

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

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| 1. | Meeting: | Self Regulation Select Committee |
| 2. | Date: | 8th December 2011 |
| 3. | Title: | Children’s Peer Challenge October 2011 |
| 4. | Directorate: | Resources Directorate and Children and Young People’s Services |

5. Summary

Children and Young People’s Services underwent a Peer Challenge facilitated by Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) from the 3rd to 7th October, 2011. The key focus of the challenge was safeguarding, an additional focus of looked after children was added as one of the peers had experience in other local authorities of working with looked after children. 4 additional discretionary themes were included at Rotherham’s request to provide an independent view on progress around these particular areas.

The week concluded with a feedback and prioritisation conference on Friday, 7th October where the Peer Challenge Team summarised their findings, identified what they perceived as strengths and areas for consideration.

The actions and recommendations arising from the Peer Challenge are being fed into the existing Improvement Panel action plan that continues to be monitored following removal of the intervention notice in January 2011.

6. Recommendations

- (i) **That Self Regulation Select Committee accept this report.**
- (ii) **That Self Regulation Select Committee accepts that the actions are included in the monitoring arrangements of the Improvement Panel.**

7. Proposals and Details

The Safeguarding Children Peer Challenge was facilitated by the Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID), this was a supportive but challenging approach which should assist Rotherham MBC and its partners in celebrating strengths and identifying jointly areas for improvement. These challenges are now forming very much part of the Coalition Government's thoughts on sector led improvement.

The peer team included Peter Rentell (LGID, Challenge Manager), Helen Jenner (DCS Barking and Dagenham), Lorna Scarlett (self employed consultant) , Judith Blake (Deputy Leader, Leeds CC), Ghislaine Miller (self employed consultant), Sarah Baker (Health Associate), Hilary Hall (Herefordshire Council) and Paul Clarke (LGID)

The challenge included a large amount pre on-site activity including:

- Reading list – documents including LSCB business plan, Children and Young People's Plan, OFSTED Performance Profile, child protection procedures etc. These were supplemented during with week with requests for many other documents.
- Key Lines of Enquiry document based on the 4 additional themes to show context and point to specific evidence in the reading list/
- Data sheet which included key safeguarding and child protection statistics
- Case mapping group exercise – a small group of partners from the RSCB conducted a case file mapping exercise and produced an in-depth report around multi-agency case audits of 4 cases.
- Results from a safeguarding survey of partners – a wide range of partners (64 in total) completed a self-evaluation questionnaire around safeguarding

During the week around 68 interviews, focus groups and visits took place with the Peer Team meeting more than 86 officers and members from across the council and its partners.

The feedback from the Peer Team at the prioritisation conference on Friday 7th October covered the following:

7.1 Summary of overall Strengths

- A positive journey of improvement was acknowledged
- Strong political and managerial leadership was evident
- There is a commitment to safeguard Rotherham's children
- There is a strong focus on developing user engagement
- Evidence of partnership and joint working
- Good Learning and Development Practice

References to Scrutiny arrangements were made in relation to joint meetings being held with the Youth Council and the specific work around bullying and also

that the re-organisation of cabinet portfolios and scrutiny arrangements has resulted in a stronger emphasis on cross-cutting themes.

7.2 Summary of Areas for overall Consideration

- Clarity of roles, responsibilities, relationships and leadership around strategic boards eg Children's Trust Board, Health and Well Board, Local Strategic Partnership, Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Board and the Rotherham School Improvement Partnership Board.
- More detailed outcome focused service improvement planning is required taking into account data and information and the use of it by managers
- Increased pace in key strategies, delivery and quality assurance around:
 - The rigour and detail of social care practice
 - The fostering service
 - Quality of audit and the action arising from it.
- Communication with staff at all levels from across the partnership to be improved
- Clarification of Children's Trust commissioning approach and strategy

7.3 In relation to Looked After Children

- This is an improving service with several strong performance indicators
- Looked after children are routinely visited by social workers
- There is a high quality of provision for care leavers

However, further consideration needs to be given to:

- Health Assessments (with health partners) for looked after children
- Reducing the number of multiple placement moves
- The Multi Agency Support Panel must ensure clearer outcomes for children

In relation to the 4 additional themes:

7.4 The effectiveness of the delivery and commissioning of early intervention services and the use of CAF and effectiveness of thresholds.

- The refresh of the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy has unfortunately delayed pace in this area despite strong support for the agenda

- 7.5 How the council and its partners can learn from and improve the service user experience
- There is evidence of significant progress in this area which is becoming a strength
- 7.6 Review the effectiveness of the multi-agency support panel in relation to Out of Authority Placements and value for money.
- The Panel has delivered financial savings, it could be developed further to support children's outcomes
- 7.7 An independent perspective on the approach to improving Key Stage 2 results.
- The more robust approach is welcomed by schools, specific actions need to be taken now with clear targets and performance management

7.8 With specific reference to scrutiny the following was identified in the letter

“Scrutiny process could be better used in order to be more effective and the peer team believe that the scrutiny role needs further clarification. There needs to be recognition of the individual contribution it can make in holding Partnership Boards to account, policy development and making a real difference to outcomes for vulnerable young people. There is a lot of work in progress currently and priorities may need to change. Effective scrutiny could be a useful tool to use to address this.”

- 7.9 The workshop session in the afternoon involved attendees prioritising the findings in relation to their organisation and role, the following were felt to be the key areas:
- Strategic Governance
 - Prevention and Early Intervention and the use of the Common Assessment Framework
 - Aspirations of staff for children and young people in Rotherham
 - Communication and engagement with staff
 - Performance and Data analysis and the understanding of this by the services
 - Accountability for our looked after children
 - Commissioning for outcomes
 - Quality Assurance and Audit
 - Rotherham School Improvement Partnership
 - Constant drive for value for money with regarding to cost and quality of interventions.

These will have action plans developed and fed into the overarching Improvement Panel action plan, monitored regularly by the Improvement Panel.

8. Finance

The LGID now carry out the peer challenges free of charge, there was however some costs associated with ICT set up costs, refreshments and room bookings for the reviewers during the on site week. It is anticipated that the total cost of this has been in the region of £2000.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The completed report will be shared with partners involved in the challenge as well as the Department for Education, but will not feed into any formal OFSTED Children's Services Assessments ratings, however it could be shared as evidence with OFSTED to demonstrate our continued direction of travel.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Although not a mandatory requirement in the letter from Tim Loughton MP in January 2011, there was an expectation that Rotherham take part in a peer challenge and that results are forwarded onto the DfE for their information. We will share the report with our Ofsted Link inspector, Bernard Campbell, and also the Children's Service Assessment Link, Pauline Allinson.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- LGID Peer Challenge Guidance
- Previous reports to SLT, Improving Lives Select Committee
- Peer Challenge Letter

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