

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 12 September 2023

Present:- Councillor Pitchley (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Bacon, Baker-Rogers, Barley, Bennett-Sylvester, Cooksey, Z.Collingham, Griffin, Haleem, Hughes, McNeely, Monk, Wilson, and Mills.

Apologies for absence:- No apologies were received.

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

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

107. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 25 JULY 2023

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 25 July 2023 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

108. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

109. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items of business on the agenda that required the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

110. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

111. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair advised that all the items regarding communication were covered on the agenda.

112. CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL - UPDATE

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel was scheduled for the afternoon of the 12th September 2023 and

consideration would be given to the following items during the meeting:

- An update on Fostering Recruitment and Retention.
- An update on the Fostering Panel Review.
- An update on the Statement of Intent for Corporate Parenting.
- An update on the Independent Reviewing Officer Report.
- An update on the Local Authority Designated Officer Report.
- An update on Performance Monitoring for the period of quatre one, 2023/2024.

The Chair advised that a further update on this meeting would be provided to Members at the next Improving Lives Select Commission meeting.

113. WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION UPDATE

This item provided an update to members on the progress against the Written Statement of Action, following on from support and challenge meeting five, with the Department for Education and the National Health Service England.

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to the meeting. The Cabinet Member advised there had been many capital investments and improvements which were shared with the Commission at previous meetings. The Written Statement of Action judgement received in July 2021, had provided an opportunity for the service to be held to account and make improvements on the four areas of identified weaknesses. Re-assurance was provided that the service was in a much better place because of the improvements.

The Chair welcomed Nathan Heath, Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion, Tracey Jubb, Interim Head of Special Educational Needs and

Disabilities (SEND), Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead and Jayne Fitzgerald, Strategic Manager for Rotherham Parent Carers Forum.

The Chair invited Nathan Heath and Mark Cummins to introduce the report and give the presentation.

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion advised that the accountability, challenge, and support provided to the service by the Improving Lives Select Commission, had directly impacted the Written Statement of Action. There had been a clear commitment by the service to ensure regular updates were provided to the Commission after every Department for Education meeting. The presentation would cover an update from the most recent meeting, meeting five. Meeting five was important as it included the sign off for the Written Statement of Action and the transition from improvement to business as usual. The importance of lived experience was highlighted, with a commitment provided that the service would continue to check and measure with lived experience at all appropriate points in the future.

The presentation gave an overview of the following content:

- After the July 2021 inspection, it was identified that there were four main areas of weakness and as a result it was decided that Rotherham should have a Written Statement of Action.
- The four main areas of weakness identified were as follows:
 - The variability in the quality of Education and Health Care Plans, including the contribution of health and social care partners.
 - The effectiveness of the graduated response to identify and meet children and young people's needs, especially in key stages one and two.
 - The quality of provision for children and young people's preparation for, and transition to, adulthood.

- Communication with all parents and carers of children and young people with SEND about the local offer, and the accessibility of the very valuable information included within the local offer.
- A comprehensive governance structure was in place and each area of identified weakness was led by a sub-group with its own membership, action plan and key performance measures. Monthly highlight reports were produced and presented to the SEND Executive Group, who ensured sufficient progress against the Written Statement of Action. Regular updates were provided to the CYPS Performance Board and SEND Partnership Board. The Department for Education and National Health Service England held five support and challenge meetings, to measure progress against the Written Statement of Action. Each meeting was supported by a note of visit, with feedback on progress and recommendations for the next period.
- The most recent support and challenge meeting, meeting five, was held on the 5th of June 2023 and it provided an emphasis on demonstrating evidence of impact and outcomes, moving on from the implementation phase of the Written Statement of Action. Comments from the draft note of visit following on from the meeting, suggested that Rotherham had made considerable progress in its focus on 'impact', which related primarily to the day-to-day lived experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families. Following support and challenge meeting five, it was confirmed that Rotherham would not be subject to a re-visit based on progress against the Written Statement of Action, instead any re-inspection would form part of the timetable under the new framework. It was also confirmed that the support and challenge process would be reduced, with further actions and activity being aligned to business-as-usual monitoring.
- Throughout the Written Statement of Action journey, the service collected evidence of impact through a centralised evidence bank,

this would be continued to support with inspection readiness. All Written Statement of Actions were formally signed off through the Evidence Challenge Panel process. The performance monitoring pack submitted as part of Rotherham's Written Statement of Action was shared by the Department for Education, with other local authorities as best practice. At regular points the service captured the voice of parents and/or carers and young people, through the delivery of listening events and working closely with Rotherham Parent Carer's Forum, who are key members of the Written Statement of Action sub-groups and governance structure.

- The current position of the Written Statement of Action had been presented as part of the Children and Young People's Service Performance Board, with actions continuing to be formally signed off as part of the Evidence Challenge Panel process. Sub-groups were reviewing their terms of reference, membership, and action plans, in line with the SEND Development Plan for Rotherham. This ensured that progress against each area would be maintained, with work continuing to be overseen by the SEND Executive Group. A SEND Inspection Planning Group had been established to identify key activity and planning to support inspection readiness, this included development of the SEND Self Evaluation Framework. On-going learning from the process of the Written Statement of Action would continue to influence the SEND Development work, with an increased focus on capturing evidence of impact and outcomes.
- The service would continue to strive towards continuous improvement, to ensure every child in Rotherham with additional needs would get the best possible education to reach their full potential.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- The monthly meetings were internal meetings that were separate to the support and challenge meetings. The support and challenge meetings were where The Department for Education challenged the service on their progress.
- The governance arrangements established during the process of the Written Statement of Action would continue.
- The inspection in 2021 judged the service on how far they had progressed on SEND between 2014 and 2021 and it was acknowledged that during this timeframe, the service had not progressed to the required level. The judgement in 2021 helped the service provide the right improvements in the right areas of weaknesses. Reassurance was provided that the service was aware of where further improvements were still required and the strategies being developed were not in isolation.
- As the service would move into the next part of the sustainable improvement journey, there would be challenges that sat against the national context. There was a challenge regarding inclusion in mainstream education, both for children with EHCP's and those on SEND support, this was a national, regional and Rotherham central challenge. This challenge required further improvements to embed a graduated approach and to hold accountability to a good provisional map, to ensure children received the best offer.
- Sufficiency of provision was a huge challenge, any funding provided to the local authority in relation to SEND, was based on growing provision and not the material quality of provision. The complexity of needs and best practise had changed distinctly within the last five years, significant investment was required to have the best quality provision within Rotherham.
- Another challenge was a wider level of needs, as social, emotional, and mental health had grown post-pandemic. Previously the service was in a position where the most complex needs were educated outside of Rotherham, there was now a social, emotional, and mental health school in Rotherham.

- Over the next twelve months a SEND Strategy would be developed, and the Improving Lives Select Commission would be involved in the process. There was still a large amount of work to do, but the service was in a much better position, and it now had the ability to be able to self-evaluate any weaknesses in a measured way.
- A lack of provision was challenging to the service, the service adopted a considered approach and there was a strong operational process for the SEND Panel, who ensure the approach was always child centred.
- There were some areas where provision mapping was accelerating, for example over the summer period the service had worked with Nexus Academy Trust to re-purpose a council building, which was previously the Rowan Centre, to create additional provision within the Borough.
- The Council's Cabinet had taken forward proposals discussed in June, to develop a new line of accessibility funding, which had not been available before in Rotherham. The funding would be available for schools that had an identified level of SEND need for small scale investment. This would be match funded by the local authority, to create provision that would enhance the SEND offer within the school. This was a different approach to other local authorities and was seen as very innovative, it would provide schools with the appropriate support, capacity, and tools to provide the right level of SEND support. The application process for the accessibility funding was being cascaded to all schools within Rotherham.
- The Written Statement of Action was based on quality, although the timeliness of EHCP's was considered as an area requiring significant improvement. The sub-group had developed an audit process to ensure a rigid oversight was in place, ensuring that there was a strong level of compliance within the EHCP and that the targets were SMART and tangibly linked to lived experience.

There had been a huge level of investment within the timeliness of EHCP's such as, continuous professional development, a distinct change of staffing model to work in localities and building personal relationships with schools. The timeliness for compliance with EHCP's had improved drastically and the service had moved significantly above national averages in the most recent performance period. There were further improvements required around reviews to ensure key points of transition had a focus on supporting children with the next step, although the metrics were stronger than they have been previously.

- Regarding pupil premiums, the service had significant confidence that the pupil premium funding would be utilised in a defined way. The OFSTED inspection process asked schools how they had utilised the funding and what impact that had.

Resolved:- That

- 1) The Improving Lives Select Commission accept the report and note the progress made following the final support and challenge meeting as part of the Joint Written Statement of Action.
- 2) The Improving Lives Select Commission note the planned activity and progress as part of preparation for inspection under the new framework and SEND Development plan for Rotherham.
- 3) Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission welcome the opportunity to visit Kimberworth Place, date to be confirmed.

114. ROTHERHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT

This item provided an update on the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (RSCP) 2022-2023 Annual Report.

The Chair welcomed Laura Gough, Head of Service for Safeguarding Children and Families, Darren Downs, Independent Chair and Scrutineer of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Laura

Koscikiewicz District Commander at South Yorkshire Police. The Chair invited Darren Downs to give the presentation.

The presentation gave an overview of the following content:

- The report was very comprehensive and celebrated the achievements made, alongside the required improvements and future areas of focus. There was a real strength in the quality of the RSCP and the engagement levels within it.
- Performance and scrutiny were areas of improvement for the RSCP, this included a specific focus on measuring impacts.
- There was a focus on the wider partnership in relation to challenge and accountability, specifically within the voluntary and community sector.
- Capturing the voice of children was a key focus, this would include inviting young people along to the RSCP day, to be held in November.
- In relation to the previous year, there had been excellent inspection grades across the RSCP, which were good indicators of the direction of travel. The Evolve Team had also received good grading throughout the Childrens Services Grading Inspection. South Yorkshire Police were graded as excellent in relation to protecting vulnerable people.
- The RSCP had consulted on future priorities and the report detailed the four future priorities for the RSCP, which were, exploitation, neglect, performance and safeguarding. Each priority had a sub-group that reported to the partnership, these groups would continue to evolve over time.
- The RSCP had a focus on continuing to develop the inspection work for audits, such as quarterly dip-sampling activities.
- Rotherham would be hosting Safeguarding Awareness Week in November; this would promote the work completed in Rotherham across South Yorkshire. The RSCP was also in the process of

developing an annual learning event, which would take place early next year.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- The reduction in child protection plans was due to an increase in early intervention by the RSCP. There had been high investments into the Early Help Programme, in terms of resources and training for staff and wider community groups. The family group conference process and family group meetings had also been heavily invested in.
- Training was an area of focus, specifically around digital safety which continued to evolve. Regular training was on-going for the RSCP.
- There was internal training completed by all individual agencies and organisations within the RSCP. For example, South Yorkshire Police had held specific training around digital awareness and spotting the signs of exploitation.
- The RSCP had focused on keeping children safe at home, safe in communities and ensuring safe systems. There had been situations where keeping a child safe within their home had been a better outcome in the long term for the child. Keeping a child within their home had sometimes increased risk and the RSCP role was to provide the family with the relevant guidance and support to manage that risk. The latest figures showed that out of all the children on child protection plans, only one had evolved to a looked after child. This highlighted that the management within the community and within the home was working effectively.
- The RSCP had committed to dip-sampling individual cases on a quarterly basis, to continue learning from experiences and ensure improvements.
- In Rotherham, organisations were very good at working together to

keep children safe. There were several groups that worked together to keep children safe. For example, children in need were supported by a team across the RSCP, children on child protection plans were supported by a core group and high-risk children were supported by MACE. This had a significant impact on the reduction of child protection numbers.

- The number of repeat children missing from home was much lower in Rotherham, than in the rest of South Yorkshire. The number of high-risk children missing from home was also much lower than statistical neighbours. This was because the RSCP identified needs and vulnerabilities earlier and placed a multi-agency response around the child to reduce potential harms.
- The service had now recruited to the post of Safeguarding Education Lead, to ensure children are kept safe in Education.
- The Local Government Association was currently working towards the development of a register of children who are being electively home educated, this would make it easier for safeguarding checks to be completed.
- There were on-going changes in the guidance and legislation, an example was provided that the Working Together Review and Refresh would be released in the near future, this would provide further clarity around the thresholds and legal responsibilities.
- The report discussed 'a disconnect with health colleagues' this related to the threshold for risk of significant harm, which was not always in alignment with social care. Clarification was provided that this was in relation to the application and definition of thresholds. The Healthcare Service was a complex system with many different specialisms, the definition of 'significant harm' to one medical professional differed to another medical professional's definition. Therefore, meeting the threshold of 'significant harm' would sometimes be dependent on which part of the Healthcare Service an individual visited. Work was being completed within the Healthcare System to ensure the threshold was applied equally

across all services.

- The MASH Baby Clinic that was set up on a temporary basis to manage thresholds and ensure early identification, was now continuing as a permanent measure.
- The RSCP would always continue their gold standard response to child sexual exploitation. The response to child sexual exploitation was identified as gold standard by His Majesties Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Ofsted. The Policing Advisor to the Prime Minister visited the Evolve Team and advised that the work delivered by the team was a best practise model. South Yorkshire Police were now applying the Evolve Model developed in Rotherham, to Barnsley, Sheffield, and Doncaster.
- The neglect subgroup was working on understanding what areas of neglect were showing the biggest increases, to establish prioritisation of those identified areas. The cost-of-living crisis was discussed at the Wider Partnership, it was noted that the healthcare service and voluntary sector both had roles to play regarding neglect and the cost-of-living crisis. Safeguarding Awareness Week would involve discussions around the cost-of-living crisis and information on what support was available. South Yorkshire Police had also completed training with all officers to ensure they were re-educated on the cost-of-living crisis, this enabled officers to complete assessments which identified the support and help that was required.
- Neurodiversity was an area for the partnership to track and to improve the understanding across the RSCP and wider professionals.
- The safeguarding and education sub-group would focus on the voice of the child and the school. A high number of referrals and information around exploitation were provided by peers. This was positive as it highlighted the good work of the education programmes across Rotherham, such as Crucial Crew.

Resolved:- That

- 1) The Improving Lives Select Commission accept the report and note the progress made.
- 2) The Improving Lives Select Commission requested feedback following the conclusion of the Safeguarding Awareness Week which was taking place in November in Rotherham.
- 3) The Improving Lives Select Commission welcomed the opportunity to visit the MASH hub, date to be confirmed.
- 4) The Improving Lives Select Commission requested an off agenda briefing to provide more detailed information regarding the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership 3-year plan (2023-2026).

115. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme, and the Chair provided the following update:

- Elective Home Education had been removed from the Work Programme for the next meeting on the 31st October 2023, as it was proposed that this be looked at as a sub-group.
- The item on Domestic Abuse had been added to the Commissions agenda for the meeting on the 5th December 2023.
- The Work Programme would be added to the agenda for each meeting for comment and refinement.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme for 2023-2024 be approved.

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

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity which included the following:

- The sub-group for Elective Home Education was under

construction and an expression of interest would be circulated to all members in due course.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

117. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

118. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission would take place on 31 October 2023 commencing at 10am in Rotherham Town Hall.

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission take place on 31 October 2023 commencing at 10am in Rotherham Town Hall.