

Commissioners' Office

Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
S60 1AE
E-mail: commissioners@rotherham.gov.uk

Our Ref:
MN/SN/VH

Direct Line:
01709 255100

Please Contact:
Lead Commissioner Mary Ney

7th February 2018

The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Housing
Communities & Local Government
Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local
Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

The Rt Hon. Damien Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretaries of State,

By the end of February 2018, Commissioners will have been in Rotherham for three years. Progress of the intervention has been well documented, and reflected in most powers now being restored to the Council. Since my last letter to you in November 2017, there has been positive news regarding the Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care, rating the Council 'good' overall.

In this letter, I will update you on progress around adult social care, domestic abuse, and highlight positive developments in housing and regeneration. I will also update you on the final preparations being made for the independent health check taking place at the end of this month.

Ofsted Inspection

Ofsted inspectors visited Rotherham between 6th and 30th November 2017 to re-inspect services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after, and care leavers. On 29th January, it published its report that services are 'good' overall. In summary, the sub judgements ratings for each area were:

- Children in need of help and protection - Good;
- Looked after children - Requires improvement;
- Care leavers - Outstanding;
- Adoption - Good;
- Leadership, Management and Governance - Good.

Ofsted set out eight recommendations for improvement for children looked after, and the Council is taking steps to address these.

This is a significant step forward for the Council and further evidence that Rotherham continues to improve.

In an early submission of her quarterly progress report, Commissioner Bradwell wrote to the Secretary of State for Education on 22nd January 2018 commending the exceptional progress the Council has made and recommended that powers are restored to the Council. In his reply on behalf of the Secretary of State, Minister Nadhim Zahawi MP announced that DfE will no longer be intervening in the quality of social work practice and that the department would consider returning executive powers to the Council if Commissioners recommend it in our mid-February progress report. I have therefore discussed this matter with Commissioner Bradwell and Commissioner Kenny and we are in agreement to recommend to you that such powers should now be returned to the Council.

Independent Health Check

Preparations for the independent health check are well underway. As I outlined in my previous letter, the health check is designed to gauge the Council's preparedness for the end of intervention and whether it can continue its improvement without the need for Commissioner oversight.

The health check will examine a wide range of themes including: the competence of the organisation's political and officer leadership in delivering its strategic aims; its ability to work well with partners and exercise its community leadership role; competently deal with financial challenges and manage risk well; understand the needs of local residents and build cohesion within communities; a healthy organisational culture with a desire to achieve with attention to performance management.

This is an important moment for the Council. This is its chance to demonstrate it is able, without supervision, to perform well and be inquisitive and tenacious in its desire to improve.

The health check will take place between 27th February and 2nd March 2018, and I will report back to you on its findings and outcome before the end of March 2018.

The Council has been functioning with all decision-making powers restored (with the exception of Children's Social Care) since September 2017 and has continued to develop its capabilities and to build confidence with its key partners. As the quality and performance of its service delivery improves, the Council has the capacity to focus more on its wider strategic roles. It therefore seems timely for me to report to you on the progress the Council is making with the growth agenda and in particular in developing the local economy and the delivery of additional housing.

Regeneration, Economic Development and Housing

Since the publication of Rotherham's growth plan in 2015, the Council is increasingly playing its part in working with others to secure investment in the borough, including McLaren Automotive, Boeing and Bodycote. This has been reflected in the recent UK Powerhouse report which shows over Quarter 3 2017/18 Rotherham to be the 8th fastest growing economy in the UK and the fastest growing economy in Yorkshire. Playing to its strength, Rotherham Council is leading a programme of business accelerator activity across Sheffield City Region to grow new businesses.

The Council continues to work closely with universities and businesses to strengthen regional innovation assets including collaborating with Sheffield City Council to develop the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District (AMID). Other AMID related investments that the Council has contributed to include: the 'Innovation Corridor'; a strategic transport

scheme; delivery of around 750 new homes at Waverley, and working with the private sector to create a high quality local centre that will connect business and residents.

The Rotherham Town Centre Masterplan was adopted by the Council in September 2017 and sets out a programme of regeneration proposals. The plan includes transforming Forge Island as a leisure hub and the delivery of the first round of new housing development opportunities in the town including on the ex magistrates court site. Other key projects making early progress include University Centre Rotherham (on site and due to open September 2018) and refurbishment of the transport interchange which is due to be completed by March 2019.

Progress is being made in the development of the visitor economy. The £37 million Gulliver's Valley leisure scheme will start on site in April 2018 and the Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust has acquired Wentworth Woodhouse, the largest privately owned house in Europe. The Trust plans to restore the property and develop its visitor potential.

The Council has recently agreed a new Housing Strategy which sets out its plans for increasing and improving the housing stock. This includes commitment of over £50m of HRA resources for housing growth with a 336 unit house building programme including partnerships with Homes England and Wates Construction. Work has already commenced on site.

At the start of the intervention, many of these proposals had been mere aspirations for over a decade. The Council's consultation with local residents and businesses has highlighted the importance of making progress with regeneration as part of rebuilding confidence in the Council. It is pleasing to see developments underway and it is an important sign of a maturing administration that it is working with others to bring plans to fruition.

I now would like to update you on those functions where Commissioners retain additional powers.

Adult Social Care

Adult Social Care continues to face significant challenges in relation to service demand and increased complexity, in the progression of its plans to transform and modernise services and in its work to improve the quality of its social work practice. These challenges include some specific cases of unacceptable practice which the Director of Adult Social Care and Housing is addressing. In my November letter, I referred to the introduction of the Council's Adult Social Care Improvement Plan and the Council is now making progress with this.

Whilst the Council does have some significant issues to tackle, it has shown strong commitment at member and senior officer level and has put in place appropriate additional resources and capacity. The Director is now supported by a new interim Assistant Director who has significant experience in change, operations and health integration and was a previous Director of Adult Services. Further senior appointments are also due to come into post. The Council is increasing its capacity to scrutinise and audit its processes and practice and to use peer challenge to assist it achieve improvement.

There is evidence that progress is being made, in particular that the Council is improving its access to and use of performance data in the management and monitoring of service demand and care pathways.

Performance around Delayed Transfer of Care (DTOC) is positive and the adult care offer has been praised by health colleagues for its responsiveness and flexibility to date. There

continues to be significant joint work across the health and social care agenda to implement the priorities of the Rotherham Health and Social Care Place Plan.

Domestic Abuse

Progress in this area continues. Further to my letter in November, the peer review of domestic abuse services led by Bradford MDC, took place in January 2018. The early feedback recognised the strength of the political leadership as a driving force for improvements, with strong support from the managerial leadership. The reviewers also commended the level of support from the services involved and people at all levels, engaging in an open and transparent way.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Meeting (MADA) were highlighted as strong and well-supported partnerships, with positive feedback about the practice in general in these areas. There was a rich offer of intervention for domestic abuse victims and their families with strong evidence based provision. They also had positive feedback from the service users.

The areas identified for improvement included: a greater understanding of training needs (with more consistent delivery); better engagement with service users; and areas around operational process. The Safer Rotherham Partnership Domestic Abuse group continues its development and is currently focussing on those areas for improvement, particularly on developing capture and use of data, driving up training levels and engaging with those touched by domestic abuse to inform future delivery.

The tender process for the perpetrator programme is now complete with a provider appointed. The service will launch in February 2018 and will initially operate for a period of two years.

Due to the most recent Directions giving Commissioners enhanced oversight arrangements for both adult social care and domestic abuse, the independent health check reviewers have been asked to comment on the Council's ability to progress improvement without these enhanced powers

The Council's Budget

The Council continues to develop its Financial Strategy and whilst its financial position is challenging and it is faced with significant demand led overspending in both Children's and Adult Social Care services, it is on track to set a balanced budget for 2018/19. However, the Council has more work to do to achieve a longer-term sustainable position in the light of the challenges and spending pressures. Commissioners will continue to provide oversight and assistance.

You will be aware from my previous letter that the Council faces significant additional financial pressures as a result of the work to support victims and their families who are engaged with the National Crime Agency Operation Stovewood investigations. The Fusion Centre Bid to support this work is still under consideration by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. Whilst the Department for Education and the Department of Health have both confirmed their financial support, the Council and Commissioners remain disappointed at the lack of firm progress by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. Commissioners will maintain oversight of this given the critical importance of the services of the Fusion Centre to the successful outcome of Stovewood prosecutions.

Complaints and Whistleblowing Review

In December 2017, Commissioners submitted to your officials the review into how well the Council addresses complaints from residents and whistleblowers. Both whistleblowing and complaints procedures are set out clearly to the public on the Council's website, and staff are able to signpost or help those who wish to make a complaint or 'blow the whistle'. From the small sample of cases reviewed, and from interviews, the review is satisfied that whistleblowers and residents are dealt with appropriately and in line with national guidance.

I am pleased to report that the Council's whistleblowing and complaints policies are fit for purpose, with some observations for improvement around complaints handling. The Council has committed to address those areas for improvement in the coming months.

Commissioner Days for 2018/19

As most powers have now been fully restored to the Council, Commissioners are not required to be in Rotherham for as many days as in previous years. We cannot yet take into account the outcome from the independent health check which may alter matters, but on the basis we are still in appointment until March 2019, the total number of days expected is no more than a total of 200 for all three Commissioners. This will operate as a pooled allocation as agreed with MHCLG officials previously.

At the start of this letter, I highlighted that it is nearly three years since Commissioners first started their work in Rotherham. Commissioners have been able to give you a detailed picture of a changed Council: one that now has a developed vision; with strengthening political and officer leadership; one that is improving delivery across its services and in its community leadership role, and a Council that has achieved positive change in its children's services making Rotherham a safer place for children. Through our intervention, we have tracked Rotherham's story and the attached appendix details an updated timeline of key headlines/progress since intervention commenced.

In this letter I recommend to you the restoration to the Council of decision making powers in relation to Children's Social Care and I confirm that I plan to write to you again in March 2018 following the outcome of the independent health check with my view of what further is required in this last phase of the intervention. If it would be helpful we would be happy to meet with you at any time to discuss our assessment of the position reached. 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

Enc: Appendix: timeline of key headlines/progress