

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 27 July 2021

Present:- Councillor Pitchley (in the Chair); Councillors Cooksey, The Mayor (Councillor Jenny Andrews), Aveyard, Barley, Burnett, Browne, C Carter, Collingham, Hughes, Khan, Singleton, Thompson and Wilson.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors R. Elliott, Griffin, Haleem and Monk.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2021

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 15 June 2021 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items that required the exclusion of the public or press.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

15. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications.

16. DOMESTIC ABUSE - IDENTIFYING HIDDEN VICTIMS

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services attended the meeting to provide a report on the how the Council worked to identify and support hidden victims of domestic abuse. At the meeting of the Improving lives Select Commission held on 26 January 2021 it had been resolved to receive further information on work surrounding how hidden victims of abuse were identified (Minute No.133 2020/21).

In introducing the report and presentation the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services noted the Council's long-term commitment to supporting and identifying victims of domestic abuse and the role that the Improving Lives Select Commission had had in inputting

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into the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy.

The Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services noted how the implementation of Domestic Abuse Act 2021 had placed new responsibilities on local authorities with regards to domestic abuse, and as such the work that had been carried out on the refresh of the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy had needed to be extended in order to take account of the new requirements. The Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services advised that a key objective of the domestic abuse support services was to increase the number of domestic abuse victims accessing support.

In introducing the presentation, the Head of Community Safety advised that while the Home Office had estimated that there were approximately 20,000 incidents of domestic abuse in Rotherham each year that in 2020 the Police had recorded 6,878 incidents and reiterated that in many cases victims will suffer a number of incidents before reporting issues to the Police. The Head of Community Safety advised that in addition, a lower number of referrals come through to DA support services than can be seen from Police incidents, while much of the difference between these figures would be due to repeated incidents involving the same victims and perpetrators, the figures did show that there remains a gap between incidents of domestic violence and victims receiving or accepting support.

The presentation provided information on:

- Incidents of domestic abuse in Rotherham in 2020 and the number of victims who accessed support.
- Additional services provided in Rotherham, including the programme that worked with perpetrators of domestic abuse and multi-agency working.
- Activity carried out to raise awareness and increase access to support services.
- Training activity that had been carried out with delivery partners.
- Deaths related to domestic abuse and the response to these incidents, including domestic homicide reviews.
- The recommissioning of domestic abuse support services in Rotherham, outcome from the market engagement and the proposed domestic abuse pathway in Rotherham.

The Head of Community Safety noted that the Council and the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP) also prioritise issues surrounding female genital mutilation and so-called honour related abuse and assured members that these issues were being monitored carefully. The Head of Community Safety noted that further work was needed to raise awareness of these issues with the public and that with the refresh of the SRP

Strategy these issues would likely be a priority for the partnership in future.

The Cabinet Member advised how cross directorate working had developed in order to meet the challenges of dealing with domestic abuse in Rotherham and noted the importance of work with schools in delivering age-appropriate education on what healthy relationships looked like. The Chair agreed that early intervention work was essential in the Council's response to reducing the number of victims of domestic abuse. The Assistant Director – Early Help and Family Engagement, who was in attendance at the meeting noted that questions around domestic abuse were contained in the Early Help assessment process and advised that Early Help staff were trained on the issue of domestic abuse.

Members welcomed the recognition of male victims of domestic abuse in the Council's response to domestic abuse and asked how confident the Council was that the police and delivery partners shared this focus. Members also asked what percentage of known victims of domestic abuse were male. The Head of Community Safety noted that around 30% of victims were male and assured members that he was confident that male victims of domestic abuse were a focus of partners but also noted that there would always be scope for doing more. The Head of Community Safety noted that it was always more challenging to identify male victims due to issues around the stigma of being a victim and a reluctance to come forward. The Head of Community Safety provided information on how dispersed properties across the Borough were available to male victims of domestic abuse as well as other victims, who could not be placed in the main women-only refuge building. The Chair noted that from her experience of working with victims of domestic abuse as part of her ward member casework that she was confident that the services could effectively support all victims who came forward.

Members sought further information on the training that was provided and delivered on domestic abuse with delivery partners regarding its content and where and how it was delivered.

Members asked how the figure provided by the Home Office on the number of incidents of domestic abuse in Rotherham had been arrived at. The Head of Community Safety advised that the figure had been based on research carried out with victims, the police and partner organisations. Members sought assurance regarding the strength of the Council's relationship with police and delivery partners involved in providing the response to domestic abuse. The Head of Community Safety assured members that the relationship between the Council and delivery partners was positive, and as such enable an integrated strong response to be taken towards the issue of domestic abuse. The Head of Community Safety also noted the strong relationship with schools that meant that in all reported cases of domestic abuse where children were involved that the relevant schools were alerted to the situation.

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Members asked for further information on how survivors of CSE who had subsequently been impacted by domestic abuse were supported. The Head of Community Safety assured members that the model of service delivery was able to meet these needs and advised that the services provided to all victims of domestic abuse were based on the need to recognise past trauma when delivering support.

Members noted the importance of language used around the issue of domestic abuse and how it was essential that terms such as “honour-based violence” were not used as the use of such terms added an element of legitimacy to what were violent and abusive acts.

Members asked for further information on what activity was happening around other types of domestic abuse such as elder abuse or abuse by children of their parents. The Head of Community Safety advised that as the recognised definition of domestic abuse as defined in legislation was now much wider and encompassing this type of abuse, more victims would be able to access support services. The Head of Community Safety noted that despite this change referrals for support for victims of this type of abuse were low and activity would be focused on this area in future to encourage more victims to access support. The Cabinet Member emphasised that it was essential that a clear message was conveyed that any form of abuse in any relationship was ever acceptable.

Members asked for further information on how successful the perpetrator programme had been and how its success was measured. The Head of Community Safety noted that the programme had shown good initial results but advised that it was too early in its delivery to be able to assess whether it had led to any long-term changes in behaviour. The Head of Community Safety advised that while the programme was subject to performance monitoring, that most importantly success would be measured by tracking the longer-term outcomes of those who had participated on the programme.

Members asked how services had been impacted by the pandemic. The Head of Community Safety advised that services had been maintained with face-to-face services being provided in line with the varying levels of restrictions throughout the pandemic.

Members sought assurance about the ongoing supply of emergency accommodation. The Head of Community Safety advised that there was and would continue to be sufficient supply but noted that it was hoped that the use of hotel rooms would be reduced as more appropriate accommodation became available. It was noted that with the new responsibilities for local authorities that had been included in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 that there had also been an increase in allocated funding that could be used to support the provision of appropriate emergency accommodation. The Cabinet Member noted that the ultimately the best solution was to allow victims to be safe and to remain in their own home.

The Chair asked about the activity that had been carried out to promote the support services that had been available during the periods of pandemic related restrictions. The Head of Community Safety detailed the diverse range of locations where services had been promoted and advised that activity, including multiagency working and meetings had been stepped up during the pandemic. Members asked whether the increased promotional activity had increased the level of referrals for support. The Head of Community Safety advised that demand for services and the number of domestic abuse incidents in Rotherham had been similar to demand seen in other areas with demand remaining at even level throughout the pandemic, and as such it difficult to see exactly how increased levels of promotion had impacted on demand.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That members of the Improving Lives Select Commission be further consulted on the development of the revised Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- 3) That further information on the number of incidents and their outcomes related to female genital mutilation and so called "honour-based" violence be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.
- 4) That further information on work conducted with perpetrators of domestic abuse be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.
- 5) That consideration be given to providing all elected members the opportunity to access an appropriate training session on domestic abuse.

17. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2021/22.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the Work Programme be updated as discussed.
- 2) That the Work Programme for 2020/21 be approved.

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18. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - SUB AND PROJECT GROUP UPDATES

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

19. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

20. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on Tuesday 21 September 2021 at 10am at Rotherham Town Hall