

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 6 March 2024 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Reed (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Cosslett, R Crute, S Deinali, J Griffiths, C Hunt, C Lines, L Mavin, M McGaun, D Mulholland, K Rooney, J Scurfield, C Varty and E Waldock

Parent Governor Representative:

Professor G Ciesielska

Co-opted Member:

Ms A Gunn

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, Members observed a minute's silence for Councillor Isabella Roberts, who sadly passed away recently.

The Chair spoke about Councillor Isabella Roberts, in particularly her involvement with the production of the film 'The Old Oak'.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Simmons, M Walton and Ms R Evans.

2 Substitute Members

No substitute Members were in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 December 2023, 8 January 2024 and 25 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair subject to the following amendment:

19 December 2023 – Minute 6, page 7, last paragraph – ‘dysphoria’ be amended to read ‘dyscalculia’.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Deinali declared an Interest in Agenda Item No.6 – School Attendance and Inclusion as she has a child that is educated at home and remained in the meeting during consideration thereof.

5 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer read out the following statement that had been received from Ms R Evans – Co-opted Member:

“I have informed the Overview and Scrutiny Team that I will be stepping down as coopted member after this meeting. I am finding it increasingly difficult to devote the time to the committee and think that it is time for a fresh face to take over. I am unable to attend today but hope that my comments might be read to the meeting.

In terms of the subjects of the meeting - school inclusion, performance, and home education - I know the tremendous work undertaken by Council departments and teachers, along with other staff in schools. However, there is a huge issue with how society nurtures our young people and the support and help it affords them. I do not believe that looking at individual statistics on inclusion, Ofsted reports etc goes much way to addressing these issues. There is a systemic problem in schools - in my view largely caused by academisation, resulting in lack of local accountability by families and the increasingly limited control of the democratically elected local Council. The support services for children and young people, including youth services, health services, careers services, leisure services (I could go on...), are non-existent or really difficult to access for most young people. This has happened after years of funding cuts. Another vital consideration is the overall levels of poverty in County Durham, with all the challenges this presents to families - and with the current cost of living crisis adding considerably to existing poverty. If we are to improve the lives of children, young people, and their families in County Durham we need a dramatic change in approach - and much of this is currently out of the Council's control. We must always do our best to improve the situation, and positive interventions are always worthwhile, but it is big, systemic changes that are also needed. I would hope that the Council is lobbying for such changes at every opportunity it has.

Finally, I would like to thank the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and particularly the staff team, who have supported me, as a member of the public, to engage with this committee. I send my very best wishes to you all.”

Councillor Crute asked that a letter be sent to Ms Evans on behalf of the Committee thanking her for her service to the Committee.

Members were advised that a letter of thanks would be sent to Ms Evans on Friday when her resignation comes into effect.

6 School Attendance and Inclusion

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with an overview of school attendance and inclusion in the County Durham. The report also covered the national and local context and policy, published data and collaborative working (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer and the Inclusion & Alternative Provision Coordinator were in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided details of the overall absence; working together to improve attendance (May 2022); stepped approach; support from the Local Authority; work to date; attendance alliance; permanent exclusions by year group; primary permanent exclusions; secondary panel developments; main implications and areas for development (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer introduced the school attendance part of the presentation giving an outline on the current system, highlighting that there was new national guidance that would come into effect in September 2024. Members learned that a partnership approach was embedded to provide whole family support where needed. Where pupils had 50% attendance or less a multi-agency plan was required. In relation to legal action this option was only used where all support options were exhausted or not appropriate

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Group Lead informed members that the new guidance detailed information on the role of the local authority and regulations have been laid to mandate attendance data sharing by all schools so schools, LAs and Department for Education have access to near-live data from all state-funded schools from the beginning of next school year (Collecting this data at the previous termly census frequency created a two-term lag between the data being collected and being published). The voluntary national collection begun in 2022 and gathers a sub-set of that data. However, in County Durham, the majority of schools share data locally voluntarily.

Members were also advised that an attendance strategy was currently in development and of work that had taken place such as the development of the attendance alliance that was made up of multi-agency colleagues represented at the prevention and early help partnership and more widely. A multi-agency operational group also considers children who are electively home educated.

Information was given on the school portal which allows schools and education settings to access resources and share information.

School Attendance

Ms Gunn referred to the school attendance support team and asked what kind of coverage they were experiencing and their availability and if they were struggling to meet demand.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that there was high demand for the service, and whilst stretched the capacity in the team covers current statutory responsibilities alongside the alliance partnership approach. They had received some grant funding for children with a social worker through the virtual school to provide a focus on the attendance of children with a social worker and they had appointed an Education Welfare Officer to work with wider partners (developing a joint protocol and resource kit). They had also invested in a Vulnerable Groups Education Support Officer supporting those Electively Home Educated. They used the partnership approach to build capacity across the system.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that when schools academised in 2011 their contribution was lost towards this service, more recently some of the academies were buying back into the service with Service Level Agreements. He added that there was high demand for the service and there were challenges, but the service was building capacity.

Councillor Varty indicated that some parents wanted to keep their children at home to look after other children. She continued that some children stay at home because they were frightened to attend school where they were living in domestic violent situations. She commented that these children needed to be fed when not at school which was a cost to parents and indicated that they needed to encourage free school meals take up more.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that there was a focus across the partnership to ensure they were highlighting the most vulnerable children and arrangements are in place around those young people, so they received the best support available.

In relation to domestic violence, an Education representatives supporting to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) considering high risk domestic abuse incidents are also part of the team that support school attendance, elective home education, children missing from education and this opportunity has meant information can be shared across the piece allowing connections to be made. The joint arrangements ensure that the partnership work is joined up around those concerns.

The Chair referred to children eligible for free school meals and asked if when a child was ill and unable to attend school and was going to be absent from school for a considerable amount of time was there any provision to ensure that the child was well fed.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that if children were prevented from attending school due to health needs, there is an Educational Health Needs Team who are able to help and support young people.

Councillor Hunt indicated that her local school had employed an attendance officer who engaged with children and families and the attendance for the school had improved. She then referred to school holidays, highlighting concerns as some schools now had different holiday periods which was creating problems for parents who had children in different schools.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that the service was aware of this, and it had impacted on attendance however, they had undertaken some work with other local authorities and the Roman Catholic Diocese on holiday realignment and advised that holidays next year would be aligned, and they were now consulting for the following year.

Councillor Hunt indicated that medical appointments were logged as an absence in some schools but in others it was not and asked for consistency of approach among schools.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that schools are guided by the national attendance and absence codes and indicated that there were some changes to some codes from September 2024 that may help. She continued that parents were encouraged to book medical appointments where possible outside of the school day. Where it was not possible, and a young person must be absent from school due to a medical appointment schools current registration regulations and corresponding guidance states this would be an (authorised) absence.

Councillor Hunt asked if this could be highlighted to the virtual school as some children had missed out on incentives due to medical absences.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer indicated that if a child are present at school for registration, the regulation state they receive their mark for the session even if they leave school later in the morning to attend an appointment.

Councillor Crute referred to the cohort of children on long term absence from school and asked how they identified those vulnerable children, specifically children with undiagnosed autism or awaiting an assessment who miss school regularly which impacts on their attainment and the risk of being permanently excluded. He then asked what mechanisms were in place to identify those children who might not have had an assessment for an Educational Health Care Plan.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer indicated that those young people where pupils have an Educational Health Care Plan (whether children are in special schools, mainstream or otherwise), the team work closely with the schools around attendance. She continued that targeting support meetings were held across all schools including special schools. For severe absentees, guidance suggests that children should have a muti agency plan in place. Often there may already be a multi-agency plan in place (some examples include an EHCP, child and family plan, child protection plan) with attendance as a thread running through this / as part of any existing multi-agency plan however if no wider multi-agency plan in place, guidance is clear that one should be put in place to support with wider barriers / ensure needs are met.

In response to a further question from Councillor Crute, the Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer indicated that cohorts of children and young people particularly those vulnerable and those persistently and severely absent are also considered at school targeting support meetings and there is wider consideration around themes / barriers that a number of schools / families are facing around how partners will work together via the alliance to assist.

Professor Gosia M Ciesielska indicated that a worry was focusing on the number of absences without looking at the reasons for the absence and deeper investigations in some cases were required as some families really needed support. However, some families were sending their children to school when they were unwell due to the worry of keeping them off school. She indicated that some guidance for parents around these issues would be beneficial. She then referred to medical appointments and indicated that sometimes parents had no influence on when the appointment takes place.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that the most common reason for absence was illness, there were also some absences for unauthorised reasons. Other wider reasons include holidays in term time and suspensions, but these reasons for absence represented small percentages.

Members were advised of a pilot exercise with local GPs, Public Health, Early Health and Family Health Service to look at sharing information between services where absences due to reported illness were frequent with a pattern of broken weeks with no underlying cause known. She continued that the government also had a national campaign focused on preventable absences currently. The Attendance Alliance received full breakdowns of absence by year groups, including information on reasons for absence, cohorts and groups on a half termly basis. The Access to Education/Vulnerable Group Lead assured members that reasons for absences and all available information is fully considered.

The Head of Education and Skills commented that this work was not just around the volume of absences and commented from a school point of view once a child got to year 11 the difference between the outcomes of a child that attends 98% of the time and a child who attends 92% was enormous and was potentially the difference of two grades across the eight subjects. He stated that secondary schools were struggling to ensure that all their year 11's were enjoying life, school was a nice place to be and stretching resources.

Councillor Waldock referred to where a family's attendance was spasmodic and were receiving targeted support and asked what support was given to the siblings of absentees and if a family approach was taken. She commented that some family's relationships had broken down and asked how they ensure that it does not impact on siblings.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that one of the key features of the attendance alliance work was to ensure that needs are considered holistically, and family centred and not just take into account the needs of one child, they were very much considering siblings. They worked with Early Help services with key workers providing support to the family, and services have worked to closely align the attendance strategy with the early help strategy. One of the work streams of the attendance alliance was parental engagement and promotion of the available offer from the Family Hubs and for example corresponding agencies holding drop-in sessions to enable families to access services within their community and respond to need was highlighted.

Councillor Scurfield referred to persistent absences and asked how this compared to previous years and if they had seen a decline.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer indicated that persistent absences had come down and the early indication was positive, but they still had some challenges.

In response to a further question from Councillor Scurfield the Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer indicated that absences were increasing before the pandemic and did increase to almost 9% but had come down nationally and locally particular in the last year.

Mrs Gunn referred to some special schools measuring engagement and asked who was required to report engagement.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer stated that the attendance systems that schools used were SIMS and Arbor that help schools manage the day-to-day attendance. Particularly secondary schools also make use of such applications to take lesson attendance and lesson monitor so can monitor engagement on a daily basis.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that they could not enforce the process and stated that Ofsted measures engagement with the curriculum.

Councillor Mulholland asked about metrics to measure the percentage of children were living in poverty and if they were taken into consideration.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that they were, and they also look at their absences data by free school meals, vulnerable cohorts etc. that was reported to the attendance alliance to consider. Key partners from the attendance alliance worked with the service to support families and schools.

Durham Inclusion, Exclusion and Pupil Movement

The Inclusion and Alternative Provision Co-ordinator presented information to members that highlighted a significant increase in exclusions and suspensions both regionally and nationally, with some LA's reporting figures at the end of the Autumn term 23 were the same as what was recorded for the previous full academic year. In County Durham we have seen an increase but not at the same rates as other areas. Last year in County Durham 120 permanent exclusions were reported this was not significantly higher than the previous year's figures. He explained that key stage three was a key area of focus.

Members were advised there were four secondary panels that had a geographical split, and all schools were part of the panel with senior leaders from schools attending along with representatives from Early Help, EWEL, CAMHS, Educational Psychology and Anti Social Behaviour teams. Peer to peer support was given along with support from areas such as emotional wellbeing, Early Help, Outreach support, Alternative Provision and through the Inclusion Practitioner whose role also includes working with hard to engage parents and families.

The panels had seen a significant increase in referrals during 2022/23 a number of which were being picked up at an early stage as part of a graduated response.

Referring to primary schools the Alternative Provision Co-ordinator advised that there were no permanent exclusions during 2022/23 but it was anticipated that it would happen during this academic year creating pressure on the preventative offer currently in place.

Information was given on the primary pathway model where a triage system was in place and would offer advice, peer to peer support and put recommendations in place. Four Nurture Hubs provided support at the earliest stage and could support individual pupils for three sessions per week for up to three terms. All schools accessing the Nurture support would be expected to develop Nurture provisions within their schools this will increase capacity across the County. In relation to primary outreach work the service was looking to extend this. Work was being done to reduce the long term pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB).

Transition support was provided across key year groups, work was ongoing to identify pupils requiring support to ensure a successful transition into Primary and Secondary

All schools had agreed to sign up to the Alternative Provision framework and protocol. The LA also oversees a directory of providers. Providers have quality assurance checks to support their entry into the directory. The LA provides a training offer to AP providers with service level agreements in place to strengthen the offer.

The Alternative Provision Co-ordinator advised of the work taking place on reintegration of pupils. Forty young people were supported back into mainstream schools following permanent exclusion since May 21.

Supported Offsite Placements (SOP) had replaced the managed move protocol, the new process ensures moves are right for the young person. SOP's were managed robustly with a greater emphasis on the young person, which had increased successful outcomes.

A Fair Access Protocol had been implemented from September 23 to support the admission of young people who do not have a school place, the panels met weekly geographically, there were fair and transparent arrangements, thirty young people had gone through the system. Members were advised of the challenges involved with in year admissions process between schools, the LA continue to work with the DFE and school leaders.

Councillor Hunt asked if there were any reasons or patterns for exclusions.

The Inclusion and Alternative Provision Coordinator responded that historically persistent disruption was the main reason for exclusions but over the last few years exclusions for assaults against staff and other students had increased.

There was also had a number of incidents more recently in relation to dab and vape pens and were working with the police and services on this.

Councillor Hunt referred to the nurture hubs and asked who were funding these.

The Inclusion and Alternative Provision Coordinator responded that the funding was from the high needs block and was a small amount of money that had enhanced the offer as the hubs were already established.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that a small allocation from the high needs block was allocated to support preventative work. If the exclusion number increased the costs to the Pupil Referral Unit would increase so they were trying with the school's direction to get ahead. The Head of Education and Skills advised that High Needs Block allocation to support the preventative work of the Primary and Secondary Panels was ahead of the game and would reduce higher long term costs. This had taken over five years to establish.

Councillor Hunt asked if match funding included academies.

The Head of Education and Skills confirmed this was the case and all schools had agreed to match funding over a three year period.

In response to a question from Mrs Gunn the Inclusion and Alternative Provision Coordinator indicated that the alternative provision directory had a range of different providers such as colleges, vocational and therapeutic intervention. The directory currently had approximately 36 providers. Regionally and nationally not all local authorities had a robust systems in place and leave any decisions around alternative provision to schools. There was encouragement to use provisions that were part of the directory that had been checked by Local Authority officers. On a monthly basis the Alternative Provision providers came together and held network meetings to share good practice and focus on areas for development. Alternative Provision is a key part of the education system supporting schools and individual young people.

Mrs Gunn indicated that this was an important part of SEND review and was the place to be looked at as a key priority and the fact that this was already being built upon was important. She asked how proactive they were to find new providers.

The Inclusion and Alternative Provision Coordinator responded that there were two parts to the alternative provision, and they had registered and unregistered providers. The unregistered providers could not offer a full time offer but could offer packages and interventions working in partnership with schools. The registered providers offer fulltime placements this was not directly available to parents and could only be accessed through school referral routes. He stated that new providers were coming on board to increase the options available to school.

In response to a further question from Mrs Gunn around the financial limitations and the legal implications prohibiting obtaining some of the funding the Head of Education and Skills responded that the allocation of money was to the panels, there was a business plan in place. Funding was from the High Needs Block to support the panels work it was not allocated to individuals. They were trying to do something different and 27 out of 29 secondary schools were academies with all schools part of the Behaviour and Inclusion Partnership. If some of the academies withdrew it would be difficult to continue, these panels were solution focused providing challenge, as well as professional development for everyone involved.

Councillor Varty indicated that it was positive to see everyone working together and would like to thank everyone.

Resolved: That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to school attendance and inclusion, and the proactive, collaborative actions being taken to address areas of challenge be noted.

Councillors Mulholland and Waldock left the meeting at 11.30 am

7 Schools Ofsted Update and Educational Attainment

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with an update of recent Ofsted inspections of County Durham's maintained schools and educational outcomes in County Durham in 2023 (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Head of Education and Skills was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that focused on the Ofsted Inspections of the current academic year; Ofsted Inspections position currently for all schools; Ofsted Inspection Outcomes for different school categories and the summary outcome data for children in Durham Schools by Key Stage. He also provided details of Ofsted Inspections regime going forward (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Ofsted Inspections

Members were advised that the new Chief Ofsted Inspector was Sir Martyn Oliver, who had local connections to the county. The new chief inspector would make changes in the inspection framework due to the intense pressure Ofsted inspections put on school managers. There would no longer be one word judgements, which may impact on making comparisons with previous years inspection judgements, it was also reported there was a lack of headship of the inspection process.

The Head of Education and Skills added that if a school had 50 in year transfers this provided a challenge to the school, but schools did well, there was a lot of 'good stuff' going on in schools and they would benefit from the changes to the inspection framework.

Referring to inspection outcomes for nursery and primary provision the aim was for all children to attend good or better provision and the figures would look better next year. The Head of Education and Skills advised that small primaries inspection outcomes had dipped and provided examples of reasons for this.

Focus then turned to secondary schools and members were advised that five secondaries were due for inspection and gave examples of two schools that should receive a better inspection outcome.

In relation to special schools the Ofsted inspection outcomes were on par with national figures and indicated that lots of special schools were not being inspected.

The Head of Education and Skills advised members that when he provides an update to committee next year, he will include comparisons with statistical neighbours.

Mrs Gunn commented that the context was important but not applied to special schools and those schools that had resources were able to manipulate the outcomes.

The Head of Education and Skills provided an example of Dean Academy, that had received a Requires Improvement Ofsted judgment at a previous inspection and at a recent inspection and received a good outcome, the school had unique challenges. They had 40/60 transfers coming in from different parts of Durham and the country and statistically if a child had moved schools three or more times, they would be 2.5 grades lower in all their 8 subjects at GCSE. Dean Academy were doing a good job and were still showing positive outcomes with these children that was now recognised by Ofsted.

Ofsted Inspections Outcomes

Moving to Educational Attainment the Head of Education and Skills advised in relation to primary data, previously County Durham was above regional and national data, but they were now lower. He added that he was not worried about this and that post COVID priorities had changed, and SATs were less important when compared to the welfare of the child. He expected that changes in the inspection framework relating to child welfare would be included. Maths was an issue and support was available via a service level agreement to provide support for schools and this would support children to achieve later in their educational attainment.

Information was given on Progress 8 which was a range of very academic subjects and young people were measured by their peers for performance. Aspects were doing well but the EBAC focussed on languages, humanities and sciences and some young people struggle. A range of tools had been removed from secondary schools, but the Head of Education and Skill advised he could see change coming. He explained the scoring of progress 8 and how the county was third regionally in terms of progress.

Referring to key stage five members were advised that Durham's schools and 6th form colleges had improved and were better than national figures in to attaining places in the Russel Group of universities.

Mrs Gunn asked what support was in place for leaders.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that they run school business manager networks. If they are a maintained school, they would visit the school three times as year.

In response to a question from Councillor Deinali the Head of Education and Skills stated that they were finding it hard to appoint Head Teachers of Secondary Schools. The Head of Education and Skill suggested that progress 8 was not a one size fit all but could be easily amended to be more inclusive.

Professor Gosia M Ciesielska asked if any support was provided to children to help them pick their subject choices and to understand how their subjects would impact on their choices for university.

The Head of Education and Skills responded that the 11-16 age group schools had an open door policy and let everyone in; 11-18 age group schools had less incentive to get everyone in and lose some of their pupils. There was an expectation on the breadth of offer and careers information that should be regulated and all those levels within careers that required an independent review of inclusivity in terms of the sixth form offer.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

Councillor Hunt left the meeting at 11.35 am

Professor Gosia M Ciesielska left meeting at 11.55 am

8 Elective Home Education

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided Members with an overview of Elective Home Education in County Durham.

The report also covered the national and local context and policy, published data and collaborative working (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that focused on the background; elective home education; local context; proactivity; intervention; information technology strand and impact (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

When comparing the number of children in the county who were educated at home this was 1% of the county's school age population and was lower than national figures.

Nationally numbers of children being educated at home had increased following the pandemic and this was reflected across county Durham too. Last year there was a rise of 18.9% nationally and it was 18% in county Durham.

Members were advised that the service met with parents to offer support. 12% of the cohort access local 14-16 college provisions part of the week to undertake English, maths and a vocational subject.

The service provide annual data trends to Head Teachers as part of a wider inclusion dashboard. There were also national links to share good practice and Operational and Strategic Panels

Contact was made with parents to offer support through various groups such as the equalities education team service who supported gypsy, roma, traveller ethnic groups given this group are overrepresented within the wider cohort and are likely to have already been known to families prior a decision to electively home educate. Bespoke help was offered where required and requested.

Regular reviews took place and the service ensured that the child's voice was heard by officers speaking with the child. Progression workers provided support to young people in years 10 and 11 and had contacts in colleges, training providers and apprenticeships.

Strategic Support Panel considered information geographically, by year group and reasons for elective home education. Those arrangements were deemed as best practice.

Members were advised that in the recent Ofsted inspection the services systems, strategies, response and safeguarding arrangements were reported to be well managed.

Councillor Scurfield referred to the system that captures the reasons for elective home education and asked what were the key themes and what actions were being taken if the reasons were what was happening in the school.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that the main reasons were parental preference following COVID and wished to continue with home education. She continued that children's mental health including anxiety were also reasons parents cited. Piece of Mind teams were funded by the NHS and worked closely with schools, colleges and wider partners around mental health and wellbeing. They treat mild to moderate mental health issues and had three teams across the county. There is a specialist nurse who purely works with those children who are electively home educated.

With regard to the reasons for home education, if this were due to the school practice if they did feel that there was any issue, they were proactive and would discuss this with the school. She commented that there had been sixty movers into the local authority who had decided to home educate, so they knew the trends and were proactive addressing these issues.

The Head of Education and Skills reassured Members that the data was shared across the schools and panels and found Panel members shared information and challenged each other around the data. The service would go direct to a Chief Executive of a Trust of a Headteacher if there were any concerns and would do this before they went to Ofsted or the Department for Education.

Mrs Gunn indicated that one of the key issues for her was looking at the underlying reason was more important and added mental health issues were usually due to another reason. She referred to the word 'chosen' and asked if parents were really choosing home education as they do not have a choice and asked at what point did dialogue with parents commence.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that the service initially receive reported reasons from schools and when meeting with parents they dig deeper around the reasons and triage full information at that stage. In terms of the word 'choice' this is national framework language around home education. She continued that the first dialogue would be within the first week or two weeks of the parent deciding to electively home educate their child. The guidance suggested that contact with parents was required once a year, but the service were in continuous dialogue with parents with a three-monthly review and had a named point of contact for the parent if they had any issues.

The Head of Education and Skills indicated that they decided to invest in this four years ago and offer more support than other local authorities.

Mrs Gunn indicated that a week or two into the process was too late.

The Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer responded that not all parents take them up on the offer of the meeting and indicated that contact was made with parents as quickly as possible, and usually make contact the next day to arrange that welcome meeting, however the meeting itself may not take place until a later date, and this is often led by when is convenient for the parent.

In response to a question from Councillor Varty the Access to Education / Vulnerable Groups Lead Officer advised the service was able to provide independent support to families to help with completing forms and accompanying them to meetings.

Resolved: That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to elective home education, and the collaborative help and support of a wide range of professionals to support families be noted.

9 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Members of the following upcoming diary dates:

Special meeting on 20 March 2024 at 1.30pm focusing on Children's Social Care.

Visit to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub on 9 April (The Chair advised Members that places were limited and would be filled on a first come first served basis).