

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION  
12th March, 2014**

Present:- Councillor G. A. Russell (in the Chair); Councillors Burton, Clark, J. Hamilton, Kaye, Lelliott, License, Pitchley, Read and Sharman.

Other Select Commission members in attendance: - Councillors Dalton, Sims, Whelbourn and Vines.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali, Astbury, Buckley and Dodson

**50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

No Declarations of Interest were made.

**51. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS.**

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

**52. COMMUNICATIONS.**

On behalf of Councillor Clark, the Senior Scrutiny Adviser and Member Development (Scrutiny Services, Legal and Democratic Services, Chief Executive's Office) reported that the District Commander of South Yorkshire Police had issued a commendation for the work of Council Officers and Partners in the delivery of a proactive approach to managing Domestic Abuse Services. The Improving Lives Select Commission's Scrutiny Review into Domestic Abuse Services had reported on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2014, the progress against the recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (Minute No. 102 refers).

The Improving Lives Select Commission wished to record their congratulations to the Domestic Abuse Team and Partners for the work.

**53. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22ND JANUARY, 2014.**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2014, were considered.

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

**54. SCRUTINY OF OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN.**

Councillor G. A. Russell introduced Officers who had come to present information on the outcomes for Looked After Children.

In attendance were: -

Joyce Thacker	Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services Directorate;
Paul Dempsey	Service Manager for Family Placements and Residential Services, Safeguarding Children and Families, Children and Young People's Services Directorate;
Martin Smith	Manager of the Get Real Team, School Effectiveness Service, Schools and Lifelong Learning, Children and Young People's Services Directorate;
Sue Wilson	Performance and Quality Manager, Performance and Quality, Neighbourhood and Adults Services Directorate.

Background papers had been distributed in addition to Rotherham's draft Looked After Children Strategy and draft Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children, along with recent performance information. Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission were also referred to the 'Ten questions to ask yourself if you're scrutinising services for Looked After Children' published by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The Service Manager for Family Placements and Residential Services introduced himself and outlined his role and how he was working with a range of professionals across all sectors to produce an 'agreed vision' for all Looked After Children in Rotherham. The agreed vision included: -

- Services had high aspirations for Looked After Children and young people;
- Meet the requirements of the new Ofsted inspection framework;
- Ensure cost efficient services that achieved the most with limited resources;
- Promote strong and inspiring leaders so that the professional workforce had high aspirations;
- Confirm a clear and consistent focus on education;
- The Strategy would ensure that looked after children enjoyed stable, safe and permanent relationships;
- The voice of Looked After Children would inform the content;
- Learning would be evidenced from the best local authorities, along with research findings and learning from new things;
- Contribute to the provision of care and support for Looked After Children that was good enough for our own children.

The Service Manager for Family Placements and Residential Services was asked to outline each Priority objective and members of the Improving Lives Select Commission asked questions about each one.

- **Priority Objective One - To ensure the degree and timeliness of placement stability and permanence and ensure children are able to enjoy continuity of relationships: -**

The Service Manager described actions that were taking place in the Authority to ensure that this Priority could be achieved. These included ensuring that there were sufficient local care placements, working with the Voluntary Sector, service changes to ensure that young people did not have to change their social worker at key points in their lives, changes to ensure that the Local Authority was less dependent on the independent sector, development of in-house fostering placements and the Fostering Plus initiative. During 2012/2013, 25% of Rotherham's looked after children left care to be adopted. The national average was at 14%. Extra resources and therapeutic in-put had been secured to reduce placement breakdown following adoption.

Rotherham expected performance on long-term placement stability against the relevant National Performance Indicator to be at least in line with the national average; it was currently around 1% above the national average for all Rotherham's Looked After Children and even higher for children in in-house fostering placements.

The development of a Sufficiency Strategy showed how Rotherham aimed to get more care placements, including placements for groups where difficulties in getting a sufficient range existed. These included developing additional carer placements for teenagers; Fostering to Adoption where children and young people were placed with carers who were acting as foster carers who later adopted the child/ren, resulting in less moves and more stability earlier in their care journey; and increasing the number of local independent care providers to avoid long journeys for young people to and from placements.

The Chairperson welcomed the new model for young people up to age of 18 and the ability for young people to retain the same personal adviser between the ages of 16 – 25. This was a vulnerable time when continuity was crucial and disruptive changes were not always in the best interests of young people.

**How achievable was it that placements would be brought back to the Local Authority area?** – This would not be achieved for 100% of placements as it was in some placement's interests to be out of the area. Excluding those placements that needed to be out of the area, it was possible that 10% of existing out-of-authority placements would be based back in the Local Authority, over the next year. This had been built into the budget profile and would result in cost efficiencies.

**What were the measurable goals that were related to the draft Strategies and had the overall context of public spending reductions been taken account of? Did we have an evidence base to measure the Strategies against, as many of the aspirations of the new**

**Strategies – around having high aspirations for looked after children – had always been held by the Local Authority?** – The budget had been agreed to support the development of the Strategies. A number of the workstreams had started towards the end of 2013, including the Fostering Plus initiative and a competitive package for fosters carers of teenagers. This package matched independent agencies, including therapeutic support and supervision, access to the Get Real Team, the Virtual Head Teacher and Health Services.

**What feedback was being received from Foster Carers?** – General feedback considered the Local Authority to be offering a good service, and this was backed-up by the findings of an inspection. Carers appreciated the therapeutic support of the Looked After and Adopted Children's (LAAC) Therapeutic Support Team and the Adoption Team. Areas for development included better support for working with challenging young people and young people reported wanting to see more of their Social Worker.

**Was the Local Authority on par with the Independent Sector?** – The Service Manager believed that Fostering Plus was better than many of the independent provisions/offers available.

**Is there an action plan to support the Strategy?** – The Strategies had been presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel. The five Priority Objectives informed the teams within the Service and formed part of their measurable Service Plans.

**Had young people been consulted and given feedback on the content?** – Not yet. They had been consulted via the LAC Council. The LAC Voice and Influence Officer was part of the Strategic Group that was developing the Strategies. However, it was felt that the Strategic Group was too adult focussed and work was taking place to see how young people could attend the meetings, including holding them in the evenings.

**Had the use of a Mystery Shopper been explored?** – Similar methods of finding out service users' experiences were being used. These included the 'Tell Us Your Views' survey, where children and young people were asked to complete a questionnaire at a specific point in their journey. The Performance and Quality Team analysed the responses and reported on the responses each month to Children and Young People's Service's Directors. In addition there was the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer role who had responsibility to record children and young person's wishes and feelings at regular points in their care journey. There was also a Complaints procedure available for all people with concerns. All of these methods were independent from the Safeguarding Children and Families' Service.

**Looking to speed up the adoption process could be a risky thing in terms of placement breakdown and so on. Had strategies worked well here?** – It was a Central Government expectation that the adoption process was made quicker. Work had been undertaken to see whether this was over-ambitious and prioritised speed over good practice and the wellbeing of children. There had been no evidence in Rotherham that speeding the process up had increased placement breakdown. Rotherham had continued to place children for adoption wherever it was appropriate, however, if it was to reach the Central Government target, it would need to increase the speed of adoptions.

**What resources existed for adopted children to understand their journey and was work taking place – either locally or nationally – to provide role models for adopted children and young people?** – Resources did exist for under and over 5s. Adoption Workers would talk to the potential adopters about ‘dual-connectedness’ and how the child/young person was connected to two families. Lifestory work was also undertaken to produce a book or series of materials about the child or young person’s life. Adult Service’s provided counselling support and support for tracing birth parents/family members with a voluntary organisation in Yorkshire.

- **Priority Objective Two - To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children: -**

Strengths and difficulties questionnaires were being undertaken to measure the Services’ progress every six-months. This created a picture of need that was used to commission relevant therapeutic services for looked after children and young people. In addition all professional workers were required to have a good working knowledge of trauma, attachment and other relevant theories. The Local Authority was acting as a partner to the Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group on their therapeutic strategy and the commissioning and remit of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

**Were Looked After Children and young people able to access sports and other activity clubs in the same way that their non-looked after peers were? Anecdotal evidence/experience suggested that Looked After Children were not accessing clubs and activities as frequently. Was there a strategy to support looked after children and young people’s access to sport?** – The Officers in attendance did have knowledge that Looked After Children and young people were accessing activities outside of school to pursue their interests. The Get Real Team Manager outlined the range of activities that were on the Personal Education Plans of Looked After Children and young people which they had indicated an interest in and were taking part in.

**Was there an obligation on Foster carers to take children to activities?** – Yes, any reports of children being prevented from pursuing their interests and activities would be followed-up by the Safeguarding Children and Families' Service.

**Where children were going missing it suggested that their needs were not being met. What procedures existed to ensure that their needs would be met following them running away?** – The Local Authority was working in partnership with the Police on the definition of missing – there was a difference between young people going missing and young people being absconded or late. When they returned, young people were interviewed and a strategy meeting was called. Partners were included in the meeting as required by the circumstances of the case. A key worker was identified who would build-up a relationship with the individual young person to address their needs.

- **Priority Objective Three - To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between attainment of looked-after children and their non-looked after peers: -**

Nationally at least two levels of progress were expected between each Key Stage. To reduce the gap between non-looked after children and their looked-after peers, the Local Authority worked with designated teachers in each school. The Virtual School existed for all Looked After Children and young people aged between 0 – 25 and was overseen by a full-time Virtual Head Teacher. The Personal Education Plan template had been revised to capture more information and provide a measurable plan. A monthly Education and Social Care Panel was being set-up and chaired by the Virtual Head Teacher to address admissions and exclusions. Councillor G. A. Russell was the Virtual School's Governor.

The Virtual School consisted of a roll for all Looked After Children to be monitored and supported as a group, in addition to the children attending their own schools. The Virtual Head Teacher was an experienced Head Teacher who was looking at the education of every Looked After Child and the strategies in place to promote their attainment. They worked closely with the Get Real Team and other agencies, including Designated Teachers, to update Personal Education Plans for all looked after children.

**Overall attainment was on an upward trajectory – where were looked-after young people in this performance?** – In summer 2013 GCSE performance was good. 24% of the cohort achieved 5 A-Cs including English and Maths. The national average was 15.5%.

Each cohort was different and it was impossible to show yearly patterns as each cohort's needs varied. The 2014 cohort had a high percentage of children with Statements of Special Educational Needs, and attainment was likely to decrease on the previous year. However, consideration was given to each child being able to achieve their own true potential and

having the opportunities to develop their own skills and interests. The recent Post-16 Awards Ceremony showcased the whole range of outcomes and destinations of Rotherham's Looked After young people.

- **Priority Objective Four - To improve 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): -**

A Central Government target was for all Care Leavers to live in suitable accommodation. 96.4% of Rotherham's Care Leavers in 2012-2013 were classed as living in suitable accommodation. The national average was 88%.

Rotherham's Care Leavers who were in employment, education or training was at 54%, which was slightly below national average.

The Local Authority was developing the ability of young people to stay in their foster care arrangements after they had turned 18, including transferring their placement into a 'Supported Lodging Placement'. This aimed to give Looked After young people the same continuity, stability and permanency as their non-looked after peers. Work was also continuing to increase the breadth of work experience opportunities available to Looked After young people. Rotherham had two semi-independent homes staffed by the Leaving Care Service.

- **Priority Objective Five - 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:**

This included meetings of the Looked After Children Council, which was continuing to involve young people in recruitments, strategy and as a sounding board. The 'Entitlements Inquiry', a consultation exercise undertaken by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children, found that many Looked After Children and care leavers did not know what services and support they were entitled to. Work was ongoing in Rotherham to discover if Looked After Children and care leavers were similarly unaware of their entitlements. Future reports would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel as a strategy was devised to ensure that looked-after children and care leavers knew what they are entitled to and how to get it.

**What would be the Member involvement in these Strategies? –** Reports would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Improving Lives Select Commission on a yearly basis that provided benchmarking information and performance outcomes.

**Statistics presented needed to show how the Looked After Children population compared to their non-looked after peers to give balance and proportion to the conversations** – The performance monitoring report that had been submitted was referred to; statistics were given per 10,000 of the population. There were 70 Looked After Children in Rotherham per 10,000. The national average was 60 per 10,000, statistical neighbours were 81 per 10,000 and the Yorkshire and Humber figure was 66 per 10,000.

**How were Looked After Children who were parents supported to enter employment, education and training?** – This was a balancing act between their education and parental responsibilities. The Get Real Team and the Rowan Centre carefully supported these young people. Case studies were available to evidence this support.

**All Services were coping with diminishing resources and expectations rightly remained high for all Looked After Children. Given the available resources, how could the Council be supportive?**  
- Officers believed that the Council did demonstrate its commitment to prioritise the needs of Children and Young People through invest to save initiatives. There was capacity to increase and improve the Service. Members had an important role in holding Services to account at a time when placement costs had been driven down and quality had increased. Sometimes it was necessary to increase spending on cases to procure more costly placements when it was necessary for children and young people's improved outcomes. The Looked After Children Budget had been set at 320 children and had never been increased when the number of Looked After Children had significantly increased.

Elected Members had been supporting events for the recruitment of foster carers and this had increased morale and given a higher profile to the recruitment activity. Furthermore, the attendance of Elected Members at celebration events like the Post-16 Awards had increased the sense of corporate family and helped to celebrate achievements and offer positive role models for looked after children.

Councillor Russell thanked the Officers for attending the meeting and for their contributions. Corporate Parenting remained everyone's responsibility and it was right that the Improving Lives Select Commission continued to hold Services to account on the outcomes and experiences of looked-after children.

Resolved: - (1) That the submitted report be noted.

(2) That Rotherham's draft Looked After Children Strategy and draft Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children be endorsed.

(3) That a further update on the impact of the developing Strategies be reported to the Improving Lives Select Commission in twelve months' time.



**55. LIFESTYLE SURVEY, 2013.**

Councillor G. A. Russell introduced Bev Pepperdine, Service Improvement Officer (Performance and Quality, Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate). Bev had submitted a report on the Lifestyle Survey, 2013, that outlined the findings and also updated on the actions taken as a result of the 2012 Lifestyle Survey.

Minute No. C159 (Lifestyle Survey 2013) of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2014, noted when the outcomes of the 2013 Survey were accepted by the Cabinet.

The Service Improvement Officer reported on the results of the 2013 Lifestyle Survey.

- **Background and history: -**
  - Surveys had been taking place since 2006;
  - Pupils took part in Years 7 and 10;
  - Participation was not mandatory;
  - All findings were shared with stakeholders;
  - Actions and activities were devised by stakeholders to address the outcomes of the survey.
  
- **Increased participation in 2013: -**
  - All 16 of Rotherham's secondary schools had taken part in 2013 (in 2012 8 secondary schools had participated);
  - In 2013, 3,474 young people had responded;
  - The Local Authority provided regular updates to schools following the survey concluding;
  - The window for completion had been extended to 7 weeks to aid participation rates.
  
- **Positive improvements since 2012: -**
  - More young people felt that they were a healthy weight;
  - More young people reported taking regular exercise;
  - More young people were aspiring to attend university;
  - Reports of community cohesion had improved;
  - Teenage pregnancy was at its lowest ever recorded rate in the area.
  
- **Improvement actions since 2012: -**
  - Obesity Steering Group – had, in the past 4 years, supported 1,721 children to access weight management services;
  - Joint working between DC Leisure and the Rotherham Institute for Obesity;
  - The More4Life programme took place at the Rotherham Leisure Complex, Maltby Leisure Centre and the Aston-cum-Aughton Leisure Centre;

- The Healthy Schools Programme was working with 98% of schools;
- Smoking remained a priority measure in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
  
- **Areas for attention: -**
  - More young carers were identified;
  - Safety issues reported with regards to the Town Centre and public transport. Similar reports to those in 2012, young people did not feel safe;
  - Bullying rates remained similar to 2012, but less pupils were reporting when they had been bullied;
  - Local shops were identified as one of the places where young people were buying cigarettes and alcohol, and parents supplying their children with cigarettes and alcohol was also reported;
  - Pupils feeling good about themselves had reduced;
  - Other stakeholders may highlight different areas for attention.
  
- **Actions: -**
  - Personal safety – 12% reported feeling safe in the town centre and 18% reported feeling safe using public transport (compared to 14% and 17% respectively in 2012);
  - However, the young people who regularly used the Town Centre did report feeling safe;
  - Bullying – 38% of young people reported that they had been bullied, the same as 2012;
  - Smoking, drinking and drugs – family was the highest response to where young people got alcohol from;
  - Local shops were reported as the most common place where young people were buying cigarettes. Work was taking place by Partners to promote the health risks of giving cigarettes and alcohol to any under-aged person and Trading Standards were implementing the 'Responsible Retailer' logo;
  - Supermarkets had recorded a very low rate of supplying cigarettes and alcohol to young people;
  - Feelings – pupils reporting that they were feeling good had decreased. A self-harm pathway had been created for frontline workers who had contact with those aged between 9-25;
  - A Bereavement pathway was available;
  - A letter to parents and carers had been sent out via schools in June 2013 to highlight the available support for young people who may be experiencing emotional distress;
  - Adverts for the available support placed on the Public Health Channel in the summer and autumn months, 2013;
  - The Youth Cabinet was considering this issue and the Children's Commissioner Day to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> February,

2014, would consider activities around preventing self-harm and supporting those experiencing it.

- **Areas where young people were supported: -**
  - Youth Cabinet and Scrutiny work on Safety and Self-harm. Partners who had attended the Children's Commissioner Day had taken away the actions to address the issues raised;
  - Youth Cabinet were also addressing the questions in the survey;
  - The Police were working closely with the Youth Cabinet to address the issues raised about safety in the Town Centre and on public transport in greater detail;
  - Elected Members had supported young peoples' projects and made contributions via their Community Leadership Funds;
  - Health had received the information and had shared it with their Strategy Groups.
  
- **Next steps: -**
  - All 16 secondary schools had signed-up to participate in the 2014 survey and Service Improvement were consulting with schools on the future questions to be asked;
  - Consultation was continuing with partners on reviewing the content of the questions asked;
  - Youth Cabinet would review the 2014 questions and plans were in place for them to be more involved in the findings of the 2014 review and consulted on making improvements for the 2015 survey;
  - The positive outcomes from the 2013 survey would be shared via a communications and media plan;
  - A plan was in place to monitor the activities to support young people and address the issues identified in the 2013 survey.

The Service Improvement Officer outlined how she was collating the outcomes of the survey and would rely on the partner agencies to feed back to her the progress of their activities to address the issues raised. The Service Improvement Officer was also working with the Independent Chair of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board to monitor actions on a quarterly basis, and request updates from the multi-agency partners represented on the Board. The Service Improvement Officer was also working with Sheffield City Council to compare questionnaires as there was a difference between the length of each authority's document.

Discussion ensued and the following questions were raised: -

- **Teenage pregnancies had reduced, what actions had caused the reduction? –** The rate was now 30.3 conceptions per 10,000 of the under-18 population. The aspirations of the ten year Strategy had been met. The reduction had been achieved through

work to promote opportunities, the Raising Participation age, the availability of Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) and improving exam results.

- **The results for feeling safe in the Town Centre were still very low, which was surprising and worrying, given the work that had taken place since the 2012 survey** – The Youth Cabinet was acting as a sounding board about the work that was taking place, and they had confirmed their assurance that issues were progressing. Further work was needed to determine whether those reporting issues with the Town Centre regularly used it, to see whether there were differences between perception and reality in order that this might be addressed. Other measures including mystery shopping and reporting to the Transport Liaison Group were also taking place. Consideration was also being given to the things that prompted young people to come into the Town Centre and use its facilities.
- **How were messages passed on that things were changing because of the Lifestyle Survey?** – A key issue newsletter was distributed to all participating schools to cascade to all pupils.
- **The responses on bullying had an ‘Other’ category, was this cyber bullying? Cyber bullying was a significant issue for the people who were affected by it. It was also only seen by the ‘victim’ and could really reduce their quality of life and self-esteem** – Work was continuing to ensure that Rotherham’s survey appropriately covered issues relating to internet safety and e.safety. Pathways were available to support young people experiencing bullying.
- **The positive contribution of the Lifestyle Survey should be celebrated. The successes and actions that had been garnered from the Survey should be held up to young people as examples that democracy and their voices counted and that they could make a difference. The Survey was empowering and resources should be secured for future development of the Survey and the resulting actions.**
- **It was concerning that young people were reporting feeling less good about themselves. Why was this the case?** - This was unfortunate and did match national trends. It was likely that the increase was due to the current economic climate. Services needed to embrace the technology that young people used. Apps and other internet-based technology were being explored to allow young people to share their feelings in a safe way and access support.
- **What work was taking place to advertise the dangers relating to solvent use and restricting their access?** – Further information would be sought for the Improving Lives Select Commission. Solvents had been placed behind some shop counters to restrict access/control purchase.

The Chairperson thanked the Service Improvement Officer for her presentation and responses to the questions raised. The outcomes of the Lifestyle Survey were important to all stakeholders and Elected Members as corporate parents. The Improving Lives Select Commission would retain their interest in the outcomes and actions taken to ensure that the Survey remained a living and breathing exercise. A member of the Select Commission also asked for updates on the work of the Youth Cabinet in support of the Lifestyle Survey to be shared at the same time.

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

(2) That the outcomes of the Lifestyle Survey, 2013, be noted.

(3) That a further report be presented to the Improving Lives Select Commission on the outcomes of the 2014 Lifestyle Survey and providing an update on the actions from the 2013 Survey.

**56. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING: -**

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, to start at 1.30 p.m. in the Rotherham Town Hall.