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3rd August 2018

The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire MP
Secretary of State for Housing
Communities & Local Government
Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local
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Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
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The Rt Hon. Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
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Great Smith Street
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Dear Secretaries of State,

This is the 14th quarterly report from Commissioners to you on the progress of the intervention in Rotherham MBC. Subject to the progression of your minded to decision this may be the final report and therefore, it provides you with an update on progress and information on concluding arrangements for the intervention.

In this last phase of the intervention, Commissioners have given some priority to the Council's ongoing task to deliver its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and to supporting the Council's Improvement Plans in Children's Social Care.

MTFS

In the view of Commissioners, the delivery of a robust Medium Term Financial Strategy(MTFS) is now the most critical issue facing the Council. The financial context is challenging and the Council has growing demand in adults and children's social care which is leading to significant overspends, as well as bearing additional costs arising from the NCA Operation Stovewood investigations. It is therefore vital that the Council has an unrelenting focus on sound financial management and discipline so that it can deliver the MTFS. The Leader and Chief Executive are giving personal leadership to this but there is considerable work to do over the coming months. In this past period Commissioners have given priority to supporting the council in its plans to deliver a revised MTFS by this autumn.

NCA Operation Stovewood

The NCA investigation into historic cases of Child Sexual Exploitation is now having a significant impact on the council's budgets. You are both aware of the good work the council is undertaking with partners to support victims through this process and the costs which have been identified to meet the increased demand for this work as Stovewood investigations progress (known as the Fusion Bid). Whilst there remain funding gaps, the

Secretary of State for Education has provided funding to support the extra safeguarding investigations(section 47) required in relation to each new potential perpetrator identified by Stovewood. The Council is most grateful for this contribution. However, Commissioners are now seeing that as a consequence the number of looked after children linked to potential perpetrators is growing significantly. In many instance a single suspected perpetrator will have links with several children in both the direct and extended family and who on investigation require protection which the family cannot provide and are therefore being received into care. This is currently contributing to a large overspend which the council is attempting to manage but which provides a significant challenge to achieving a sustainable and stable MTFS.

Children's Services

Commissioner Cllr Bradwell was involved in the appointment of the new Director of Children's Services and the new post holder will take up the role in September 2018. Commissioner Cllr Bradwell has also maintained some oversight of the Council's work to address the issues raised in the Ofsted report on services for Looked After Children. I attach her report which indicates that encouraging progress continues to be made against the OFSTED recommendations.

Proposed Review before the end of Directions

When you issued your 'minded to decision' you asked that the Council arrange for a review of achievement before the end of the Directions in March 2019 and you asked if I would participate in that. Following discussion with the Chief Executive and my two fellow Commissioners, Cllr Bradwell and Julie Kenny, I can confirm that we are all willing to undertake this task for the Council early in 2019. Commissioners are discussing with the Leader and Chief Executive the scope of the review which the council will commission. There is a shared agreement between us that the focus should be:

- a) Ensure that the basic requisites of best value remain robust and should specifically look at:
 - Evidence of the continuing strength of Political and Managerial leadership and effective working between Members and Officers.
 - Organisational culture and good governance.
 - Quality of Partnership Working.
- b) Review the Council's ability to deliver and should specifically look at:
 - The Council's record of delivery against its strategic plans and priorities and review the latest performance data
 - Progress on delivery of the MTFS.
 - Progress on the OFSTED recommendations for services for Looked After Children.

We are agreed that the Council should prepare its own assessment against these headings for the review to test out. The review will consider relevant documentation, interview Senior Members and Officers, and hold group discussions with other Members, middle managers and frontline staff. In addition the review will engage with partner agencies, business and the third sector to obtain an external perspective.

Given the depth of knowledge and understanding of the Council and its context which Commissioners hold we believe that we are well placed to undertake a thorough and perceptive review which will provide the necessary insight to you on the performance of the Council as well as a useful diagnostic for the Council to use. We will continue to work with the council to develop the details so that the review can provide you with the assurance you need.

Lessons Learnt from the Rotherham Intervention

As the intervention draws to a close the Commissioner team has prepared a brief note to capture the learning from the experience of the unique and unprecedented intervention in Rotherham MBC and I attach a copy. It identifies the key considerations that Government and new Commissioners might need to think about when setting up any future similar process. It is not a blueprint as each intervention will be unique and detailed arrangements need to be sensitively tailored. However we felt there was benefit in recording the experience of Rotherham from the Commissioner perspective.

Should you or your officials wish to discuss any of the matters in this 42nd month report we would be happy to do so. As previously and as part of our normal practice, we will publish this letter on the Council's website in the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely



Mary Ney
Lead Commissioner

Encs: Progress report from the Children's Social Care Commissioner
Lessons Learnt from Rotherham Intervention

REPORT FROM ROTHERHAM MBC'S CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE COMMISSIONER PATRICIA BRADWELL

Ofsted's re-inspection of Rotherham's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers reported that only one area required improvement to be good which was Looked After Children. All other areas were judged good with services for care leavers, outstanding.

Since that time progress has continued to be made against all of the Ofsted inspection recommendations. Early permanence planning has improved. The Right Child Right Care (RCRC) Programme has identified 170 children who are in scope for a move to a more permanent care arrangement. The service has recruited a dedicated Fostering Advisor who deals with enquiries and expressions of interest from prospective carers, the first Mockingbird constellation was implemented in April 2018 with the second to follow in Summer/Autumn 2018 and a third by the end of the year. Rotherham are part of a project with the Fostering Network to recruit more Muslim foster carers.

The virtual school are working with schools to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions and persistent absentees from education among children looked after. Attendance at termly Personal Education Planning meetings is now treated with priority by all attendees with attendance monitored closely at each meeting. All cases of children and young people receiving < 25hours education are now discussed as a standing item at the complex cases group. There is also a Creative Mentoring Pilot scheme which is currently in the development phase. Attachment Friendly Schools (Phase 1) is starting to show an impact with some reduction in fixed term exclusions.

The service is experiencing increased demand arising from rising Looked After Children numbers, but despite this, performance across the board has remains stable, with 93% of children receiving statutory visits within national timescales. The service is pleased to report that 81% are still placed in a family based setting and the percentage placed in a commissioned placement has reduced.

The Corporate Parenting Panel continues to be a strong advocate of good outcomes for LAC and there is strong Elected Member and partner representation.

The Fostering / Adoption and the 3 long term LAC teams have no vacancies and all of the management team apart from one are permanent managers with the other being an internal act up arrangement pending permanent recruitment.