

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Wednesday, 24th April, 2013

Present:- Councillor G. A. Russell (in the Chair); Councillors Ali, Astbury, Buckley, Burton, Clark, Kaye, Lelliott, Pitchley, Read, Roche, Sharman and co-opted members J. Jones and A. Clough.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ahmed, Dodson, Donaldson and License and from co-opted member M. Smith.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no Declarations of Interest to record.

58. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS.

There were no members of the public or the press in attendance.

59. COMMUNICATIONS.

The Senior Scrutiny Adviser informed the Improving Lives Select Commission of members' training sessions that had been scheduled: -

- Local Government Finance;
- Public Sector Equality Session;
- Corporate Parenting.

60. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 13TH MARCH, 2013.

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 13th March, 2013, were considered.

Resolved: - That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as an accurate record for signature by the Chairperson.

61. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY.

Councillor G. A. Russell introduced the Head of the School Effectiveness Service (Schools and Lifelong Learning, Children and Young People's Services) who had attended to present Rotherham's recently revised School Improvement Strategy.

The Head of the School Effectiveness Service provided a brief background to this work, and included information on local and national funding streams, national policy context and the local drivers and input from Rotherham's schools.

The Government's aim was to 'support the school system to become more effectively self-improving', and intended to charge the school system with responsibility for their own self-improvement. As schools and school leaders took on increasing responsibility for school improvement there was a need to ensure suitable safeguards and a support infrastructure so that all children and young people could fulfil their potential.

An on-going partnership had been established between Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Rotherham School Improvement Partnership in April, 2011. In September, 2012, this partnership became the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd., set up as a school company by Wickersley School and Sports College in partnership with the Council. This organisation was the legally constituted successor to the Rotherham School Improvement Partnership. Further information in relation to the partnership included: -

- The Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd. was a not-for-profit company;
- The Council, through the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services acted as the supervising authority for the company;
- The Council's School Effectiveness Service was working in partnership with the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd.;
- The Rotherham Schools' Forum had agreed Delegated Schools Grant funding on 5th October, 2012 to support the development and delivery of a school-led school improvement model in the 2011/12 financial year, and up to and including 2014/15;
- All partners were undertaking benchmarking with other local authorities and school improvement partnership models.

Discussion ensued on the information provided and issues raised and discussed included: -

- Scrutiny of the performance of the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd.;
- Previous good progress seen in the past 5/6 years had been built upon in this model;
- Choice of other local authorities for the benchmarking and the factors that had led to the choice;
- How would relationships be managed within the new model and ensure that potential issues were managed?;
- What were the statutory and non-statutory activities of the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd.?
- The operation of a buy-back model for the school improvement services provided by the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd.;
- Was the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd. engaged with all of Rotherham's schools, including its academies?;
- Was the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd. engaging and working with Governors and school governing bodies?;

- The aspiration of achieving 'Outstanding', and what could be done to maintain and improve?.

The Chair of this Select Commission thanked the Head of the School Effectiveness Service for her contribution to the meeting and the discussion that had followed.

Resolved: - (1) That the information shared be noted.

(2) That the scrutiny of the progress and outcomes of the Learners First Schools' Partnership Ltd. be incorporated onto the Improving Lives Select Commission's work programme.

62. FAMILIES INFORMATION SERVICE (FIS) / EARLY EDUCATION FOR TWO-YEAR OLDS / LAUNCH OF NEW FIS WEBSITE.

Councillor G. A. Russell welcomed the Childcare Sustainability Officer (Early Years and Childcare, School Effectiveness Service, Schools and Lifelong Learning, Children and Young People's Services). The Childcare Sustainability Officer had been invited to the meeting to provide the Select Commission with an update on the entitlement for early education for the most deprived two-year old children and the launch of a new website that provided information from the Families Information Service.

On 1st September, 2013, it was noted that the early education offer would become a statutory entitlement for eligible two-year old children. There would be approximately 900 children who would be eligible. There were documented benefits for children accessing early education, and particularly for those who lived in disadvantaged areas.

In preparation for the commencement of the statutory entitlement the Early Years and Childcare Service were: -

- The early education entitlement would be extended from September, 2014, to approximately 40% of two-year old children. This would equate to approximately 1,700 children;
- Eligibility criteria for September, 2013, related to the benefits used to calculate access to Free School Meals and two year olds who were Looked After Children;
- Department for Education proposals for children eligible from September, 2014, included households that were in receipt of Working Tax Credits and with an annual income of less than £16,190; children with a statement of special educational needs; households that attracted Disability Living Allowance; or children who had left care through an Adoption Order, Residence Order and Special Guardianship;
- Awareness raising of the new statutory entitlement was being undertaken by the Early Years and Childcare Service and all partners, including Children's Centres, Health Visitors, Social Workers and childcare providers;

- The Family Information Service was able to undertake an eligibility test for families and provide details of local providers who were offering free early education places;
- Childcare sufficiency analysis had been undertaken by the Early Years Service to determine whether there were sufficient places available to meet the statutory entitlement in September 2013 and 2014. This analysis had uncovered some lack of capacity, but funding had been allocated to provide additional places.

The submitted report also outlined the duties place on the Local Authority by the Childcare Act. 2006, to maintain a service that provided information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents on childcare, early education, activities, services and facilities available for 0 – 19 year olds and their family members. It was noted that Rotherham's Family Information Service (FIS) met this duty through the provision of a freephone telephone helpline, email and website. Consultation with service users and stakeholders had highlighted issues with the website, and a revised website had been launched with improved search criteria and a user-friendly interface.

A demonstration of the website (www.rotherhamfis.co.uk) was provided and included a demonstration of the website's search capacity.

- 1,500 local services and activities were represented on the website;
- Regular data refreshes were undertaken on the website and records were removed if there had been no contact with the providers to ensure that all information was up to date;
- The website offered the location, maps, details and opening hours of the services provided;
- There were details of activities and providers for all needs and thresholds, from universal activities to acute.

The literature that had been produced by the FIS to advertise the Service was shared with the Improving Lives Select Commission.

Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission provided the following thoughts on the information that they had been provided with: -

- Positive feedback was provided in relation to the website demonstration;
- The presentation would be useful for local MPs and their staff to be aware of.

Resolved: - (1) That the report and the information shared be noted.

(2) That members of the Improving Lives Select Commission use and promote the site to residents and highlight any services/providers that are not represented.

(3) That the information be shared with local MPs and their offices.

63. PRESENTATION: SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES.

Councillor G. A. Russell welcomed the Senior Scrutiny Adviser and the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator (Health and Wellbeing, Neighbourhood and Adult Services).

The Senior Scrutiny Adviser provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken as part of the scrutiny review into domestic abuse services.

The parameters of the review were: -

- What does a 'good' service look like (drawing on national guidance and best practice elsewhere);
- How well do partners work together at a strategic level;
- How well do groups work together operationally;
- How well do we listen to the voice of the victim and their families.

Case studies of service users would be scrutinised to understand how existing approaches were used to protect victims of abuse and recommend where potential service gaps, duplications, opportunities to work more effectively and efficiently respond to future changes could be accessed.

It was noted that Central Government's Action Plan that had been drawn up to address violence against women and girls (VAWG) would also form part of the scrutiny review.

The Domestic Violence Co-ordinator gave a presentation that outlined national context and local issues, including local definitions of domestic abuse, profiles of domestic abuse victims and offenders and domestic abuse services in Rotherham.

Following this presentation, discussion ensued on the matters arising: -

- Which things were going well and not so well in Rotherham?;
- Impact of the whole range of Welfare Reforms and how these were impacting on domestic abuse;
- Lack of available crash pads;
- Support for the children of families that were fleeing from domestic abuse;
- Incidence rates and whether these reflected all incidents of domestic violence;
- Additional training had been developed to help frontline practitioners respond to incidences of financial abuse.

Resolved: - (1) That the information within the report and presentation be received and its content noted.

(2) That any comments arising from the report and presentation be forwarded to the review group for consideration in the scope of the review.

64. WORK PROGRAMME: 2012/13 UPDATE AND THE YEAR AHEAD, 2013/14.

The Senior Scrutiny Adviser presented a report that outlined the progress against the Scrutiny Work programme for the Improving Lives Select Commission for 2012/13 and requested suggestions for the 2013/14 work programme.

The report noted the position of the Improving Lives Select Commission in terms of the 2012/13 work programme and noted that there were two reviews currently underway from this programme. These were the scrutiny reviews into student-led mentoring schemes to support anti-bullying work in schools, and domestic abuse services. It was anticipated that the work would be completed early in the new municipal year.

Areas already identified for consideration in the 2013/14 work programme and shown at section 7.4 were: -

- Child Sexual Exploitation;
- Update on Families for Change and Disadvantaged Areas agendas;
- Support for improving outcomes at Key Stage 2;
- Outcomes and impact of the Lifestyle Survey – six-month progress review;
- Outcomes for Looked After Children (based on the 10 questions to ask...);
- Annual report of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board;
- Role of alcohol and drug misuse in child protection and safeguarding processes.

Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission also suggested further items for inclusion to the work programme: -

- Early Years – entitlement to early education;
- Child poverty;
- Welfare reform policies;
- Food banks;
- City deal – jobs and apprenticeships for young people.

Resolved: - (1) That the report be received and its content noted.

(2) That the pre-identified issues shown at 7.4 of the submitted report be placed on the Improving Lives Select Commission's work programme for 2013/14.

(3) That the areas identified at the meeting be placed on the Improving Lives Select Commission's work programme for 2013/14.

65. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING: -

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Wednesday 12th June, 2013, to start at 1.30 p.m. in the Rotherham Town Hall.