

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 7 April 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Allen (Chair), Ali, Crudass, Layton, Storr and Toms

APOLOGIES – Councillors Johnson and Dr. Riley

ABSENT – Councillors Dulston and Renton

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services) and Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion)

CYP36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP37 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 MARCH 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3 March 2025

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3 March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

CYP38 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion presented members with an update on Elective Home Education in Darlington. Parents have a legal right to choose to electively home educate their child and the local authority has certain duties regarding the monitoring of education being provided and enforcement action where it is judged a suitable education is not being provided. Members were informed that a refreshed version of the legislation is currently being considered by the House of Lords before ratification after which it will be implemented by local authorities.

Members were informed that parents have a legal right to withdraw children into home education assuming full responsibility for the child's education, with the local authority having responsibility for monitoring that suitable education is provided. Darlington employ an Elective Home Education advisor for this role who also sits on the Vulnerable Pupils Panel. Members were notified that the post-COVID period showed a significant rise in children being home educated – 2023-24 shows 390 children compared to 250 in 2021-22.

Discussions were held including the features of the new legislation with officers clarifying that the full details are not yet available but that an update can be provided to this committee once the full details are known – members agreed to receive an update in an upcoming meeting of this Committee. A member also highlighted that it would be useful to have numbers or percentages for the various reasons that parents choose to home educate.

Furthermore, another member expressed an interest in any figures relating to anti-social behaviour and home schooling.

Questions were raised including how many officers are working with home education with the response that both Children's and Education services are working together to prepare for the expectations of the new legislation. It was asked how schools support those being home educated with the schools' representative assuring members that a great deal of integrated work takes place highlighting that Darlington's small size ensures that closer relationships can be forged than in larger locales with families being made aware of the education pathways available to them. Officers added that a robust health offer is also present in Darlington for those being home educated, ensuring access to vaccinations and other health services available in a school setting.

A member noted the increase in numbers in Home Education and questioned as to whether a reason for this is clear. Officers informed members that numbers in elective home education were relatively stable in the pre-COVID period and the increase appears to be a direct result of the pandemic however the new compulsory registration rules in the new legislation will allow for more accurate figures and trend-mapping. Officers were asked to confirm how quickly they anticipate the new legislation will be implemented with confirmation that a swift changeover is expected due to staff readiness.

It was also asked as to whether families in receipt of free school meals receive equivalent benefits when home educating. Officers clarified that parents who electively home educate take on the full responsibility for the child's schooling, including meals however when the local authority is made aware of a parent considering home education, a meeting is offered in order to make them aware of the various aspects and costs of home education, for example, books and examinations.

RESOLVED - Members noted the content of the report, the council's legal duties and current arrangements as well as upcoming changes in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

CYP39 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously approved work programme

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.