton confirmed the images had been taken by the communications team throughout the year.

Members suggested extending the strategy to include schools, education pathways, apprenticeships and universities.

Councillor Brent in addressing the strategy as a whole suggested there be an expansion on the detail within the initial narrative.

A spelling error for Gulliver’s was also noted on the strategy document which would be corrected.

A young person asked for social media and online safety to be included with the strategy as this was an important issue.

Helen Sweaton proposed a vote and by majority it was **agreed to include content on social media and online safety, acknowledging further work was required without delaying the strategy being**

presented to Cabinet. It was noted that Cabinet consideration was expected at the earliest in July, or potentially September, following a further revised version of the strategy.

Members volunteered several suggestions on how the strategy may be improved before it was presented to Cabinet for approval. The suggestions included adding a little more detail to some of the statistics to make them more meaningful for impact, were in agreement with the identification of where support was available for young people and expansion of some information in the narrative.

Members hoped their contributions would be given consideration for potential incorporation into the Strategy.

The session for Members ceased at 17.50 p.m.