

TITLE	Elective Home Education
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 March 2021
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the current context and information regarding Elective Home Education within Wokingham.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee note the content of this report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council has statutory oversight for children and young people's education, employment and training up to the age of 18.

Wokingham Borough Council recognises the right of all parents to choose to educate their child at home and aims to develop positive and supportive working relationships with families of school-aged children who are being home educated.

Elective Home Education is defined when a parent withdraws their child from school to educate them themselves or never chooses to send their child to school.

Wokingham has seen an increase of 22.46% in Elective Home Education this academic year (fig1). In comparison with 133 local authorities the increase has been approximately 25% so we are slightly below but in line with the national picture.

Background

Wokingham Borough Council has statutory oversight for children and young people's education, employment and training up to the age of 18.

Wokingham Borough Council recognises the right of all parents to choose to educate their child at home and aims to develop positive and supportive working relationships with families of school-aged children who are being home educated.

Elective Home Education (EHE) is defined when a parent withdraws their child from school to educate them themselves or never chooses to send their child to school.

The Council is committed to understanding approaches to home education by outcomes, not on the basis that a different way of educating children must be wrong. It recognises that there are many approaches to educational provision and that the suitability of education varies from child to child – depending on their individual ability, aptitude and needs.

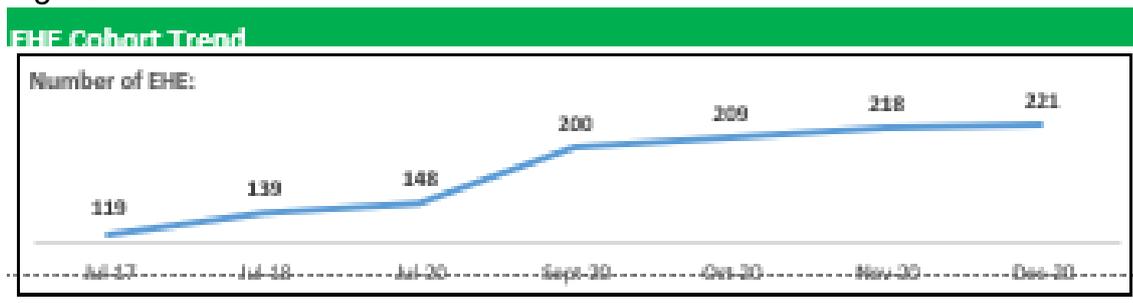
The Council's Virtual School and Education Welfare Service has responsibility for championing educational outcomes across the Borough. Within the Education Welfare Service (EWS), the Education Officer is the named officer responsible for Elective Home Education policy and procedures, who is available to offer advice and support to all families registered as Electively Home Educating within the Borough, overseen by the Principal Education Welfare Officer.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 requires parents to provide an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and any special educational needs the child may have. There is no legal definition of what constitutes such education, or a legal requirement for parents to follow the National Curriculum, therefore Wokingham Borough Council follows national guidance and use professional opinion to judge the suitability of home education on a case-by-case basis.

Current Position

Wokingham has seen an increase of 22.46% in Elective Home Education this academic year (fig1). In comparison with 133 local authorities the increase has been approximately 25%, and across the SE Region there has been an overall 29% increase in total numbers recorded as being Electively Home Educated, so we are slightly below the regional and national picture.

Fig1 Cohort Trend



Whilst we have seen an increase in the numbers of parents choosing to Elective Home Educate their children, we understand that there are a variety of reasons for these parental choices that are not only around COVID-19 anxiety, but also include families that found they were able to electively home educate well during lockdown and want to continue with this as a lifestyle choice.

The Main reasons for given for the Elective Home Education rise since the start of the pandemic are:

- COVID anxiety
- Lockdown has been successful for Elective Home Education in some families
- Wanted consistency for education rather than stop/start throughout COVID – will be looking to return to school once pandemic is over.

During COVID the Education Welfare Service offered a free service to ALL schools to support attendance and engagement of vulnerable pupils and in addition to our pre-existing traded service agreements. Therefore, every school in Wokingham has been offered a service from us which has been in the form of register consultations and direct work with families. We have worked with 165 pupils and families to date this academic year.

During the course of the autumn term the Education Welfare Service assessed the suitability of education to over 164 families of the 221 electively home educating and has made sure that all new families that decide to Electively Home Educate are seen to ensure they are making an informed decision and life choice (and not being off-rolled). We have 57 families left to visit this academic year and then all families will have been visited this academic year either in person or virtually.

The Education Welfare Service has continued to offer home visits (following risk assessment), video calls, telephone calls, reports with photographic evidence to ensure that the education in place is suitable and effective. Support is offered immediately to all new Electively Home Educating families and an initial visit offered within the first few weeks. If there are concerns raised from the school at point of removal, these are addressed with the family.

The Officer has focused on building relationships with the Elective Home Education community that had wavered due to not having anyone in post for 3 years which has worked well, and we are continuing to improve this. 15-day notices are served in cases where education has been deemed unsuitable and support in moving the pupil back into a school setting, or the issue School Attendance Orders where this fails to drive the improvement or attendance needed, however it should be noted that these are very rare occurrences.

Data Reporting

The Education Welfare Service provides a monthly report which includes data on Children Missing Education and Elective Home Education. This report provides trend data as well as information at a school level in order to support Education Welfare Service involvement and prioritisation. It should be noted that Children Missing Education and Elective Home Education are different things, and the definition for Children Missing Education does not include Elective Home Education.

The current Elective Home Educated cohort of children equates to c1% of the total school population and the breakdown of Elective Home Education registrations by school attended prior to Elective Home Education is shown in the table below (fig2) (note: some parents choose to Electively Home Educate without ever sending their children to a school).

Fig2 Current Cohort

Number of EHE registrations by secondary school attended prior to EHE.							
Bohunt	Maiden Erlegh	Holt	St Crispins	Bulmershe	Waingels	Emmbrook	Oakbank
21	5	4	*	*	*	*	*

Number of EHE registrations by primary school attended prior to EHE.			
Beechwood	7	Grazeley	*
Shinfield St Marys	6	Keep Hatch	*
Coombes	5	Lambs Lane	*
All Saints	5	Evendons	*
St Sebastians	5	Polehampton Infant	*
Windmill	5	Crazies Hill	*
Wheatfield	5	Westende Junior	*
Earley St Peters	5	St Nicholas	*
Gorse Ride Junior	4	Polehampton Junior	*
Hillside	4	Loddon	*
Radstock	4	Finchampstead	*
		Highwood	*
		Rivermead	*
		Whiteknights	*
		Winnersh	*
		Woodley	*
		Willow Bank Infant	*
		Hatch Ride	*
		Farley hill	*
		Hawkedon	*
		Shinfield Infant	*
		St Dominic Savio	*
		Aldryngton	*

* Indicates where the number is lower than 4 and thus individual children could be identified so detail is not contained within the data excerpt.

Analysis of Issues

From the Elective Home Education report (Fig2), there are a high number of pupils withdrawn for Elective Home Education from Bohunt and Bearwood Primary. Some of this could be attributed to the high levels of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT), within these areas and cultural reasons for withdrawal, however it would be complacent to assume this and therefore further investigation is taking place with all of the families involved to find out the rationale for withdrawal and then a plan to support the families and/or schools will be formulated.

Where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are Electively Home Educated, they tend to require extra support to ensure education is in place. Half termly visits are offered for the most vulnerable and we also provide correct materials where appropriate. Schools are supported to promote education to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community by offering financial support to promote positive outcomes through 1:1 teacher support or behaviour focused interventions to keep them in school. The Education Officer offers regular ‘surgeries’ in schools or on the traveller sites to address any education matters.

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community are supporting in finding ways to overcome barriers to full attendance. Relationship building has been a critical element of this built from regular site visits and communication with the ‘elders’ in the community. We have recently held a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Forum in which we are looking to put a project in place with 5 pilot schools to improve engagement from this community which will include supportive curriculum advice, off the shelf PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education), lessons for schools, direct work with pupils who are at risk of exclusions and supportive community work.

Half termly the Education Officer chairs a vulnerable pupils meeting with multi-agencies, including Health, Children’s Social Care, Youth Offending Service, The Virtual School, The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Team and Foundry College. Cases of concern are brought to this meeting to plan and professional discussion around ‘stuck’ cases. This does at times include Elective Home Education cases but is not exclusive to this cohort of learners.

At all points of process, we monitor for inappropriate off-rolling and liaise with schools to ensure that pupils are put back onto roll should this happen. We are also required to identify unregistered schools and pass information on to the DfE.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
As this report is for information purposes only an equalities assessment is not required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elective Home Education Policy 2020/21

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