

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday, 5th March, 2019

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Beaumont, Clark, Elliot, Ireland, Jarvis, Marles, Marriott, Price and Senior.

Also in attendance was Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Brookes, Khan, Pitchley and Short.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest to report.

55. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

56. COMMUNICATIONS

The Select Commission noted that feedback from the Performance Sub-Group, Health Select Commission and Corporate Parenting Panel would be circulated by email.

An update from the Review Group had also been fed into the LADO process.

57. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 15th January, 2019.

It was noted that an action arising from minutes previously agreed had been completed with a visit to the University Campus by Elected Members, who were very impressed with the facilities and what courses were on offer.

Resolved;- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 15th January, 2019 be approved.

58. BARNARDO'S REACHOUT SERVICE UPDATE AND BARNARDO'S REACHOUT FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Further to Minute No. 5 of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 5th June, 2018, consideration was given to the report presented by the

Deputy Leader and Acting Strategic Commissioning Manager which detailed how the Barnardo's ReachOut project was established in Rotherham under a three year partnership funding agreement between Barnardo's, the KPMG Foundation, Department for Education, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

The project, an innovative outreach service, strived to support and protect children and young people in Rotherham who were at risk of child sexual exploitation. The key areas of work for the project were:-

- Preventative educations in schools and other settings, primarily delivering the healthy relationships education package 'Real Love Rocks';
- Targeted outreach to young people at risk;
- Direct Support to individual young people and their parents.

The ReachOut Service began delivery in January, 2016 and, therefore, had been operational for just over three years.

The project had been the subject of a full independent evaluation which was undertaken by the University of Bedfordshire and DMSS Research to evaluate the impact of the project and provide ongoing learning and feedback. This report presented an update of the key areas of service delivery, a summary of the full independent evaluation report, and the responses to the recommendations made at the Improving lives Select Commission on the 5th June, 2018.

Following on from an initial update on the ReachOut Project last year further information was provided on the engagement with primary schools, the outcome of discussions with young inspectors about improving the project's profile and the discussion with the Assistant Director, Education and Skills, including information circulated to schools.

The outreach work had evolved and reached over 10,000 people in Rotherham. Barnardo's had also attended community events, targeted help for those considered at risk and had reached a wide audience about the risks of child sexual exploitation as well as working closely with the training of taxi drivers, the Fire Service and Roma community.

Whilst there was still more work to be done in terms of education in schools, every secondary school had been visited over the three year period and engagement had commenced with up to 50% of primary schools as well.

Further action had been recommended on improving engagement, liaising with young inspectors around any ideas or approaches that would improve engagement through the Real Love Rocks offer and promotion of training on social media. All suggestions would be considered as part of improving engagement with schools.

RMBC, CYPS Commissioning, in Partnership with Barnardo's were successful in their bid for £1m funding from the Home Office's Trusted Relationship Fund to widen its remit to include young people at the risk of Child Criminal Exploitation or "County Lines".

Barnardo's were building strong links with the Youth Offending Team and with providers who have a proven track record in delivering services for this cohort of young people. In addition were further developing their assessment indicators to include the risks and vulnerabilities attributed to this exploitation.

A discussion and question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- ❖ Had referrals increased following the work undertaken with different partners and agencies, including the training with the Fire Service and taxi drivers?

Most of referrals came from the normal routes through the MASH as a result of concerns through social care, early help and schools. There had been no referrals made by the public or taxi drivers.

- ❖ How was information shared, including low-level historical intelligence, and used to support Barnardo's areas of work?

The ReachOut Team Manager attended Police meetings and within Barnardo's there were regular meetings and discussions on a daily basis. The service worked closely with early help and social care and fed into weekly meetings.

As well as raising awareness for vulnerable children on "county lines" was information shared about how to raise concerns regarding adults who may pose a risk.

Barnardo's shared awareness about people who may pose a risk and how to recognise the signs and approaches of grooming.

Was work targeted across the borough to reduce the risk of grooming and involvement in gangs? Whilst the report was very positive, much of it was based on work in Eastwood and Ferham. ; was there a reason why these two areas were highlighted?

Staff had taken the bus to other parks in Rotherham, and did attend other areas on a regular basis, however had not seen much activity.

Reference was made to Eastwood and Ferham particularly as a result of responses to intelligence. The outreach work in Eastwood and Ferham had been used as case studies. Analysis had been undertaken of the direct work referrals.

There had also been referrals from each secondary school across Rotherham. This clearly showed the spread of work and the good coverage across the borough.

- ❖ When children were referred for outreach work, was information shared with schools and teachers in case of a need for a re-referral?

If further support was required for a child, information would be shared appropriately to ensure needs met.

- ❖ How closely did Barnado's work with the Early Help service?

The two services worked closely in partnership. Barnado's worked with the children whilst Early Help tended to work with parents.

- ❖ Were faith schools taking up the offers of support? Were there plans to for this work to inform mandatory relationships education in the future?

There had been take up from the catholic schools in the area.

Barnado's had received funding to look at lack of uptake in some Muslim communities and would be working with the University of Sheffield to establish need.

- ❖ Were Barnardo's liaising with any victims?

Yes the service was liaising with some victims.

- ❖ From the evaluation of the service was there anything that would be could have been done differently.

Overall the ReachOut project was very positive with good feedback from Children and Young People's Services and other agencies. There were currently no elements highlighted as that would have been better done differently. The project had evolved and elements of learning were incorporated as the project progressed. Earlier outreach work had learnt what worked better and how best value for money was achieved.

The three strand model had been very effective and built the foundations for further awareness and targeted education. This gave confidence in people for coming forward for support. This was a model which could be transferrable to other contexts.

- ❖ Did the service feel it had done enough awareness raising and training to make this sustainable?

The project had managed to reach people and embed the thinking

and approach. This was going to continue and it was valuable and raised awareness to children and staff allowing them to talk on an ongoing basis about issues and concerns.

- ❖ Figures quoted suggested 50% of primary schools had received input with the addition of a further twenty schools. What were the numbers previously?

About 30% of all primary schools had received input, but from October with offers promoted regularly in the bulletin to schools this had increased. More schools were added each time it was highlighted. There had been lots of activity with some recent discussions about how support could be varied and analysed. It was hoped that to building momentum and importance through liaison with academy chains.

Following the meeting of Improving Lives last year every school had been telephoned and emails sent. There had been attendance at the Safeguarding Forum at the Rockingham Centre and a feature placed in the bulletin for schools and since October staff had been trained in 26 schools.

- ❖ Barnardo's were committed to continue working to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation, but as the focus shifted towards "county lines" was the service confident that child sexual exploration prevention initiatives were sustainable.

With additional funding this support was seen as extra rather than a dilution. .

There was wider remit as often young people presented with risks, but this may be child sexual exploitation, may be gang related exploitation or drugs. With a wider remit and clearer assessment indicators this would ensure links with the Police and Youth Offending. There were other branches of Barnardo's in other parts of the country like Bradford and Manchester and discussions were taking place with them and agencies who were dealing with "county lines".

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and the information they had shared, welcomed the positive report and suggested work take place on how best schools, that had not engaged in the project, could be encouraged to do so.

Resolved:- (1) That the Barnardo's ReachOut Service update and the independent evaluation report be noted.

(2) That a further update be presented in twelve months' time to report on progress, particularly regarding the widened remit of the service.

(3) That a further piece of work with schools be initiated for those that had not engaged, the reasons why and how the engagement could be improved upon further.

59. PROGRESS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE TWO AND PHASE THREE OF THE EARLY HELP STRATEGY 2016-2019

Consideration was given to the briefing report and presentation on the implementation of Phase 2 and 3 of the Early Help Review and an update provided in respect of the progress in establishing Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with schools for youth service provision and related transfer of assets.

With the aid of powerpoint David McWilliams and Eileen Chambers gave a presentation on the Early Help Offer, which highlighted:-

- Rotherham's Early Help Offer.
- Three Phases.
- Phase Two and Three Objectives.
- What was working well.
- Youth Centre Updates.
- What we were worried about.
- Children Centres.
- What was working well.
- What worried about – Broom Valley.
- Day Care.
- Next steps.
- Youth Centres and Team Bases.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- Who were the representatives for the unparished areas of the borough.

Representatives were still to be determined.

- What was the current position with regards to the Maltby Playgroup at The Linx.

Confirmation has been distributed and their position was secure in the longer term.

- The target for savings of £205k had been achieved due a combination of freezing vacant posts and non-essential expenditure, but what proportion of the saving was due to vacant posts.

Some posts had been taken out of the structure altogether. To offset the budget pressures across the wider directorate post were

kept vacant during the selection process to offset the budget. To achieve the savings of £380,000 a longer freeze would be required from 1st April, 2019 to help with wider pressures and the move towards a more equitable position.

What work was taking place with the Children and Young People's Consortium and wider voluntary sector to maximise funding bids to offset financial pressures?

This action was already taking place. The Council was working with VAR, the Children's Consortium, Parish Councils and a number of independent organisations to bid more collectively and collaboratively. The Council was becoming more targeted and consortium bids had been submitted around holiday hunger. . It was challenging and people were working closely and more collaboratively in search of the larger pots of money on a more sustainable basis.

- Was it likely that some of the children centre provision would continue following the de-registration of some children's centres and was there a spread of where this was still happening.

In many cases there was no change to delivery, but the change was from where it was delivered from.

For example – the children centre offer was delivered from Tesco's Tuesday and Thursday morning and this was very popular. This could be observed by Members if there was a wish for this to be arranged.

In addition, Greasbrough Library offered support to around 20/30 parents and again delivered outside the children's centre.

- Could the personal support and help offered in Children's Centres be provided in more diverse settings?

Part of the restructure was to keep roles for outreach and engagement. There were people that worked with the 0-5, but in the new structure there was to be a 0-19 engagement post. The service had been on this journey for some time, but were confident the shift for working from different places and locations would be positive. Particular posts had been retained, but this would be subject to close monitoring.

- If there was no interest from a private provider and there was a sufficiency need for provision, the Local Authority would look to continuing the childcare delivery for a period of three years. Was this likely?

There would be no change to the way day care was run as the building was still available at Broom and the care would be provided

whilst there was the demand.

- Remedial work was required even with deregistration. Who, therefore, was picking up the costs of remedial work at Wath Victoria.

Very minor works were required for completion.

- With regards to the corporate property assets how was this working out given the impact of having to save £118,000.

The saving had already been made. Assets had been handed over and the budget reduced by that amount. Responsibility was now with the Corporate Property Unit. This was a real saving to the service and a smaller cost to the Corporate Centre.

The Council's position was now for Asset Management to decide on the use of those buildings for. Some of the buildings may be sold or the sites used for alternative purposes.

The only one in terms of all those buildings agreed that was not going according to plan was the one at Broom. The school had changed their mind about this provision. The transfer of the Broom Valley building would be delayed until the end of the summer term so as not to disrupt the Foundation 1 children currently using the building.

- When would costs be finalised.

There was a need for capacity in the Legal Services which was being addressed. . There was no impact on service users.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and suggested the Improving Lives Select Commission continue to have a watching brief.

Resolved:- (1) That officers be thanked for their presentation.

(2) That the report and the presentation be received and the contents noted.

(3) That a further report be submitted to the Improving Lives Select Commission once all the details had been finalised.

60. PRESENTATION - OFSTED ANNUAL CONVERSATION UPDATE

Consideration was given to a presentation on the Ofsted Annual Conversation Officer by Jon Stonehouse, Strategic Director.

This was a key part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework and assisted Local Authorities to critically evaluate

their own performance

The presentation covered:-

- Annual Conversation – 20th November, 2018
- Discussions:-
 - ❖ Complexity of the local area.
 - ❖ LAC review.
 - ❖ Partnership working.
 - ❖ Permanence planning.
 - ❖ SEND sufficiency.
 - ❖ Initial Health Assessments and thresholds.
- Next steps and possibility of a focused visit.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- Given the concerns around “county lines” and exclusions and vulnerable children and young people, were there concerns about home education and if this was being used as an alternative to exclusion.

The Council had a priority for making its education system as inclusive as possible and wanted to make sure that there was a range of provision for as many young people as possible. This was a national issue and should not be looked at in isolation in order that resources were used as effectively as possible to accommodate the majority of children and young people.

- Had there been a discussion with Ofsted about a focused visit and was the service ready for this to be undertaken? ?

The peer review would help with preparations and the service would be as ready as it would be for any Ofsted challenge with strong performance management arrangements in place which mean the service was already reasonably well prepared. However, the service would not become complacent and always ready for a challenge.

It was reassuring that nothing discussed was of a surprise. Partnership Board and Performance Board met on a monthly basis examining and challenging where it was required.

The Chair spoke for the Vice-Chair who was unable to attend today’s meeting and confirmed the Performance Sub-Group of this Commission was working well with a good level of challenge and explanation.

Resolved:- (1) That officers be thanked for their informative presentation.

(2) That for any future inspections information be circulated to this Improving Lives Selection Commission.

61. PRESENTATION - LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY - UPDATE

Consideration was given to a presentation on the Looked After Children Sufficient Strategy which sought to deliver and improve outcomes for children who were looked after. This would ensure the right placements and also delivery significant savings to the Local Authority,

The needs analysis supported the market management work going forward. Another project led by the Head of Service about demand, the Right Care Right Child Strategy was linked and informed by Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy.

The presentation highlighted:-

- LAC Sufficiency Strategy - Purpose.
- LAC Profile.
- Pattern of Admissions to Care.
- The National and Regional Picture.
- Placement Profile.
- Placement Spend and Unit Costs.
- In-House Foster Care.
- Independent Fostering Agencies.
- Residential Provision.
- Right Child, Right Care Approach.
- LAC Sufficiency Strategy Principles.
- Next Steps.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- How many mother and baby placements were there.

There were three in-house mother and baby foster placements. It was hoped that this could be developed as part of the service, but it was a matter of finding the right carers, with the right skills and commitment.

- What was the average timeframe for becoming a foster carer.

This was an area that was being looked into as part of the foster carer recruitment process. There was a need to encourage people, share the message, support and look in detail about the process to reduce the current timescales from expressions of interest to being presented to the Fostering Panel. Currently the average timeframe was eight/nine months.

- Some disabled children received respite care, but remained living at home. Were those children classed as being looked after? Where there any disabled children in specialist residential provision outside of Rotherham?

Determination of whether a child was looked after or not, depended on the percentage time they were in placement. Ten per cent of the Looked After Children population were disabled and the majority of these were placed in residential rather than foster care provision. A high proportion of these placements were out of authority. However, work was taking place to develop local provision which was hoped to open shortly.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and welcomed the good work taking place and suggested a sub-group of this Commission look into the options as they emerge from the Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy.

Resolved:- (1) That officers be thanked for their informative presentation and the contents noted.

(2) That nominations be sought for a Sub-Group from the Improving Lives Select Commission in due course looking in detail as options emerged from this Strategy.

62. IMPROVEMENT PARTNER PEER REVIEW OF THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICE (NOVEMBER 2018)

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the findings of the Council's Improvement Partner, Lincolnshire Children's Services, Peer Review of the Looked After Children (LAC) Service in November, 2018. This was almost two years after the previous Peer Review in December, 2016 and twelve months after the Ofsted Inspection in November, 2017.

The rationale for this further Review was to gauge the ongoing improvements within the service given that the LAC Service was the only part of Children and Young People's Services to be graded as "Requires Improvement" by Ofsted. Whilst the Inspection identified that, "The local authority has improved the services it provides for children looked after since the last inspection" it also concluded that many of the changes were too new and insufficiently embedded for any other conclusion to be reached.

The remit of the Review was to undertake an assessment was determined and a number of Focus Groups were arranged to meet with the Peer Review Team (PRT) and looked particularly at:-

- Scope.
- Evidence.

- What was working well.
- What we were still worried about.
- What we were doing about it.

A discussion and answer session ensued and the following questions were raised and clarified:-

- Good practice recommended pre-birth assessments should start at 28 weeks and finish at 36 weeks. Was Rotherham on track to comply with this?

This was not been on target. Capacity was being addressed and the backlog being worked through. The service were now confident it could now meet those timescales.

- What was the level of confidence that that the decision to move to care proceedings was the right one?

In 94% of the cases the Local Authority was successful in getting the care order it requested, but the 6% were where the court may not have felt confident about making a decision and often defer for further work. 94% was strong performance.

- Were there any barriers to developing foster carers in Muslim communities?.

There was a need to actively engage to become a community strength based model and for members of the Muslim community to understand the requirements for foster carers.

Attempts were being made to engage with the local Mosque Community Forum and to recognise some of the needs of young people . This was an exciting prospect and could change the experiences of looked after children.

- Were there any worries about Regulation 24?

Regulation 24 was kinship care provided on an emergency basis whilst viability assessments were undertaken. These placements lasted up to sixteen weeks with an expectation that kinship carers would become foster carers with a named individual in their care. An extension could be requested.

Most of the Regulation 24 placements progressed to permanence in the form of Special Guardianship Orders. There is a specialist worker in place to provide guidance to the relevant teams on the status of kinship placements

- Was there a timeframe for the achievements of developments identified in the review to be undertaken?

There were many innovations and developments in the service. Mockingbird had commenced and the service were aiming for a fifth hub by end of year.

The latest innovation had successfully gained a place of the second wave of lifelong links for long term looked after young people. Lifelong links identified young people aged 13-16 where there was little prospect of returning home or adoption in care long term. This would facilitate a family group conference co-ordinator "eco mapping" the life of the young person. All those people involved in their life would be invited to contribute and have some commitment to continued involvement. The first strategic meeting would take place on Friday, 8th March where the first cohort of twelve would be identified.

- Was there an action plan timeframe that could be measured?

Each case would have an action plan and tracker where any slippage would be monitored. The Right Child, Right Care 1 was complete and Right Child, Right Care 2 was being driven forward. All projects were tracked and project managed, with performance meetings arranged to monitor and overcome barriers and blockages.

- Was there a separate action plan in the peer review report.

Some detail could be provided on the actions as not all were projects and some were one-off processes.

- Was this being monitored through Corporate Parenting Panel.

Some of the performance was monitored through the Corporate Parenting Panel and some through the Performance Board.

- There was a 12 week window from the start of a PLO (Public Law Outline) meeting, to a children being taken into care.. Were there any external factors which were having an impact on timescales and outcomes?

The time was set by the Local Authority to a final decision in 26 weeks. Court timetabling across South Yorkshire and its capacity impacted on timescales and the ability to discharge care orders. An issues resolution hearing had been negotiated and this dealt with some of the discharge hearings dealt rather than a full hearing as long as CAFASS were satisfied.

- The service endeavoured to do work within 12 week window were it was safe and proportionate and safe to do so. Sometimes it was done in less time and in complex cases it took longer.

Perhaps it would be helpful to the Select Commission to understand the legal aspects around children's social care in the form of a presentation at a later date. This would provide greater understanding of the process and challenges, areas of good performance and areas that needed to improve.

Resolved:- (1) That officers be thanked for their informative presentation.

(2) That the report and presentation be received and the contents noted.

(3) That arrangements be made in the future for a presentation on the legal aspects of children's social care.

63. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday, 16th April, 2019 at 5.30 p.m.