



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 20th March 2025.

SPECIAL CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

5th February 2025 at 5.00pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Boyd, Cairns, Clough, Downes, Goodwin, Lindley, Patrick, K. Swinburn and Wheatley

Co-opted Member: Ian Robinson (Church of England)

Officers in attendance:

- Michelle McMahon (Head of the Virtual School)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Jennifer Steel (Service Director – Education, Inclusion and Integration)
- Joseph White (Agency Head of Pupil Support)

Others in attendance:

- Councillor Cracknell (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education)

There were no members of the press in attendance and one member of the public in attendance.

SPCLL.70 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received for this meeting.

SPCLL.71 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

SPCLL.72 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The panel received a report from the Service Director of Education, Inclusion and Integration on Elective Home Education (EHE).

A Member asked for some clarification on the improvement of the current trend and wondered what Officers were putting it down to. Ms Steel explained that they had done a lot of hard work around re-admission to getting children back to school, particularly with school leaders. The Member asked for further information on what the schools were doing and whether they had taken a further stance around behaviour. Ms Steel explained that a number of schools were now offering a cooling off period after forms were submitted, and this allowed them to have the opportunity to try early intervention.

Members asked for further clarification on:

- how the local authority kept track of children who were home educated if they did not need to be registered.
- whether the high numbers of Specialist Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) was a break down in relationships with schools.
- Examples of what home-schooling home visits looks like.
- Resources
- Exam processes

Officers present provided responses on these matters.

One Member sought reassurance on what measures were being put in place for the young people electively being home educated in years 9, 10 and 11, to prevent them becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Ms Steel explained that they were working with the transformation team to help understand why parents and children were opting for EHE at this age. They also use the earliest opportunity for career advice and to discuss outcomes and life choices.

Another Member asked whether schools just accepted the form to be home schooled or if someone worked with them to make sure this was the right decision. Ms Steel stated that the local authority offer support at the earliest opportunity if a school reached out about a potential EHE. However, she explained that there was still work to do around this and hopefully the Transformation Team would help them better understand this area.

Members had concerns about how local authorities had limited recourse where there could be concerns of EHE in terms of it being used to hide circumstances at home. They felt that some of the processes from Department for Education guidance could be stronger with governmental support. Ms Steel stated that each individual's circumstance was at the front and centre of everything they did when dealing with individuals going EHE. If they were already known to the authority, they get flagged and taken into consideration and if needed, additional agency intervention would be requested.

One Member asked whether some schools/academies push for EHE to stop certain children bringing down the school's league tables. Ms McMahon explained that once the EHE form has been submitted, their team ring up the family to ask about the circumstances that led them to choose EHE, giving them the opportunity to report any such practice. She then reassured Members that if they were made aware of this, it was reported to Ofsted with a clear evidence report.

Councillor Wheatley proposed that it be recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education that a letter be sent to the Secretary of State to ask them to compensate local authorities for children who were not full-time pupils at any school and provide more resources to enable local authorities to support the families of home educated children. Councillor Clough seconded this.

The panel had some further queries about the Home School Education Registration and Support Bill and Children's Wellbeing and School Bill currently going through Parliament and asked Officers on their views of the bill. The panel asked Officers to circulate, via email, any additional proposals they would like to add to the letter, after this meeting.

The proposal was voted for unanimously.

RECOMMENDED TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION – That a letter be sent to the Secretary of State to ask for local authorities to be compensated for children who were not full-time pupils at any school and provide more resources to enable local authorities to support the families of home educated children.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Service Director of Education, Inclusion and Integration circulate any additional proposals they would like to be added to the letter to the Secretary of State.
2. That the Elective Home Education report be noted.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 6.14 p.m.