

Education Scrutiny Committee – 14 March 2018

School Attendance Deep Dive Scope and Membership

Report by Chairman of the Sub-Group

Introduction

1. The Committee has previously agreed to undertake a review of educational attendance in Oxfordshire and this report seeks to outline the scope of the review, following the presentation by Officers at the last meeting in December. The deep dive is also seeking a final nominated representative to participate in the review, in the first instance a nomination from the Committee should be sought however, if that is not possible then the Committee are asked to nominate another Member of the Council with an interest in the subject matter who is not a member of the Cabinet.

Background to the Deep Dive:

2. 'Thriving People' is one of three core aims in the corporate plan and includes a commitment to work with schools, families and partners to support increased attendance at schools and other education settings. The Education Scrutiny Committee has selected 'school attendance' as one of three deep dive investigations it intends to undertake during the Council year after discovering that attendance figures for secondary schools in Oxfordshire were above the local and national average.
3. The Committee received an officer presentation in December to inform the scope of this investigation and this report seeks to confirm the scope. In December it was noted that whilst primary school absences have historically been in line with or below the national average, secondary schools have been consistently above the regional and national average since 2013-14. In 2016-17, 5.7 half days were lost to absences at Oxfordshire secondary schools, compared to 5.2 in the South East and nationally. The pupil group with the highest persistent absence rates in 2016-17 were those in the youth offending services (accounting for 76.7% of all persistent secondary school absences).

Scope of the Deep Dive:

4. The deep dive seeks to:
 - (a) gain a greater understanding of trends associated with absence and attendance at secondary schools across Oxfordshire;
 - (b) identify the pathways that exist to tackle unauthorised and persistent absence and;
 - (c) to develop recommendations that enable the sharing of good practice to reduce absence rates across Oxfordshire

5. Several activities are planned for the deep dive group to meet the stated aims including understanding:
 - (a) the pathways that have been developed with the Locality Community Support Service and by schools themselves
 - (b) why absence rates are higher for certain pupil groups and particularly schools
 - (c) the methods used to address unauthorised absences such as warning letters, school attendance orders and attendance panel meetings.

It is intended that the deep dive will be completed by September 2018. Full details of the scope can be found at Annexe 1 of this report.

Membership of the Sub-Group:

6. There is presently a vacancy on the deep dive sub-group membership. The current membership consists of Councillor Michael Waine (chairman), Councillor Sobia Afridi and Ian Jones. A request for an additional member of the Committee to join the group was made in December, however it position remains vacant. As a way forward, it is suggested that the Committee nominates another Councillor to join the sub-group. The Chairman has suggested that Councillor Fenton should be co-opted to the sub-group as he has an interest in the subject matter. Scrutiny sub-groups are not required to politically proportionate but cannot include Cabinet members.

Financial and Staff Implications

7. There are no financial or staffing implications associated with this report.

Equalities Implications

8. The working group have identified that vulnerable learners have comparatively higher levels of absence rates. The deep dive group will seek to understand the reasons for this and will consider equalities implications in developing their final recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **agree the scope of the deep dive;**
 - (b) **Co-opt an additional Councillor to the sub-group.**

Councillor Michael Waine

Chairman of the Educational Attendance Deep Dive Sub-Group

Background papers: Nil.

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