

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
9th July, 2014**

Present:- Councillor G. A. Russell (in the Chair); Councillors Ahmed, Astbury and Reynolds.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali, Buckley, Burton and Clark.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No Declarations of Interest were made.

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

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

11. COMMUNICATIONS.

The Senior Scrutiny Adviser: Member Development (Scrutiny Services, Legal and Democratic Services, Resources Directorate) informed the Improving Lives Select Commission that an email invitation had been circulated to all members about a speaking and contributing to meetings training event that was taking place on 17th July, 2014.

12. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11TH JUNE, 2014.

The minutes from the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select commission held on 11th June, 2014, were considered.

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

13. APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE ON WORKING PANELS AND GROUPS, 2014/2015.

The Democratic Services Officer (Committee Services, Legal and Democratic Services, Resources Directorate) informed the Improving Lives Select Commission that a representative from the Select Commission was required for the Council's Recycling Group for the 2014/2015 Municipal Year.

Resolved: - That the dates of the 2014/2015 Recycling Group meetings be circulated to the full membership of the Improving Lives Select Commission and expressions of interest be requested for the role of the Improving Lives Select Commission's representative to the Recycling Group.

14. PEER REVIEW - THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD NEGLECT.

Councillor Russell, Chairperson of the Improving Lives Select Commission, welcomed the Director for Safeguarding Children and Families (Children and Young People's Services Directorate), and the Performance and Quality Manager (Performance and Quality, Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate) to the meeting. They had prepared a presentation on the impact of childhood neglect and Rotherham's Peer Review on neglect that would take place in September, 2014.

The Officers gave a presentation, which included the following: -

- The Department for Education's definition of Neglect (2013): –

... the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse.

Neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: -

Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);

Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;

Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment;

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

- Peer Review in Rotherham: –
 - There was an expectation that local authorities would provide a level of challenge and support to one another to enable sector-led improvement;
 - Rotherham's peer review into childhood neglect would take place during the week commencing 8th September, 2014, for three days;
 - It would be led by Doncaster's Director for Children's Services, with colleagues from North Lincolnshire and York local authorities;
 - There were no direct costs relating to the peer review; costs relating to expenses and IT set-up would be incurred. It was noted that the cost of peer reviews was significantly less than the costs of an LGA review;
 - The July 2012 inspection of child protection services in Rotherham made a number of findings in relation to neglect

in the Borough. The actions of the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board to address them included the use of SMART planning, the roll-out of a challenge procedure and tool-kits, improved legal gatekeeping and early intensive intervention.

- Ofsted had published a national report entitled *In the Child's Time – Professional Responses to Neglect*: -
 - One third of neglect cases where social care had been involved for a long time had evidence of delay and /or drift;
 - Assessments did not always take account of family history or the impact that neglect had on a child;
 - Engaging parents in child protection work was often difficult as they were likely to have complex issues of their own;
 - Non-compliance and the disguised compliance of parents.
- This document was being used to inform Rotherham's 'Neglect Strategy'.
- Rotherham statistics: -
 - 2013/2014 – 43% of Child Protection Plans had a referral reason of neglect;
 - Child in Need – 34% had a reason of neglect;
 - LAC – 61% had a reason of abuse or neglect.
- Impact of neglect and what it looked like: -
 - There were implications across all age-ranges but neglect was more damaging to younger children and babies who were completely unable to meet their own needs;
 - Health and physical development – 'failure to thrive', physical health conditions not addressed, not having/missing medical appointments, communication, access to education, life beyond education. Parents not fulfilling their role;
 - Case studies were available - no food, no sheets or covers, debris in cot/around house, dirty nappies, hungry. Professional description of the signs was 'frozen watchfulness';
 - Current context of increasing poverty;
 - The 2012 frontline inspection asked the question 'when is enough enough?' in relation to children who were being neglected and when care proceedings would begin;
 - TripleA – workforce training had been developed;
 - Early Help Support Panel – practitioners were able to raise concerns earlier;
 - Troubled Families – Families for Change;
 - Rotherham needed its partner agencies to recognise the signs of neglect and refer;

- The Multi-Agency Support Panel had significantly changed the practice of agencies/partners;
- Working with other Council Departments, including with Housing and Adult Services.

Rotherham's multi-agency threshold descriptions were circulated and considered.

Discussion ensued and the following questions and answers were made: -

- **How do you identify where neglect is an issue? –**

Safeguarding training had been provided to all schools on awareness raising and what neglect meant to children, the use of the Common Assessment Framework and how professionals worked with families. Similar sessions had been provided to the Council's M2 managers in an information session. Neglect had been built into the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Business Plan. The opening of the Multi-Agency Support Hub in Riverside House on 4th August, 2014, would also enable agencies to work together to stop neglect.

- **How were hard to reach families engaged with? –**

Some families hid neglect, and others were in denial about neglect. Some did not understand what neglect was and some families replicated their own childhood experiences of neglect. The Family Recovery Programme provided intensive family support in these cases and was clearly helping with some families. Some families exhibited signs where the denial was so significant that they could not comprehend and had no capacity to change. In these cases the children were removed to care. The 'Say Something if you See Something' campaign was a useful way of prompting people to report their concerns.

- **Great to hear what we are doing in Rotherham. With regards to Universal Services and Thresholds – are we measuring impact after training has taken place to see whether it has been useful?**

Yes, the Service has seen more referrals and contacts, and this should lead to better referrals. It was the Service's role to challenge poor referrals and signpost to alternative agencies if it was not a social care issue. However, the message was: 'if in doubt, refer'.

- **Will the peer review highlight the areas we need to be more focussed on and direct resources to?**

The outcomes of the peer review would be used to prioritise resources. There was increasing poverty in the Borough at the current time due to low incomes and changes to Welfare provision. Neglect is an increasing issue both regionally and nationally. The addition of resource poverty to

already neglectful families could increase the number of referrals to social care and, potentially, the number of looked after children.

The overall strategy used by all services was important. An example of this was when Housing Services changed their view of a family through the influence of Children's Social Care and gave the family another chance, preventing them slipping into the crisis situation of being homeless. A more co-ordinated approach working with families where neglect happened was needed so that all Partners were tackling it in the same way.

- **Every Child Matters addressed these issues of services working long hours but in silos and not communicating information with one another. Strategies were written and then seemingly shelved. Why was Every Child Matters not used to eradicate the barriers to multi-agency working so it would be well-embedded by now? –**

In response to Every Child Matters, Rotherham created the Children and Young People's Plan. This was a multi-agency plan with six priorities and was robustly monitored in Rotherham. Nationally, multi-agency information sharing platforms had faltered and this had constituted a real barrier to realising the Every Child Matters outcomes. Rotherham was continuing to bid for funding to improve information sharing platforms.

- **Engagement of key professionals, including teachers – was workload a barrier because professionals were so busy and reluctant to take on extra form filling? Could concerns about whistle blowing/ rocking the boat be a disincentive for them to refer? –**

There was no current evidence to suggest that workload was preventing professionals from making referrals, but the Service would take seriously any allegations that this was happening. At the end of the day the lives and health of children were at stake and it is the moral obligation of professionals working with children to report any concerns they have.

- **Can the Local Authority impose penalties on Officers not reporting concerns? -**

At the moment this would be a matter for the individual's line management. Agencies did take these matters seriously and worked with the Council. There was nothing to suggest that these concerns were founded, but any allegations would be investigated.

- **Does the Council have sufficient resources? -**

It was always the intention to protect frontline services for Children's Social Care. The Local Authority had sustained cuts to budgets and these were continuing. Where cuts had been made they were being

implemented as slowly as possible to mitigate impact and Services were asked to work more closely, again to mitigate cuts as far as possible on the front line.

Councillor Russell thanked the Officers for their presentation and contribution to the discussion.

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

(2) That an update be provided on the outcomes of the Peer Review into childhood neglect and Rotherham's action plans in response to the outcomes be considered by the Improving Lives Select Commission in six-months' time.

15. YOUNG PEOPLE MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE.

Councillor Russell welcomed the Service Manager - Family Placements and Residential, and the Provider Services Manager (Safeguarding Children and Families Services, Children and Young People's Services Directorate) who had been invited to the meeting to update the Improving Lives Select Commission on the procedures, legislation and working practices around young people who went missing from their home or from care.

This issue was regularly considered by the Corporate Parenting Panel in respect of looked after children and young people who went missing or who ran away.

The Department for Education had published statutory guidance in January, 2014, relating to children who ran away. The guidance made it clear that local authorities continued to be responsible for protecting children when they went missing, whether this be from their family home or from local authority care. It was recognised that when Looked After Children went missing they were at risk of exploitation, including sexual exploitation. Department for Education guidance had always been that local authorities should agree with the local police and other agencies and, potentially, other local authorities, a protocol for dealing with children who ran away or who went missing in their area. Local protocols should be agreed and reviewed by all agencies/partners and scrutinised by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The report outlined Rotherham's local protocol, as scrutinised by the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board, and that of the South Yorkshire sub-region. The South Yorkshire protocol was due to be reviewed in the summer of 2014. A sub-regional meeting was held every two months, which covered structures for managing the local and regional protocols, forums and panels. Rotherham's Silver Group met monthly and missing people formed part of the Terms of Reference; early support and strategy meetings were arranged at the Silver Group.

The report showed the numbers of children who had gone missing between January – May, 2014, and a commentary on the patterns and trends and some of the reasons why a child may choose to go missing/run away.

A recent change in the Department for Education's guidance introduced new definitions. The guidelines had been implemented across South Yorkshire in 2014, and this had led to an increase in the number of cases being recorded.

The new definitions that were now in place: -

Missing: -

Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

Absent: -

A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

The Police considered and decided whether the incident was 'out of character' for the child/young person who had gone missing. If this happened routinely, they would be classed as absent, as it was in character. When the child or young person returned, the Police conducted a 'safe and well check'. This was followed up with an independent interview conducted by 'Safe@Last', who shared the messages from the interview with Rotherham's Contact and Referral Team.

Two case studies were shared that illustrated how/why and the frequency of a child/young person going missing. The case studies suggested the reasons why the child/young person was choosing to go missing and the actions and interventions that were put in place by agencies to support the young person. The case studies showed positive outcomes and reductions in the number of incidents of the child/young person choosing to run away.

Discussion ensued and the following questions and answers were made: -

- **What about when children were placed out of the Borough, how were multi-agency responses made? -**

Rotherham's Safeguarding Children and Families Service had sent a reminder of the obligations arising from the National Guidance to all providers where children were placed out of the Borough. Regulation 33 visits were undertaken each month.

- **How do we link in with partners for Early Intervention and Prevention Services?**

The Council's Children Missing from Education Officer established these links.

- **More females were going missing compared to the number of males. Was this a recent trend or a long-term pattern? And why?**

This was not a new trend. Monitoring had been done over the previous 8-10 years and every year the outcomes were similar. The majority of children/young people who went missing were females, and the 15 year-old age-group also experienced a peak. This could relate to gender expectations; boys being allowed more independence and girls being more protected by their parents/carers, and also normal teenage behaviour of increasing independence, boundary testing and changing identity.

- **Is there anything in the Legislation that could be used where we think a young person is at risk of going missing? Or would this require new Legislation?**

Yes, Care Orders – if the Service needed to put a young person into Secure Accommodation for their own protection, the Courts can grant this if there is evidence to support the need/reason. However, this is extreme and undesirable, and most young people who went missing would not meet the criteria. Instead, the Service tried to work with the young person to influence and engage them to more positive strategies for coping. There was no law that could be used to prevent children and young people from going missing, but there is a law to stop other people from taking them or persuading them to run away. It was a preferable option to address/punish perpetrators, and not stigmatise or alienate the young people involved.

- **There is a high level of emotional factors surrounding children going missing. -**

Training had been provided to the staff in Children's Homes to ensure that they were aware of risk signs and able to encourage young people to engage when they had issues, rather than running away.

- **Could the new definitions of missing and absent lead to new emerging trends in the data? -**

Service meetings taking place every six weeks were concentrating on trends and patterns. In general, most young people were tending to be running away *to* something rather than away *from* something; usually they were running to their friends and returned in the early hours of the morning. Many did not go very far. Some do cross local authority boundaries and could be at risk of exploitation.

There was a small proportion of young people who made up a very big incidence of those going missing. Many will say they are ok on return but then go missing again. Services concentrate on the young persons' wishes and feelings and relationship building, activities and hobbies to help the young person so they did not want to go missing again.

- **Could additional medical/social needs be underlying issues for going missing? –**

The Service kept figures on whether a child or young person going missing had a Statement of Special Education Need or if they had other, lower level forms of SEN.

- **Was there any indication that young people were going missing due to Female Genital Mutilation or forced marriage? -**

Yes there was, but this did not happen often/recently in Rotherham. There was a watching brief on these issues and they were being regularly monitored.

Councillor Russell thanked the Officers for their presentation and contribution to the discussion. The presentation had been useful and important.

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

(2) That the Corporate Parenting Panel continue to receive regular updates about the numbers of looked after children and young people who go missing in Rotherham and the multi-agency work that was taking place to support these young people.

16. CLAIR PYPER - INTERIM DIRECTOR OF SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Councillor Russell informed the Improving Lives Select Commission that this meeting would be Clair Pyper's (interim Director of Safeguarding Children and Families, Children and Young People's Services Directorate) last meeting before she left her role to take up another post. Councillor Russell thanked Clair for the fantastic way that she had performed her role and for her efforts and contributions to Rotherham.

All wished Clair well for the future.

17. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING: -

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Wednesday 17th September, 2014, to start at 2.00 p.m. in the Rotherham Town Hall.