

TITLE	Education Welfare Service
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Schools Forum on 7 December 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This report is a response to a Schools Forum request for an update on Education Welfare Services and activity.

RECOMMENDATION

Schools Forum is asked to note the update on the Education Welfare Service

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report outlines the work of the Education Welfare Service that encompasses communication and advice, targeted support meetings, multi-agency support for families, and legal interventions; and highlights some of the current challenges facing the service.

Background

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) continues to support multiagency work where attendance is low and where children are missing out on their education and regularly attends the Early Help Hub to ensure education is prioritised. The Local Authority has recently removed the EWS traded service offer to our local educational partners in light of the new arrangements set out in the white paper and non-statutory guidance. The EWS works in close partnership across internal and external agencies and core priorities such as Children Missing Education (CME), Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) and Elective Home Education (EHE).

EWS Provision

Communication and Advice – we have provided a named Education Welfare Officer for all schools in the LA and are able to call or email for advice at anytime. The service are providing training webinars, quick guides, template letters and a referral form which talks the school through what processes they need to have done in order to access EWS support for legal proceedings. The service will be offering a Network meeting at least annually to bring schools together to address any specific areas of concerns and will incorporate speakers from partner agencies. The EWS will be able to offer ad hoc

training sessions on identified areas (e.g. part time timetables, exclusions, CME, EHE, etc).

Targeted Support Meetings – all schools are offered either termly or half termly consultations with their identified EWO. The service prioritises schools who have significant attendance concerns and will offer more frequent consultations (caseload permitting). The consultations will prioritise persistently absent pupils, including pupils on part time timetables, pupils at risk of PEX, and pupils who receive frequent suspensions. However, in order to work more efficiently and transparently our service needs access to all school's attendance data, something which is not in place at this time.

Multi-disciplinary support for families – signpost schools to partner agencies to support pupil and families. The EWS liaise and work with partner agencies to provide appropriate support for families.

Legal intervention - Schools will refer into the EWS service when all appropriate support has been proven not to make a difference or there has been no engagement from family with identified support. EWS will write to parents offering an initial meeting to look at previous support and attendance plans to see if anything can be modified, or further avenues suggested. The family will be given a 2-week period to engage but if they do not then Fast Track to prosecution processes will be initiated. Through this 8-week period the EWS and other identified professionals will continue to work with the family and if engaged with and attendance improves then the process can be withdrawn. If no difference is made to attendance, then papers will be sent to legal department.

Statutory duties for EWS also include prioritising Children Missing in Education, Electively Home Educated children, the issuing of Penalty Notices and legal work, and Child Employment (work permits and chaperone licences).

EWS does significant work with the GRT community, mainly around supporting applications for schools and supporting appropriate elective home education and 2021/22 year inclusion work in schools.

Delivery Challenges

EWS, when fully staffed have 9 members in the team equating to 6 ½ full-time staff- Principal EWO, Senior EWO, 2 FT term time only EWO's and a part time term time only EWO, also Part time TTO support worker and a part time Child Employment Officer with full time admin). At the moment the team is 2 EWO colleagues down, but activity is taking place to respond to this. However, as a result, the service cannot offer the early intervention support work for schools and families that has previously been offered due to these staff shortages.

Not having access to all schools data or having a system in place that tracks attendance data means we cannot identify where support is needed either on an individual, cohort or area basis. It also makes it difficult to track areas of concerns amongst ethnic groups, pupils with SEN needs etc. Due to lack of staff it is proving difficult to continue to provide a robust service in areas such as CME, EHE and for the GRT community.

Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education numbers have significantly increased since COVID and continue to rise. This is putting a strain on our resources to be able to manage this.

Child Employment is an area which is also growing – several large new studios being built in the area.

Funding of the Education Welfare Service

The budgeted cost of the Education Welfare Service in 2022/23 is £245k, with 96% of this being direct staff costs. Of this, the Central School Services Block of the DSG contributes £117k as approved through Schools Forum in January 2022.

The balance of costs are in part funded by Penalty Charge Notice income, with around £32k received to date this financial year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	Nil		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

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

The EWS sits as part of the Learning, Achievement and Partnerships service area within Children's Services, and works closely with other parts of the council but most notably Children's Social Care and Early Help.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An equalities assessment is not required given that there is no decision recommendation.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

A climate impact assessment is not required given that there is no decision recommendation.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
None

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