

CABINET

20 MAY 2022

REFERENCE REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A.1 CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION

(Report prepared by Keith Simmons and Hattie Dawson-Dragisic)

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on 21 March 2022 (Minute 53 refers) the Community Leadership Overview & Scrutiny Committee's ("the Committee") Chairman reminded the Committee that Council had requested an enquiry be undertaken into the safeguarding and education position concerning those persons of school age attending mainstream schools. In undertaking the enquiry the Council had identified those who were to be invited as being representatives of Essex County Council, Local Academy Trust representatives, representatives of Alternative Education Providers and organisations mentoring or offering support for those not in mainstream education.

A report was submitted to the meeting identified that representatives of Essex County Council had been invited to attend remotely and present to the meeting. The report identified some information concerning those missing from education and also information on those children who were missing from home.

From Essex County Council, Anita Patel-Lingam, Statutory Education Compliance Manager and Michael O'Brien, Head of Specialist Education Services, joined the meeting using MS Teams and presented slides that included detail on the subject of the enquiry.

The Members were advised of the potential impacts, suggested by research, of children missing school:

- Slower progress in learning
- Worse Prospects for future employment
- Poorer mental health and emotional well-being
- Restricted social and emotional development and
- Increased vulnerability to safeguarding issues and criminal exploitation

The Committee was also informed which children that were more at risk of missing education:

- Children at risk of harm/neglect
- Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families
- Families of Armed Forces
- Missing Children/runaways
- Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System
- Children who cease to attend a school

The Essex County Council officers advised Members of figures within Essex and specifically in Tendring of children who were Electively Home Educated (EHE) and that a rise was being seen nationally. They were shown figures of the following:

- Children Missing from Education (CME) broke down by quadrants
- EHE broke down by quadrants
- A breakdown of school aged CME by district
- A breakdown of school aged EHE by district

Members were informed that currently parents who removed their child from school were not required to tell their Upper Tier Local Authority, they were not required to provide the school a reason for de-registering their child from a school, they did not have to have their EHE plans documented at the time of de-registering their child and they were not required to let an inspector come into their home to observe their EHE system.

The Committee was advised that in the admissions process for schools, the Education Compliance Team of the County Council offered support for parents to navigate the appeals process to reduce their perception of alienation from the process. Where there were schools with unusually high numbers of children being de-registered, the Education Compliance Team would look to work with the school to address any issues leading to those de-registrations.

The meeting was informed that schools across Essex were signed up to support Young carers who otherwise could lose out on mainstream education. It was also the case that a Fair Access Protocol was in place for secondary school age children to facilitate them returning to mainstream schooling if a home schooling experience was not successful following a child being de-registered.

With the consent of the Chairman, Councillors Ivan Henderson and Delyth Miles participated in the meeting due to their interest in the subject of enquiry.

During the Committee's discussion the idea of recommending Cabinet to send a letter to the Department for Education to support Essex County Council's lobbying for increased powers for Upper Tier Local Authorities in respect of EHE. The advantage of circulating an email to all Tendring District Council Councillors to provide them with information on the issue of those missing from education (drafted by Essex County Council) and with details of reporting routes was also discussed.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

That Cabinet agrees to:-

(1) Send a letter of support to the Secretary of State for Education for the introduction of the following powers/measure to safeguard the position of those de-registering from mainstream schools and opting for Elective Home Education (EHE) namely:-

- (a) That the details of the proposed Elective Home Education should be documented and submitted to the Upper Tier Local Authority in advance of the child being de-registered.
 - (b) That a backstop right of access for the Upper Tier Local Authority be provided to the home and to the child where Elective Home Education is provided with a view to confirming the position.
 - (c) That Academies be urged to provide access on their sites in a locality for those being home schooled to undertake examinations close to home.
 - (d) That parents of children being home schooled be required to provide regular updates to the Upper Tier Local Authority on the progress of the children being home schooled.
- (2) That an email be sent to all Tendring District Councillors, prepared by Essex County Council, to explain the position on those missing from mainstream education and the routes for reporting concerns about those children (which, if recommendation (1) above is also approved) could be accompanied by the letter to the Secretary of State as referred to in that recommendation.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENT(S) AND RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

Portfolio Holder's Comments

"With reference to the enquiry into Children Missing Education, I fully support the recommendations of the Committee and I will action the following:-

- a) Writing to ECC giving the Cabinet's support to strengthening home education.*
- b) Writing to the Secretary of State for Education outlining support for the powers/measures as indicated above, as well as giving support to the Essex County Council Cross-Party Response to the House of Commons' Education Committee Report entitled "Strengthening Home Education" (published 26 July 2021).*

In summary the cross party response further outlines the urgent need for a number of additional safeguarding measures for Upper Tier local authorities together with the financial support per pupil to set standards to ensure consistency regarding regular monitoring, communication and assessment of the suitability of home education."

Recommendations to Cabinet:

That the recommendations made by the Community Leadership Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted and that the response of the Portfolio Holder thereto be approved.