

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

5 JUNE 2018

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTE EXTRACT 19 APRIL 2018 – HOME SCHOOLING UPDATE

4. HOME SCHOOLING UPDATE

- 4.1 Ms Donna Manson - Service Director Children and Young People and Ms Michelle Strong - Chief Officer Education, were in attendance to give an update on legislative and guidance changes to home schooling within the Scottish Borders. The Chairman, referring to the Private Minute of 16 February 2017, gave the context to the request. Ms Manson began by explaining the current legislation, which had been circulated with the Agenda, remained in force. Home schooling was a priority area for the Council and included in the discussions on the mental and emotional health of young people. National tracking of mental and emotional health was being introduced but Scottish Borders was already taking action in this area and had carried out pupil and staff surveys.
- 4.2 Ms Manson went on to advise that within the Scottish Borders, there were 50 families who home schooled their children (20 primary and 30 secondary) of which eight were being flexi-schooled (seven primary and one secondary). 34% of those children lived out with a town or village, with the number of home educated pupils remaining stable over the last four years. Approximately 30 requests for home schooling were received each year, of those six to eight withdrew their request following engagement with the family. Ms Manson then referred to the limited action available in terms of legislation. She highlighted that the Council did not have the right or duty to visit the home, see the child, check parents' qualifications, ensure the curriculum was adequate, see samples of work, monitor home education or make an annual enquiry. The same legislation only required parents to respond to informal enquiries by the Council. There was no parental duty to equip premises, cover the school curriculum, work to age specific attainment standards, provide lessons or peer group socialisation.
- 4.3 Ms Strong continued that there were clear challenges and discussed the ways in which the Council's approach was continually improving - reaching out to families whilst respecting their decision to home school. The Council were raising awareness of emotional wellbeing, helping young people gain confidence; developing coping strategies and ensuring schools provided a nurturing, learning environment. Part of this included increased engagement with a range of partners to join up all approaches around the child. Another factor was improving public perception by promoting successes and measuring the impact of actions to ensure schools were the best they could be. In terms of progress, in 2017/2018 the Council had increased flexi-schooling, offered support, when appropriate for accessing qualifications/college, IT, activities and the Education Maintenance Allowance. Ms Strong went on to explain that the majority of home schooling requests were linked to children with anxiety and she highlighted initiatives to raise awareness of the child's emotional and social needs, including, training, investment in a helpline, online support and working with Stable Life. Policies would continue to develop in 2018/2019 with partnership working focused on mental and emotional health improvements, innovation, participation and vulnerable families'

early intervention. Ms Manson then referred to continuing risks and referred to the work of the Emergency Planning Officer to raise awareness of radicalisation. Partnership working with health professionals was also ongoing to engage with families regarding the immunisation programme. To conclude the presentation, Ms Strong advised that any requests for Home Schooling, where there was a child protection concern, would be refused.

4.4 Discussion followed and Members raised a number of questions. In response, officers advised that the secondary school equivalent of the Leader Valley School, would be the new Jedburgh School, there would also be enhanced level of provision provided in other schools. Clarification around the Section 37 Order was also provided and it was suggested that a range of scripts be available to assist Members with enquiries. With regard to Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) it was explained that this was based on free school meal entitlement and therefore home schooled children were not eligible. However, this would be included as feedback in a reply to a survey on PEF. Regarding a question by the Learning Disability Champion on the number of home schooled children with additional needs, Ms Manson would advise out with the meeting.

4.5 It was noted that Ms Manson would meet with the Executive Member for Children and Young People, the Learning Disability Champion and the Children and Young People Champion to discuss future engagement with partner organisations. The Committee agreed that home schooling should be monitored annually providing a summary of the number of requests, how many pupils remained in school, how many were flexi-schooled and the split between primary and secondary schools, and, that in future, this monitoring role be referred to Executive Committee. It was further agreed that a briefing on home schooling should be provided for all Members. The Chairman thanked Ms Manson and Ms Strong for their attendance and detailed presentation.

DECISION

- # (a) **AGREED to RECOMMEND that Executive (Education) Committee review home schooling on an annual basis.**
- (b) **AGREED that all Members receive a briefing on home schooling**