

**IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION**  
**Tuesday 28 April 2026**

Present:- Councillor Monk (in the Chair); Councillors Adair, Blackham, Bower, Brent, Clarke, T. Collingham, Elliott, Fisher, Harper, Hughes, Pitchley, Sutton and Mr. M. Hemmingway and Ms. L. Hickey.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Garnett and Ismail and Mr. J. Newman.

Also in attendance were:-

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader  
Darren Downs, Independent Chair  
Kelly White, Service Director and Link Officer  
Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding  
Stuart Williams, Service Director for Children's Social Care  
Chief Superintendent Andy Wright, South Yorkshire Police

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

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

**48. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2026 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

**49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**50. 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.

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

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

**52. CORPORATE PARENTING PARTNERSHIP BOARD UPDATE**

Councillor Brent, Vice-Chair, provided an overview of the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board held on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2026.

The Chair thanked Elected Members for their support and kind words offered at a recent extraordinary meeting of Full Council, where foster carer Christine Lunn had been awarded the Freedom of the Borough in

recognition of her outstanding contribution to children and young people in Rotherham over more than fifty years as a foster carer.

The Service Director presented the Action Log, Work Programme, and the Forward Plan for 2026/27. Members also requested the inclusion of an additional item at the May 2026 meeting to receive an update on the Residential Development Programme, which had been a priority focus for Children and Young People's Services throughout 2025.

The Service Director presented the Annual Report 2025, which had previously been shared for feedback. As this was the first annual report produced by the Board, Members welcomed it, although the Chair noted that future reports would be brought forward earlier to allow greater Member input.

Virtual Head Teachers attended to present the Virtual School Annual Report, providing a comprehensive overview of achievement, attendance, progress, and aspirations for children in care.

The Board then received an update on preparation for adulthood, including a presentation on how children in care were supported into adulthood and the care leaver offer.

A further update was provided by Adult Social Care, outlining support for children with additional and complex needs transitioning into adulthood. This demonstrated effective partnership working between Children and Young People's Services and Adult Social Care.

The Head of Service then presented the Q3 Performance on a Page, after which the Chair invited discussion on reviewing priority areas for 2026/27, the commencement of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2027/30, associated working groups and the potential for a children and young people takeover event.

The meeting concluded with a video presentation prepared by the Children's Care Group, focusing on preparation for adulthood. The children delivered a game-show-style "Beat the Buzzer" presentation, highlighting what they felt was most important in terms of support as they moved into adulthood.

Resolved:- That the update be received and the contents noted.

### **53. CORPORATE PARENTING PARTNERSHIP BOARD ANNUAL REPORT**

Consideration was given to the first Corporate Parenting Partnership Board Annual Report, introduced by the Cabinet Member/Deputy Leader which had been brought to Improving Lives Scrutiny to outline progress made over the past year in fulfilling corporate parenting responsibilities.

The report provided assurance on how partners had worked together to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers, highlighting key achievements, challenges and the impact of partnership working. Corporate parenting was a shared responsibility across the Council and its partners and thanks were given to all contributors including young people.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting:-

- Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader
- Stuart Williams, Service Director for Children's Social Care

Stuart Williams, Service Director for Children's Social Care, in presenting the Annual Report outlined that it captured the collective work of the local authority, partners and young people over the previous twelve months, focusing on delivering high-quality, consistent care and support for children in care and care-experienced young people. He highlighted the significant achievements of the year, the priority areas for the year ahead and reaffirmed the Council's ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for children in care.

By way of the presentation included in the agenda pack, the following was highlighted:-

- Purpose of the report.
- What was Corporate Parenting.
- Key Achievements in 2025.
- Ofsted Inspection – November, 2025.
- Priorities for 2026.

A discussion and answer session ensued with Improving Lives Members and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- How had the redesigned Corporate Parenting Partnership Board impacted outcomes across education, health, emotional wellbeing and preparation for independence, noting the positive external validation that had been received.

The Service Director for Children's Social Care explained that the redesign of the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board had been guided by two overarching priorities. The first was ensuring consistent and meaningful engagement with children and young people so that they set the tone and identified priority areas.

This was supported by a robust range of evidence, including quality assurance data, audit activity and peer review, to inform a comprehensive self-assessment of priorities.

The second priority was restructuring the Board's work around six clear priority themes. Each meeting focused on a themed priority

with children and young people undertaking work on that theme outside meetings and meeting directly with the Champion Member and Lead Officer. Their feedback was then reported back to the full Board, ensuring they were central to decision-making and acted as the measure of success. This approach enabled dedicated focus on specific areas, such as education, employment and training, supported by presentations from senior education officers and virtual school heads. It was also noted strengthened corporate ownership across the wider Council and partner organisations.

The Cabinet Member also added that the use of Champion Members and Link Officers reflected good practice and enabled meaningful work to take place between meetings, recognising both the limited number of meetings each year and the need to ensure children's participation was purposeful.

It was noted that themes had been developed collaboratively with children and young people, allowing progress between meetings. Following the LGA peer review, more senior decision-makers had been present at meetings, improving responsiveness and reducing delays. Housing was cited as an example where senior attendance had enabled practical issues to be resolved more quickly. This redesign was described as a catalyst that had driven corporate parenting forward at pace.

- What tangible examples of improved outcomes had arisen from the redesign of the Board.

The Service Director for Children's Social Care highlighted two key examples. First, children and young people had contributed directly to foster carer training by shaping learning on what made a good foster carer. This work had influenced the "Skills to Foster" programme and had been particularly impactful for prospective carers. Second, priorities identified by care-experienced young people had informed changes to the housing allocations policy, helping translate young people's views into operational policy change.

The Cabinet Member provided further assurance by noting that she had visited other local authorities, including Southampton and Middlesbrough, to observe their corporate parenting arrangements and that a lead member from Doncaster was due to observe Rotherham's Board, reflecting recognition of effective practice.

The Head of Safeguarding highlighted the developmental benefits for young people involved in the Board, describing increased confidence, presentation skills and inclusion.

Examples included a young person receiving a Children's Champion award during Safeguarding Awareness Week and the growth of the

Young Journalists group, which had interviewed senior leaders and produced newsletters.

- Clarification was sought on children in care 2025 placement data on page 24 of the agenda pack, particularly the distinction between in-house and in-borough provision of 53% and 47%.

The Service Director for Children's Social Care explained that in-house provision referred to Council-approved foster carers and Council-run residential homes, whilst non-in-house placements were typically commissioned through independent fostering providers. Furthermore, placements not classed as in-house could still be within Rotherham with placement decisions driven by children's best interests given careful scrutiny. Details of the placement data for children and young people would be collated and circulated.

- Should community support be sought before opening new children's residential homes.

The Cabinet Member explained that engagement with Ward Councillors took place where possible, but that children's homes were typically small domestic properties and planning and regulatory constraints limited broader consultation. It was emphasised that children's welfare was prioritised and that community understanding often improved once homes were established.

Further discussion focused on challenging public misconceptions about children in care and residential provision. Members acknowledged the need to change narratives while protecting children's privacy.

Detail was provided on how home managers supported children's inclusion in local communities through everyday activities that promoted belonging and wellbeing.

The Cabinet Member asked if there were instances where Ward Members were not being engaged in processes then if the details could be forwarded she would look into it.

- Within the work done by the Cabinet Member around the country was there any examples of a Local Authority or an independent fostering authority that had managed to tell its story in a way that was sensitive to the fact that these children had a right to privacy and how this narrative could be changed.

The Cabinet Member referred to the LGA's Children and Families Committee and the mix of views and challenges around Post 16 residential placements.

The key issue appeared to be around Planning and how this narrative and language could be changed by working with young people and the challenges they faced when coming into care.

The Cabinet Member agreed to take the views back to see if any changes were possible to the narrative surrounding children in care and care leavers and how it could be positively reframed to challenge stigma and dispel common myths.

The Service Director for Early Help explained that there was something particularly important about how children's homes engaged with local communities. It was noted that highly skilled managers ran the homes and were actively involved in their local areas. Positive examples of children being integrated into their communities in ordinary but meaningful ways were provided, such as playing locally, building relationships with neighbours and being invited to birthday parties. Although these examples might appear small, they were highly significant for children in care and should be available to all children. Furthermore, it was important for managers and staff to feel part of the community and this was the narrative being supported across all homes.

An observation was shared where recently a young person in a meeting had shared a powerful account of their housing experiences, demonstrating the impact of the redesign and reinforced that the new approach was driving meaningful change.

- The inclusion of named leads against actions in the action plan was welcomed, but clarification was sought on actions awaiting start dates or delayed when reading from the RAG status on Page 35 of the document pack.

The Service Director for Social Care confirmed the action plan was a live document, reviewed regularly, with progress with each Champion Officer discussed at monthly 1:1 meetings. The updates were then collated into a report that was then presented to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board at each meeting. Some of the delays reflected ambition to meet young people's expectations, such as developing an app rather than a basic alternative.

Officers were working extremely hard with partners and the plan would evolve over time with new actions included that aligned to the new priorities for 2026/27.

The Cabinet Member welcomed the positive step to have a named person to lead on key actions which reflected the changes of personnel. In addition, there had also been progress on making meetings more accessible for young people with the inclusion of video pen portraits of Board members identifying who they were, what their role was and likes and dislikes. This made Board

Members more human to young people and hopefully would encourage greater feedback and a willingness to attend meetings with an eventual takeover challenge and an agenda set accordingly.

The more work that could be done with the young journalists and the setting up of a communications team would provide more engagement and communication with the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board and the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. From the recent Ofsted visit, Inspectors were impressed with the capturing the voice of the young person. It may not be possible to provide all what young people were requesting and manage their expectations, but where any requests made could not be met the young people would be advised why it could not be achieved.

- Concern was raised about reliance on independent fostering agencies and the proportion of children in in-house provision and what action could be taken to lessen the use of independent fostering agencies.

The Service Director for Social Care explained that increasing in-house provision was a clear priority and outlined the strong recruitment, retention and support for foster carers, alongside innovative training aligned to children's needs.

In terms of recruitment activity across Yorkshire and Humber, Rotherham was very strong in terms of the amount of applicants and the conversion rate to approval. Rotherham's offer was good and whilst the pace of recruitment had slowed, this was the case nationally. There was still work to be undertaken and this remained a Children and Young People's Services and a Council priority.

The Cabinet Member further added that Rotherham compared favourably with national averages and remained committed to increasing in-house provision. Foster carers genuinely appreciated the amount of support provided by Rotherham and every effort would be made to increase the provision further.

The discussion concluded with consideration of proactive, programme-level communication to address misconceptions about children's homes.

Members suggested broader engagement, including with parish councils, and it was acknowledged there may be a requirement to reflect further on how narrative change could be strengthened whilst still maintaining privacy and regulatory requirements.

The Service Director for Social Care described the engagement with local residents as being an absolute priority when looking at in-house provision. The difficulty was that from a process perspective it had to be managed with clear provision on how this was launched

and operated. It was an expectation that ongoing discussions would take place with Ward Members, but not with residents until further in the process post planning and post Ofsted registration. This had to be balanced and whilst the privacy of children in care had to be maintained, they had the same rights as the wider cohort of children and young people within Rotherham as community members.

There was often some misconception within the community about a children's home, but a good children's home should blend into a community. That was a sign of success.

Location of a children's home was key and it would not be where young people were fundamentally unsafe. However, this needed to be managed in terms of the process and the checks and balances that run alongside. Every location was risk assessed and all homes Ofsted validated.

- Managing the misconception about children's provision earlier to make it easier for them to integrate successfully into a community.

The Service Director for Social Care reiterated that in terms of in-house provision communication with communities was limited, but later in the journey when submitting an application to Ofsted

The Cabinet Member would pick up on liaising with Parish Councils, but reiterated the suggestion around the narrative surrounding children in care and care leavers in the overall programme.

The Chair thanked Members for the discussion and the presentation and information by officers.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the progress by the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board be noted.

(2) That the areas of focus for 2026 also be noted.

(3) That a breakdown of the Children in Care 2025 placement numbers be provided.

(4) That the Cabinet Member be tasked with asking the LGA's Children and Families Committee if they were aware of any work being undertaken to change the narrative surrounding children in care and care leavers and how it could be positively reframed to challenge stigma and dispel common myths.

#### **54. CHILD EXPLOITATION STRATEGY 2024-29**

Consideration was given to the report which outlined progress against the objectives in the Strategy at the conclusion of the second of the five years following approval by Cabinet in July 2024.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting:-

- Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader
- Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding
- Kelly White, Service Director and Link Officer
- Darren Downs, Independent Chair
- Chief Superintendent Andy Wright, South Yorkshire Police

The Cabinet Member had pleasure in presenting the Child Exploitation Strategy

progress update and explained how the strategy outlined the multi-agency approach to preventing, identifying and responding to all forms of child exploitation. The strategy had a strong focus on early intervention, partnership working and listening to the voices and experiences of children and young people, but also recognised the evolving nature of exploitation and the need for a co-ordinated and trauma-informed response across safeguarding partners.

The strategy also set clear priorities and shared responsibilities to ensure that children at risk were protected, supported and able to recover, while exploitation was prevented, disrupted and responded to through co-ordinated partnership working.

The strategy embedded trauma-informed practise within specialist exploitation and safeguarding services and the delivery of this was recognised by Ofsted.

Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding, walked the Commission through the presentation which had been circulated with the agenda pack and highlighted:-

**The definition of the Strategy:-**

- Child exploitation is not easily defined.
- Multiple forms of harm which are exploitative, including child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, radicalisation and trafficking.
- A common thread in all exploitation of children is using an imbalance of power to manipulate, coerce or control a child to make them behave in way which the exploitative adult wants, for their own benefit.

**The duties of the Strategy:-**

- The Council has a duty to safeguard children and provide services to children and their families to promote their welfare.
- The Council also has a duty to work with partner agencies and partner agencies have a duty to work with the Council to keep children safe.
- Exploitation of children is a pernicious crime and the Council's

commitment to tackling it remains unwavering, as does our commitment to listen and learn from past mistakes.

### **The background to the Strategy:-**

- July 2024 – Cabinet approved the *Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29: A Vision for Managing Risk Outside The Home*.
- The Strategy is delivered through the Child Exploitation Delivery Group (CEDG), within Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- CEDG is chaired by Detective Superintendent Anna Sedgwick. There are working groups which report into CEDG, and a link to the operational Child Exploitation Tactical Group.

### **Rotherham's Safeguarding Children's Partnership:-**

- Under the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, the Lead Safeguarding Partners are:-
  1. The Chief Executive of Rotherham MBC
  2. The Chief Executive of South Yorkshire ICB
  3. The Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police
- The Delegated Safeguarding Partners are:-
  1. Strategic Director, Children's Services, Rotherham MBC
  2. Director of Nursing, South Yorkshire ICB
  3. Chief Superintendent for Rotherham, South Yorkshire Police

There is also an Independent Chair and Scrutineer for RSCP, Darren Downs.

### **Governance:-**

- Child Exploitation Delivery Group meets bimonthly, and reports into the Executive Group bimonthly.

There are four priorities:

1. Prepare
2. Prevent
3. Protect
4. Pursue

### **Prepare:-**

- Rolling multi-agency training programme, led by our specialist Evolve service, which considers wider 'Harm Outside The Home' approaches too.
- Rigorous approach to taxi licensing in Rotherham, which was

commended in Baroness Casey's National Audit.

- Section 175 self-assessments and our follow-up assurance visits explicitly consider how schools safeguard children from exploitation and online harm.
- Improved early intervention, as identified through partner agencies completing more of our Family Assessments of Need.

#### **Prevent:-**

- Using Operation Makesafe and Operation Keepsafe as tactics to disrupt and dissuade exploitation in the borough.
- *Fearless* campaign targeted young people aged 11 to 16 years old to empower them to report crime, including knife crime, drug dealing and exploitation, anonymously.
- South Yorkshire Police have attended a number of forums, including the Designated Safeguarding Lead forum where each school is represented, to promote intelligence sharing.

#### **Protect:-**

- Harm Outside the Home approach introduced, which extends the role of the independent Chair from young people at risk of significant harm to children in need as well.
- Robust multi-agency data which allows us to monitor trends. This includes a range of measures for the Police including intelligence, referrals and offences which relate to child exploitation.

#### **Pursue:-**

- Child Exploitation Tactical Group provides a weekly multi-agency environment to assess and manage risk, including legal powers to disrupt exploitation. Successful operation and criminal prosecutions have emerged from CETG.
- Strong links developed into Organised and Violent Crime Silver Group to ensure a robust multi-agency approach to the role of organised crime in child exploitation.
- There are commissioned services which support survivors of child sexual exploitation, child and adult, with recovery from their experiences.

#### **Ofsted ILACS November 2025 Quote.**

#### **Priorities in the next twelve months:-**

- Developing the Harm Outside The Home approach to grow the focus on locations and 'hotspots', in conjunction with CETG, Neighbourhood Tasking Groups and Community Action Partnerships.
- Improved interface for partners with the launch of the Children's Portal, which will allow partner agencies to submit their Family

Assessment of Need directly onto Early Help and Children's Social Care systems.

- Sharpening the link between intelligence and the focus of Operation Keepsafe and Operation Makesafe.
- Developing improved child exploitation training packages for non-traditional partners from the leisure and hotel industries.
- Positioning the workplan to ensure a focus on what data demonstrates are the most prominent forms of harm.

The Chair invited questions from Members.

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

- With regards to the multi-agency engagement with people on Page 57, Section 1.8 of the agenda pack if did indicate that services would engage with any parent to try and help the child. What would happen if parents were unwilling to engage either through fear, cultural challenges or a mistrust of agencies.

The Head of Safeguarding confirmed child protection processes set out clearly thresholds to be worked to. There was a whole raft of different approaches should engagement become an issue. Social Workers were skilled in what may drive this kind of behaviour, but the priority remained that the starting position would be to keep a young person safe by working with the family first.

It was inevitable that young people would need time to build a rapport with professionals, but persistence, creativity and honesty would pay off.

The Service Director for Early Help emphasised the specialist skills required to establish effective relationships with young people and recognised the dependence on other professionals who often spend more time supporting them.

- Were there any interventions around online safety, addiction to screen time for families in Rotherham in terms of practical support and was this recognised as an issue.

The Service Director of Early Help acknowledged this was difficult and not straightforward as it was a form of activity that could not readily be controlled. Some intervention work was taking place about school readiness and transition rather than any reliance on electronic devices.

A raft of support was available for parents through Family Hubs and it was about how people could be encouraged to engage without requiring a device to do so. This needed to be a partnership, particularly around the school readiness for children. If families were

identifying screen use as an issue, they could seek support through the MASH who would be able to signpost and connect families with the support that was available.

- Reference was made to working with hotels and if there was any influence of having a home screen prompting staff to be vigilant in spotting suspicious behaviour on check in.

In addition, it was noted that many young people exposed to exploitation from a young age did not associate that this behaviour was inappropriate. What was the earliest age work was taking place with young people to demonstrate what healthy relationships looked like and whether there was a willingness to commence this work in pre-school when children were starting to forge friendships.

The Head of Safeguarding addressed the second point first and confirmed Rotherham was fortunate to have an education safeguarding lead who engaged all schools in Rotherham.

One of the Safeguarding Education Delivery Groups was also supporting schools on the delivery of early work on relationships, relationship dynamics and what exploitation or coercion looked like with influence on the PSEE curriculum.

Further investigation would be required to see what work was taken place in the primary sector as the work was primarily undertaken in secondary schools.

The Cabinet Member reflected on previous work and the need to be ahead of the curve in addressing healthy relationships. In secondary schools it was a key part of the national curriculum with little focus in primary on intimate relationships with more on friendships and teamwork.

It was important to look at this at a younger age and further information on what was taking place or available would be made available to the Commission. The national curriculum was under review with a keen focus from the Government on life skills.

Where a gap was identified in Rotherham this would need to be delivered through the family homes network and the positive relationships with schools and early years providers was growing because of the changes in legislation.

The Independent Safeguarding Chair referred back to the question about hotels and keeping people safe, but whilst there may be some quick wins around screensavers, the challenge being faced was with many hotels being part of national chains.

As the world was changing many people no longer checked into hotels preferring to book an Airbnb and not a normal taxi preferring an Uber.

It was important to stay ahead of the curve and Rotherham was further down the line than other authorities. This was recognised in the recent inspection and the evidence within Baroness Casey's report.

- Speaking from experience it appeared that some primary schools were sharing healthy relationship training with children.

In preparation of the priorities and the approach for rigorous taxi licencing with the surge of Uber and drivers licensed in other areas coming to drive in Rotherham, it may be quite a stretch to achieve.

The Head of Safeguarding confirmed there were challenges created by the licencing scheme, but the licensing system in Rotherham was very robust. There were some local authorises who have issued a larger number of taxi licences, but it was important for this to be a focus and presented to a regional forum across all of South Yorkshire on approaches and opportunities. There were some licensing elements that would require a legislative change.

- There was still one weak area within the licensing sector and this was in relation to takeaways who had suppressed hours of opening. Lobbying was taking place to the Food Standards Agency about registration as there had evidence that these takeaways were often a front for modern slavery and this needed to be tightened.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that these incidents had not been found in Rotherham. These details would be shared with Community Safety and Environmental Health about the risks of exploitation associated with non-licensed food premises.

The Chief Superintendent provided assurance that whilst some of these issues fell outside of the licencing regime in terms of some of the Council mechanisms, the benefit of the Child Exploitation Delivery Group was that any intelligence received, regardless of its status, would be discussed with all relevant partners around the table. So whilst the Council might not have the right levers through the licencing legislation, actually other partners may have the right levers to be able to investigate any concerns that were raised.

- Reference was again made to the healthy relationships work within primary schools, but with focus on how addictive social media and screen activity was becoming. Was there anything taking place in schools to address this.

The Cabinet Member confirmed this kind of work was already taking place by Me In Mind.

- Clarification was sought on information on Page 59 Section 2.5 which talking about building strong links with probation who attended the Child Exploitation Delivery Group which provided joined up management of risk from offenders.
- The Chair confirmed this did refer specifically to offenders and asked looking back at the previous strategy if anyone was working with non-traditional partners such as contractors in terms of their awareness of exploitation and how to channel that intelligence into the right channels.

The Head of Safeguarding described the “Spot the Signs” public campaign used to influence the likes of contractors and non-traditional partners. Much of this work on intelligence has led to the opportunity to disrupt some exploitation much earlier for young people.

- Reference was made to the Government launching a twelve-week campaign about taxi licencing that closed on 1st April and the potential of it coming under the remit of the combined authority. It was imperative that the excellent work in Rotherham should not be diluted. Did anyone have any insight about the direction of travel.

The Chair of Licensing acknowledged the concerns of other drivers being licensed in other areas, but confirmed Rotherham’s licensing model was held in regard as best practice.

The Independent Safeguarding Chair endorsed what the Chair of Licensing had just said and confirmed that presentations had been made to the South Yorkshire wide Strategic Safeguarding Partnership Group about pushing further and extending safeguards to Uber and Airbnb establishments. This did not guarantee safety, but gave additional assurances.

- Was consideration given to engagement, when children were brought into care, with parents and the support that may be available if this failed.

The Service Director for Social Care confirmed that with any interventions, the relationships with families continued regardless of where children ended up within a very complex system. Where a child entered local authority care this was due to an acute issue where a child needed to be kept safe. The position of the local authority was from an intervention perspective to get that child back home with parents. To ensure effective relationships with parents the Council’s excellent support and intervention services sat within both family help and children's social care.

If adults were choosing not to engage with services children were often left in the situation they were. However, there were proactive efforts to explore avenues for children to return home.

The Cabinet Member responded by confirmed there were many valid reasons why children were often placed at a distance when there was a need to remove them from where the exploitation had been taking place.

The Service Director for Early Help provided additional assurance that whilst opportunities were considered for children to return home, there was acceptance that family circumstances did change and life did move on. A Panel looked at children's situations and whether they were likely to return home to parents or even extended family members and how best this could happen. There was often a knowledge gap and consideration was given as how to upskill parents to make a child returning home a success.

- Over the life of the strategy and the headline, harm outside the home, had there been any feedback as to whether there was a link between the online harms that technically did occur within the home outside of the family relationship.

The Head of Safeguarding confirmed there were occasions where exploitation began online and progressed to the real world. The feedback had been universally positive with examples of young people delivering their experiences.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged this was a good point that it had been picked up nationally and things were progressing at a pace. Up to that point, people talked about contextual safeguarding, but there did not appear to be a shared understanding of what that really meant. It was, therefore, reframed using more straightforward language around harm outside the home, which was quite different from traditional social work focused on families, neglect and intra-familial abuse. Over time, a clearer term or framework may emerge that better captured this.

There had been developments such as online abuse legislation and wider discussions about online harms alongside the concept of harm outside the home. This could create an assumption that if a child was physically at home say, in a bedroom they were safe, which was not always the case. This would be brought up at the next LGA meeting.

The Service Director for Early Help provided some assurance that as part of the Family First programme work was taking place about language with particular focus on the use of plain language.

A series of workshops was also being run with families and children who have experienced services, spanning Family Help right the way through to statutory social care, to ensure their voices were heard.

Importantly, this work was not about changing thresholds. The threshold descriptions remained the same, and the law had not changed. Instead, the focus was on how those thresholds were described in a more family-friendly way, particularly for those engaging with services.

Two workshops were held last week and another was scheduled for the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2026. Sessions were also being held with practitioners. It was highly likely that Harm Outside the Home, both as a concept and as terminology, would feature in those discussions as well.

Resolved:- (1) That the progress made against the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29 be noted.

(2) That consideration be given as to what work is taking place in the primary sector around the work on healthy relationships.

(3) That detail be shared with Community Safety and Environmental Health about the risks of exploitation associated with non-licensed food premises.

(4) That consideration be given as to how to equip non-traditional partners and contractors to identify and respond to child exploitation now and in the future.

**55. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - WORKSHOP, SUB AND PROJECT GROUP UPDATES**

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

- Children's Capital of Culture Workshop

A dedicated workshop took place on Tuesday, 21st April, 2026.

An invitation was also extended to Improving Places Select Commission and several Members joined the workshop.

The session shared the results of the interim evaluation followed by a short film and an opportunity for Members to share their experiences focusing on Member engagement - what worked well, what could be better and ward experience - what took place in their wards, what worked well, what could be better.

Members that did attend welcomed the excellent information that was shared and welcomed the opportunity to discuss at length the

evaluation process for the Children's Capital of Culture and fed back their own experiences which would be incorporated into the results and included in the final evaluation report.

- Children and Young People's Partnership Board

Several Members of Improving Lives were also due to attend the meeting of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2026 at the invitation of the young people who welcomed the opportunity for a pre-decision scrutiny session on their strategy and their priorities moving forward.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

**56. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.