

# **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ROTHERHAM MBC**

**FEBRUARY 2019**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 In September 2018, the Secretary of State revoked the Directions imposed on Rotherham MBC and stood down Commissioners. In doing so, he set a requirement for the Council to submit to him an independent review of their performance by 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The Council commissioned the previously appointed commissioners with support from the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake the review. The review team comprised:

- Dame Mary Ney, former lead commissioner
- Cllr Patricia Bradwell OBE, former children's commissioner
- Julie Kenny CBE DL, former commissioner
- Judith Hurcombe, Programme Manager, LGA

1.2 The purpose of the review is to consider the council's performance in relation to:

- Delivery against the best value duty and specifically to review:
  - Political and managerial leadership and effective working between members and officers
  - Organisational culture and governance
  - Quality of partnership working
  - Delivery against the strategic plans and priorities and a review of the latest performance data
  - Delivery of the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS)
  - Progress against the OFSTED recommendations, including a practice strand to assess the service improvements in children's social care services.

In addition, at the request of the Secretary of State, to report on progress on the issues raised in representations made to him in 2018. The report on the representations is included at Appendix 2.

1.3 The review considered a progress statement from the council together with a wide range of supporting documentation and evidence. The review team spent 3 days on site and met with the Leader and Cabinet members, the Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team, Scrutiny chairs and the opposition leader and deputy leader and held focus groups with senior managers, front line staff and partner agencies.

1.4 This report provides an overarching assessment together with a fuller commentary against the lines of enquiry set out at paragraph 1.2 above. A separate report at Appendix 1 is provided by Lincolnshire CC Children's Services who undertook the practice strand.

1.5 The review team were grateful for the professional way in which the Council organised the review and for the assistance and willing cooperation that the Team experienced from all participants.

Much thanks are due to Lincolnshire Children's Services for their ongoing support to RMBC and for their valuable contribution to this review.

Finally, the team would like to acknowledge the support the LGA has provided throughout the intervention, as well as in facilitating this review and making available the expert support of Judith Hurcombe.

## OVERVIEW

2.1 We are pleased to report that the Council has continued to make good progress since Commissioners were stood down in September 2018 and has acted on the recommendations made by the independent progress review undertaken in March 2018, which showed progress was being made but there was more to do, particularly on developing the MTFS and in modernising its approach to Adults Services. Indeed, it is our view that the pace of improvement across the Council has increased beyond our expectations, which bodes well for future prospects and gives assurance that the council is compliant with the best value duty. The Council has now assumed an air of calm and confidence enabling it to set high ambitions for the future.

2.2 The Council is increasingly displaying the attributes necessary for a good and continuously improving council and we were able to evidence:

- The Leader has grown in stature and together with the Cabinet is providing strong political leadership and is beginning to set a more ambitious vision for the future. The Council is now able to play a key role within the City Region
- There is good visibility of political and managerial leadership throughout the organisation and with partners. Staff understand the Council's values and priorities and there is a stronger and empowered focus on delivery
- Members and officers work well together resulting in shared understanding of the issues, collaborative approaches to problem-solving and shared ownership of the best way forward. This is evident from the way in which the MTFS has been developed and the approach to monitoring implementation, as well as the engagement of scrutiny and opposition members in the process
- The Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team are providing strong managerial leadership and are now seen as collegiate and working collaboratively and this is encouraging a genuine breaking down of silos and improved cross-departmental working. We heard of several examples of corporate working and of working with partners which is improving services for residents. The Council has a number of crosscutting boards in place focused on different aspects of service transformation which is assisting a 'one council' approach
- Partnership working is now firmly based on mutual trust and respect. Partners spoke well of the Council as a partner and this is evidenced through the strategic work of the key Partnership Boards as well as the delivery of on the ground operational projects
- Whilst there is more work to be done to improve performance across the board, the council had delivered some significant service improvements (e.g., in Children's services and in the new Waste Service arrangements) and has a number of transformational plans underway including for Digital/ Customer Services, and a new target operating model for Adult Social Care. The Council has a number of examples of good practice and of being at the leading edge in some areas
- The audit undertaken by Lincolnshire County Council of Children's Services Cases indicates that the Council is committed to improving practice and outcomes for children and families in Rotherham. The workforce is becoming more confident in decision making and managing risk. Assessments and plans for children continue to improve, although more work is required to capture and evidence impact and outcomes for children, and to be more systematic in practice in some areas. The Ofsted Annual Conversation in November 2018 expressed confidence in the progress being made against the recommendations of the Ofsted Inspection in November 2017.

The Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board reports good progress in engagement of partners and confidence in the leadership of Children's Services.

- The External Auditor gave the Council an unqualified value for money opinion for 2017/18 following a similar unqualified opinion in 2016/17
- The Council has made such progress that there is a palpable shift from an organisation that is 'fixing things and fire-fighting' to one with confidence and is becoming a more outward facing, modern and innovative council
- Staff morale is high despite the prospects of substantial change arising from transformational projects and from implementing the MTFS. Staff say they are now proud to say that they work for Rotherham Council
- Crucially, the political and managerial leadership of the Council have re-established the Council's moral compass. There is clarity on the council's values and ethos and a whole council commitment to safeguarding young people. This gives confidence that the council will be vigilant in protecting the vulnerable, will avoid back-sliding or failure to address adverse issues as they arise

2.3 The review identified 2 key risks going forward in terms of the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and further work to improve service performance against targets particularly in relation to sickness absence. Whilst the Council is sighted on these issues and has plans in place to address them, there is no doubt that delivery of the MTFS is particularly challenging. In 2018/19 the Council has significant levels of overspend in both Children's Services and Adult Social Care of £15.7m and £5.6m respectively, which arise from a mix of demand pressures and costs of care packages. The overspends are additional to the need to address the budget gap of £30m over the next two year period. The Council also needs to meet the cost pressures arising from NCA Operation Stovewood which in 2019/20 is expected to reach £7m. The Council is in ongoing dialogue with Government Departments on its costs burden relating to Operation Stovewood and the review team hope that some financial assistance will be provided to the Council.

2.4 The Council's MTFS sets out how these challenges are to be met which includes the delivery of a number of transformational projects in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Customer/ Digital Services which will deliver the necessary reductions in expenditure. Whilst these projects should result in enhanced services for users, their implementation will be challenging and great care will be needed to ensure that in achieving savings, there is no untoward impact on outcomes for service users and in particular that the improvements achieved in Children's Services are not destabilised.

The arrangements that the Council has in place to oversee the delivery of the MTFS and crucially the shared understanding and shared ownership by the Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team have provided reassurance that the Council has the capability to deliver a balanced budget over the two-year period.

2.5 This review team were pleased that the Council had made such strong progress over recent months and we assess that they have the vision, capacity and structures to be a successful council. It will be important for the Council to:

- Maintain its momentum of improvement
- To pick up pace in delivery
- To broaden its ambition and
- To embrace innovation.

We believe it will be strongly supported by its staff and partners who have confidence in the leadership that the council exercises on behalf of the residents and businesses of Rotherham. We wish the Council well in its onward journey.

## REPORT

### **3.0 Political and managerial leadership and effective working between Members and Officers**

3.1 The political leadership of the Council is now strong. There is a clearly expressed ambition for the future of Rotherham and the Council is now politically led rather than being officer-led. The Leader and the Cabinet provide visible leadership across the organization and with partners.

3.2 Cabinet Members have worked hard to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities. This is reflected in a number of ways. The Cabinet is working well as a strategic leadership body, and relationships in Cabinet are good and improved. Portfolio holders work well with non-executive members across the Council, and there is mutual respect and appropriate challenge between councillors at both Cabinet and non-executive levels.

3.3 Opposition members feel they have access to the right level of information and can provide an appropriate level of interaction and input to Council decision making and scrutiny. Relationships between the ruling group and opposition members are mutually professional and respectful.

3.4 The Council's scrutiny function through its Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Scrutiny Commissions continues to improve and brings good levels of challenge, as well as added value on policy development. The extent of the improvement has been recognised through visits from other councils to see how Rotherham undertakes scrutiny, as well as the Council having input into the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee. There is also evidence that the Council's scrutiny function is respected and there is recognition of members' focus and efforts.

3.5 Similarly, the Chair and members of Licensing Committee have continued to uphold the higher standards set in the new Taxi Licensing Policy and to seek further improvement in the service and are working well with the officer team.

3.6 We found that working relationships between members and officers are also good across all levels of working across the Council. There is respect for mutual roles and responsibilities, and relationships have the right amount of appropriate challenge whilst not being cosy. Behaviours are appropriate and professional between councillors across the political groups, and between councillors and officers. At the most senior levels between Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) there is strong evidence of collaborative working and shared ownership, which is particularly evident through the focus on the Council's budget.

3.7 The Council's Chief Executive and SLT give visible leadership to officers. Relationships are collegiate and harmonious within SLT, and there is a clear, shared understanding and commitment to tackling the challenges facing the Council. This leadership is widely recognised within the Council, and by its partners.

## **4.0 Organisational culture and governance**

4.1 The culture of the Council continues to improve, and we noted that staff morale is good. Leadership is widely dispersed across the organisation and staff have a clear pride in working for both Rotherham Council and Rotherham as a place. This is in stark contrast to the early days of intervention when many members of staff felt ashamed to be associated with the Council or the town.

4.2 Cross-cutting working is evident, and staff can own issues and work together across directorates and within departments to co-produce solutions. Whilst the degree of the financial challenge facing the Council remains considerable and will not be easy to address, staff can nonetheless also see that it presents some opportunities to do things differently and are engaged with the challenge, in a more extensive way than we have witnessed previously.

4.3 The Council members and SLT model good behaviours and leadership and this is having a positive effect as it cascades through the organisation. It is providing confidence to the workforce and is also a reflection of the efforts that have gone into changing the Council's culture.

4.4 The dynamics of the Senior Leadership Team have changed, with positive results, and this is providing ongoing encouragement for staff. The Chief Executive and the SLT individually and collectively has a grip on the Council's performance, and there is improved and broader understanding of each other's challenges within directorates, relating to both service delivery and finance.

4.5 There has been and continues to be an ongoing commitment to engage with staff on a regular basis through a variety of fora. At a corporate level the wider leadership team, which encompasses all of the most senior managers from across the Council, meets every six weeks. The Leader and Chief Executive continue to meet staff regularly, seeing over 500 staff during the last quarter of 2018. These sessions are welcomed by staff. During these sessions "pulse" surveys are undertaken to gauge staff views on the organisation's improvement and these reflect an 11% increase in staff feeling valued and engaged and a 9% increase in employees feeling well informed about what is happening across the Council.

4.6 The Council continues to consider how to improve its governance, and revisions to modernise the officer delegation scheme were made to the Council's Constitution in July 2018. These enable more responsibility and some decisions to be made, within agreed parameters, by Council officers, in line with a more streamlined approach.

4.7 Overall the strength and visibility of the Leader and Chief Executive and the work undertaken to develop the organisational culture have resulted in the Council re-establishing its moral compass which gives confidence that in future the Council will make good choices which promote the safety and welfare of its residents.

## 5.0 Quality of partnership working

5.1 Partnership working in Rotherham continues to improve and the Council is seen by partners as engaging and collaborative, and as a good partner to work with. Robust challenge takes place across the many arenas where the Council works with external bodies and partners are clear that there is a focus on collaboration and delivery. This is in part enabled by the Council and its partners having a good understanding of each other's delivery, priorities and pressures, and budgets. This is encapsulated in The Rotherham Plan, published by the Rotherham Together Partnership in March 2017 and sets out the Partnership's vision and large-scale projects it wants to achieve by 2025. There are also a range of partnership strategies which collectively focus on what the Council and its partners aim to achieve by 2025, for example, the Economic Growth Plan.

5.2 This positive working at the strategic level is cascading down to frontline delivery. Staff across partnership organisations are working well together and take shared responsibility to improve outcomes for local people: overall the mood is positive and is reflecting an optimistic and 'can-do' culture. There are several teams of staff from different agencies co-located both in Rotherham Council's offices and across the borough, and this is having a significant and positive effect on joint working.

5.3 The Council is gaining some recognition for showing leadership and more visibility at the regional level. This is having a positive impact on how the Council is perceived by partners and businesses, and is reflected in growing confidence in Rotherham as a place to expand inward investment, for example at the Advanced Manufacturing Park at Waverley, where Rolls Royce, Boeing and McLaren have developed sites.

5.4 Partnership working has also been positively influenced by an internal partnership and collaborative style within the Council, which has helped to breakdown silo working. The strategic partnership Boards which are reaching a stage of maturity and confidence, with some chaired by the Council and some chaired by partners:

- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Community Safety Partnership
- Children and Young People's Partnership
- Business Growth Board
- Strategic Housing Forum
- Integrated Health and Social Care Place Board

5.5 The Council has been shifting its focus to delivery at ward level and the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in November 2018, and it is a clearly stated corporate priority. The approach supports members, officers and partners to work together at ward level, members have been active in developing ward plans and all 21 wards have published plans which set out agreed actions for the following 12 months. Progress on these is being brought to Full Council meetings by members on a ward by ward basis, and there is a degree of healthy competition between councillors about their actions and achievements. This locality working is also improving partners' confidence in the Council and partners have encouraged their own staff to actively participate in liaison and delivery at the local level.



5.6 The degree of progress on partnership working at both strategic and local levels is encapsulated by one partner who made the comparison between the Council at the start of the intervention and how it performs and engages now: 'the difference is that I trust them, and I could never have said that before'.

## **6.0 Delivery against strategic plans and priorities, and a review of the latest performance data**

6.1 Since the last progress review the Council has further improved its political and managerial focus on performance and financial data. A new Council Plan covering the period from 2017 - 2020 was approved in 2017. Following feedback from councillors, reporting arrangements have been further refined and a redesigned performance report was introduced during 2018; information is now presented in a way which enables members and the public to quickly identify performance issues. This is based on 14 key delivery outcomes and 70 measures, reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. Based on currently available data it includes an overview on key projects and activities which contribute to the delivery of the Council Plan, and is set out across the Council's five corporate priorities. The refreshed Council Plan links closely to the partners' Rotherham Plan and includes commentary on the 'Game Changer' indicators of the latter, as well as how the Council will deliver its contributions to the Plan. The reporting of performance and financial data together allows for a stronger focus on how resources are used to deliver priority outcomes, including value for money.

6.2 In the data for the second quarter of 2018/19, the Council reported overall performance is continuing to improve, with 57% of indicators improving, and 24 measures were met or exceeded the target set in the Council Plan. Eighteen measures in Q2 were off target and 11 made satisfactory progress. Key areas of improvement in service delivery are:

- A reduction in the Children in Need rate
- A reduction in the number of children subject to repeat child protection plans at 7.2% compared to the target of 9%
- On target of 65% for the number of Education and Health Care Plans for Special Educational Needs
- A reduction in smoking status at the time of pregnancy
- Reductions in the numbers of children excluded from schools
- In Adult Social Care 91% of new clients received the re-ablement service and had no need of further support
- The number of adults supported in residential and nursing care went down significantly to 975 people
- A large reduction in the number of repeat victims of anti-social behaviour, reduced from 98 to 38 people over the last 12 months

6.3 The number of Looked After Children remains challenging, although there has been a slight improvement from quarter 2 of 2018/19 of 114.9 per 10,000 population to 112.0 in quarter 3. However, educational attainment scores at Key Stage 4 are below target, and there are higher numbers of 16 -17 year olds who were recorded as not in education, employment or training (NEETs) with performance at 16.4% compared to the target of 5.8%. Demand across the whole of Children's Services remains high across all levels of social care intervention in Rotherham, and is noticeably higher than that of similar councils.

6.4 Performance has been helped by using a wide range of Boards where councillors and officers, and sometimes partners, work together to drive service collaboration and delivery, including:

- Big Hearts, Big Changes Board
- Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme Board
- Asset Management Board
- Housing and Regeneration Programme Board
- Customer Services and Efficiency Programme Board
- Workforce Management Board
- Corporate Consultation and Engagement Group
- Waste Management Board
- Cabinet Budget Working Group
- Preparing for Adulthood Board
- Children and Young People's Services Performance Review Board
- Project Assurance Meeting (Adult Social Care)

6.5 A significant change during the last 12 months has been the introduction of a new waste strategy, which includes a comprehensive change in the Council's household waste collection service. Although there is a dip in the performance of waste collection during the rollout of new bins, performance for the whole year is anticipated to be above the national average. The demand for some aspects of the new service has been overwhelmingly positive, and the rollout is being managed well, with considerably more uptake of the new chargeable brown bins service for garden waste than had been anticipated.

6.6 The February 2018 independent review identified the need to improve outdated service provision and address costly demand pressures within Adult Services. A new Adult Social Care operating model was agreed in August 2018, setting out a new people-focused approach for service provision and the Council's role in supporting its service users, including clarification of priorities, and high-level plans. The next steps will include the development of digital working alongside detailed process design and staff training and development.

6.7 Town centre regeneration also has a greater profile. The Council and its partners have a Town Centre Masterplan which is being implemented and there is visible activity on and around the town's Forge Island site where a new developer has been secured, as well as improvements at the transport interchange. In addition, a new University Centre Rotherham opened in September 2018. These developments are having a positive impact on the Council's reputation with partners and residents, as well as potential investors, as it shows that improvement is being delivered on the ground.

6.8 Other councils are beginning to recognise Rotherham's progress and the Council is now able to share good practice across a wide range of improvement and innovation including:

- Taxi licensing including the use of cameras in vehicles, and the Council is cited widely in the LGA's guidance for councillors on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.9%20Councillor%20Handbook%20-%20Taxi%20and%20PHV%20Licensing\\_November\\_2017.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10.9%20Councillor%20Handbook%20-%20Taxi%20and%20PHV%20Licensing_November_2017.pdf)

- The Planning Service which won the Royal Institute of British Architecture's Planning Team of the Year in 2018 <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/briefing-room/news-releases/2018/september/president-sees-planning-excellence-in-yorkshire/>
- The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board's arrangements for reporting to Full Council has been identified by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee as good practice. Rotherham has been following this approach since 2017
- The Rotherham Health Record (RHR) is an integrated web-based system which presents the information health and care workers need to make clinical decisions with confidence. Developed by the Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust, it is a good reflection of how health partners and the Council are working together <http://rotherhamhealthrecord.org/>
- The Health and Wellbeing Board's approach to health care integration is cited by the LGA and the Institute of Public Care as an example of innovation and good practice <https://www.local.gov.uk/integrating-health-and-social-care-rotherham-case-study>
- Several young people won regional awards in January 2019 for their involvement with the Rotherham Youth Council, and some council staff were recognised too [https://www.rotherhamadvertiser.co.uk/news/view,rotherham-teenagers-shine-bright-at-youth-voice-star-awards\\_30546.htm](https://www.rotherhamadvertiser.co.uk/news/view,rotherham-teenagers-shine-bright-at-youth-voice-star-awards_30546.htm)
- Councillors and officers are actively participating in sector-led improvement activity to support development and learning in other local authorities.

## **7.0 Delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

7.1 RMBC have been working on the development of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy for some time. Whilst the Council has managed to deliver a balanced budget it has had to rely on use of reserves to some extent and it realised the importance of moving to a more sustainable position.

7.2 The Council adopted a MTFs in December 2018 and in February 2019 the Cabinet will agree a budget for the next two years. Whilst it was pleasing to see the Council move to a two-year budget process, there is no doubt that the delivery of the budget will be very challenging. In 2018/19 the Council has significant overspends in both Children's Services of £15.7m and Adult Social Care of £5.6m which arise from a mix of demand pressures and the costs of care packages. In addition, the costs attributable to NCA Operation Stovewood will reach £7m in 2019/20 and are also giving rise to concerns for partner agencies. The demand pressures are best captured in considering the Council's experience of a rise in the number of Looked after Children from 380 in 2012 to 662 in 2018. In addition to the overspend, the council's budget has had to address a budget gap of £30m over the two-year period.

7.3 The delivery of a balanced budget over 2019/20 to 2020/21 therefore requires the Council to deliver significant savings and transformational projects in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Customer Services. Whilst many of the proposals themselves are aimed at providing a modernised and beneficial service offer for residents, implementation will require detailed consultation, reassessment of need and care packages and changes to staff structures, roles and practice standards. Changes in care and safeguarding services need to ensure that they do not destabilise the improvements in practice and standards that have been achieved. It is notable that proposals in Children's Services are based on a reduction in the numbers of looked after children to 541 by March 2021.

7.4 The council has developed its strategy and budget proposals using the Cabinet Budget Working Group. This a joint officer-member board chaired by the Leader of the Council and comprising the Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team and there has been a good level of consultation and scrutiny of proposals. The Working Group will also oversee implementation. This mechanism has ensured that there is real understanding and commitment to the budget across members and officers which does give a degree of assurance that proposals will be delivered. In particular, the Senior Leadership Team are working collaboratively, in a way not previously seen, and this should ensure that issues are tackled as they arise and that managers across the organisation are working together to live within the budget envelope.

7.5 The Council is in dialogue with the relevant government departments in relation to the costs related to Operation Stovewood and any assistance with these would be a great benefit in keeping the Children's Services budget in balance.

7.6 Whilst the delivery of the MTFS is challenging, the Review team were impressed by the shared resolve and determination of both members and officers to work together to achieve it. However, progress will need to be closely monitored and corrective action to unlock problems will need to be promptly taken to avoid drift.

## **CONCLUSION**

Rotherham Council has made significant progress over the last 12 months and is on the right trajectory for sustained improvement. Like other councils it faces some significant challenges particularly in finance and managing demand, which will test its capacity and resolve. Members and officers show grip, confidence and competence, all of which bode well for the future.

**Dame Mary Ney, former lead commissioner**

**Cllr Patricia Bradwell OBE, former children's commissioner**

**Julie Kenny CBE DL, former commissioner**

**Judith Hurcombe, Programme Manager, LGA**

**February 2019**

### **Progress against OFSTED recommendations: report of Lincolnshire County Council Audit Team, undertaken 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

Lincolnshire County Council was asked to be part of an Independent Review of Rotherham Borough Council (RMBC). The area of focus was to assess Rotherham's Children's Services progress against Ofsted's recommendations.

The following documents and reports were provided prior to the visit:

- Council Position statement 2019
- Self-evaluation
- Improvement plan
- CHaT
- Annex A data
- Story boards
- Ofsted Report January 2018
- 10 health check audits and moderation audits
- Overview of health check audit report

From the Annexe A, 10 cases were selected for collaborative audit and moderation. Cases were chosen on the basis that they could attract attention from Ofsted. Lincolnshire was previously Rotherham's Improvement Partner and has therefore shared RMBC's journey to good since 2016. During this period there has been clear improvement across all Children's Services. RMBC's improvement plan actions summarise all of the Ofsted recommendations and this is tracked through the Performance Board.

There has been a strong cultural shift across the organisation which was clearly evident, staff are positive about working for the authority and proud of their service to children and families. Overall there is a strong commitment to improving outcomes for children by leaders and workers who know their children well and have high aspirations and hopes for their futures.

The quality of assessments has improved, assessments are more meaningful and reflective of changing needs and supported by the incorporation of the whole family model. The implementation and development of Rotherham's practice framework (Signs of Safety), is accelerating service-wide and several examples of good practice were noted along with improved use of themed danger statements and safety goals. As expected safety planning will continue to improve as the understanding and the use of the framework is strengthened. Its use is supporting the gradual shift from compliance to a workforce who are becoming more confident in decision making and managing risk. In the majority of cases the management oversight remains strong and effective with formal and informal supervision available to workers.

It would be expected that as Signs of Safety develops and becomes more embedded in practice, that family finding becomes more rigorous and robust. RMBC need to further progress the commitment of staff to begin this approach with their very first contact with a family. Developing a more systematic approach to exploring networks and family members creates greater opportunities for children to remain living with their families.

Whilst assessments and plans are improving, further work is required on capturing and evidencing impact and outcomes for children. The voice of the child has improved with some stunning examples of direct work; however, this is still not consistent in the cases audited. There is also a need to maintain a focus upon effective analysis of cumulative risks and impact – ask the question ‘So What?’

From the collaborative audit, Lincolnshire's moderation of quality of practice generally reflects RMBC's own audits and moderation scales, evidencing that RMBC knows itself. Plans are improving, a good practice example demonstrated the tenacity of the social worker, management of risk and clarity of the plan allowed the child to remain in the care of parents, where mother had previous children removed and placed for adoption.

It was considered that the RMBC quality assurance process needs to reflect that used for this deep dive and we recommend a review of the role of the moderator and seek to establish collaborative audits.

There is evidence that senior managers are listening and acting on staff feedback, evidenced through the reconfiguration of the structure to avoid multiple handover points for children and families. There is consideration and revision of the contact service specification and further evaluation of the purpose and function of the Edge of Care Team. The continued journey of integration with Early Help could be further strengthened through increased joint supervision arrangements.

The overall finding from the Independent Review was that:

- The culture seen in RMBC shows efforts by the senior management team and adopted by all, of increasing confidence and managing risk
- That RMBC is an authority that knows itself and is committed to improving practice and outcomes for children and families
- That RMBC is an authority that is on the cusp of balancing increased confidence/risk management versus compliance
- Senior Leaders are ambitious, visible, accessible and clearly articulate the vision for RMBC.