

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Improving Lives Select Commission
2.	Date:	12 March, 2014
3.	Title:	Scrutiny of outcomes for looked after children
4.	Directorate:	Resources All wards

5. Summary

As part of its work programme, the Improving Lives Select Commission agreed to examine how RMBC is improving outcomes for looked after children (LAC).

As part of its consideration of LAC services, the Corporate Parenting Panel asked Improving Lives Select Committee to scrutinise the draft **Rotherham Looked After Children Strategy** and the draft **Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children**.

6. Recommendations

That Members:

- a. **Receive the reports and comment on their content;**
- b. **Forward any comments arising from the reports to the Cabinet Member for consideration;**
- c. **Determine if there are any additional issues arising from these papers for further consideration by the Select Commission.**

7. Proposals and details

7.1 Children in the care of a local authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society; the majority coming into care because they have suffered abuse or neglect. At any one time approximately 60,000 children are looked after in England, although some 91,000 pass through the care system each year (NSPCC, online 2014).

Evidence shows that looked after children will have lower educational attainment than their non-looked after peers. They are much less likely than other young people to progress into further and higher education, employment or training (Barnardo's, online 2014). They are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health outcomes (Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum, 2012). Looked after children and care leavers are also over-represented in the criminal justice system (House of Commons, Justice Select Committee, 2013).

7.2 All councillors have a role of 'corporate parent' to children looked after by their local authority. This involves taking an interest in the wellbeing and development of those children, as if they were their own children. Although the lead member for children's services has particular responsibilities, the responsibility to act as corporate parents is held by all councillors, regardless of their role on the council.

These roles were first outlined by the then Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson MP in 1998:

"Elected Councillors have a crucial role. Only you can carry it out. You can make sure that the interests of the children come first. You bring a fresh look and common sense. As councillors you set the strategic direction of your council's services and determine policy and priorities for your local community within the overall objectives set by Government."

7.3 One of the roles of overview and scrutiny members is to ask questions of a range of service providers and assure themselves that children in the care of the local authority are being well looked after.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has issued a guide "10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children?". The questions cover a range of issues which should establish whether the services provided by the local authority and its partners are leading to positive outcomes for children and young people in care.

- How well does your authority do in providing (or commissioning) services for looked after children, including in comparison with other similar authorities?
- How well do your children in care do at school, both academically and in terms of other kinds of achievements?
- How good is the health and wellbeing of children in your care?
- How stable and secure are the lives of your looked after children while they are in your care?
- How well does your authority do at finding appropriate adoptive families for children for whom it is decided this is the right option?
- How well do your foster care arrangements work?

- How good is the standard of any residential care provided or used by your authority?
- What support does your authority provide to young people leaving care and how effective is it?
- How effective is your professional workforce of social workers and others responsible for running services for and working with looked after children?
- What more could be done to fulfil the council's responsibilities as a 'corporate parent'?

7.4 There are two reports for consideration by the Improving Lives Select Commission; the **Rotherham Looked After Children Strategy** and the **Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children**. Accompanying these papers is a recent performance report.

7.4.1 The **Rotherham Looked After Children Strategy** (attached as Appendix 1), sets out "improved outcomes for all our children and young people in care and what needs to be done by all those involved in the development and delivery of services to looked after children." It has five priority objectives:

- 1) To improve the degree and timeliness of placement stability and permanence and ensure children are able to enjoy continuity of relationships.
- 2) To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children.
- 3) To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between attainment of looked after children and their non-looked after peers.
- 4) To improve the support for and opportunities open to care leavers sufficiently to increase the number and proportion of them who are in employment, education or training (EET)
- 5) To listen to children and young people so as to ensure that their views influence their own plans, as well as wider service delivery and development.

7.4.2 The strategy is work in progress rather than a completed document. Under each priority objective, there are a number of questions.

- Where do we want to be?
 - What is the vision for the service and for looked after children, and what are the priorities for the service.
- Where are we now?
 - how well we are performing to improve children's outcomes in all the key areas.
- How will we get from where we are now to where we want to be?
 - What strategies and action programmes do we need to initiate in order to improve services and outcomes?
- How will we know we are there?

- Are there clear goals and targets at the outset so that we can measure our progress?

Members are asked for their comments on the draft strategy and priorities and to establish how performance will be measured against each objective.

- 7.4.3 The **Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children** (attached as Appendix 2A and 2B) outlines the statutory requirement for local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation for looked after children in their local authority area.

Improving Lives Select Commission has been asked to comment on the draft strategy.

- 7.4.4 As background, the most recent performance information available is attached as Appendix 3. The information provides information to enable you to analyse trends and assess how well RMBC is doing. Questions can also be asked to examine how RMBC compares with other similar areas.

8. Finance

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Authority's Corporate Parenting arrangements must contribute to improved and sustainable outcomes for looked after children and their families. Councillors involved in scrutiny of LAC services should be satisfied that the services are meeting these requirements.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Ofsted Inspection Framework 2013

RMBC Corporate Plan (2013-16)

- Protecting our most vulnerable people and families, enabling them to maximise their independence
 - we will protect children and young people, vulnerable people and families from all forms of abuse, violence and neglect
 - we will identify need and support children, young people and their families at the earliest possible stage

11. Background Papers and Consultation

10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children - Centre for Public Scrutiny (2012) http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/-/journal_content/56/10180/3611618/PUBLICATION

NSPCC (2014)

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/looked_after_children_home_wda79690.html

Barnardo's (2014)

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/advertising_campaigns/campaigns_children_in_care.htm

Report of the Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum – Mental Health Sub-Group (2012)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216853/CYP-Mental-Health.pdf

House of Commons Justice Committee: Youth Justice (2013)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmjust/339/339.pdf>

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