

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Scrutiny Panel 24th January 2012

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Education & Children's Services

PART I **FOR INFORMATION, COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to provide information on the current procedures for children educated at home.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

It is recommended that members note the legal context within which the service operates and the current procedures for monitoring home education.

3 Community Strategy Priorities

Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion

Children educated at home should receive a suitable education and their safety and well being should be monitored as far as possible within the limited powers and resources of the Local Authority (LA).

4 Other Implications

(a) Financial

For 2011/12 Slough Borough Council received £27,000 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding from schools to employ an Education Support Officer, whose role includes providing advice for families educating their children at home and accompanying a member of the Attendance Team on home visits. It is planned that this funding will continue in 2012/13

(b) Risk Management

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation
The Council continues to follow the procedures outlined in Appendix 1	<p>The risks are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The LA is not aware of pupils educated at home.• Pupils educated at home do not receive a suitable education.• Parents refuse to allow annual visits.• Annual visits are not completed on time due to unforeseen staffing difficulties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Off rolling procedures outlined in Appendix 1 are followed.• Annual visits are undertaken with parents' consent.• The LA aims to support and advise parents in a constructive way and reduce the likelihood of them refusing an annual visit.• The LA has contingency plans to cover vacancies and staff sickness, so that the maximum gap between home visits is 18 months.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications. There is no legal requirement for parents to register with LAs if they choose to home educate and the LA cannot require parents to co-operate with annual visits.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no changes planned to the home education procedures so no equalities impact assessment is required.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The School Services Team became responsible for the home education service in October 2010. The procedures that schools and LA Officers follow were reviewed shortly afterwards and have been updated recently. The procedure document is included in Appendix 1 and its main purpose is to ensure that pupils do not slip through the net when parents decide to home educate. These procedures apply to parents and children known to the LA. There will be some families

who have moved to Slough and are not known to the LA because parents have not applied for a school place and the LA has not yet received any information from other agencies involved with the families.

- 5.2 Parents and carers have a duty to provide an education for their children but there is no requirement for this to take place in school, therefore parents do have the option to provide education at home if they wish. The number of children educated at home in Slough has fallen in recent years from 42 in September 2009 to 26 in December 2011. It is possible that the number of pupils educated at home is linked to the availability of schools places. Some parents state that their reason for educating at home is that they were unable to secure a place at their preferred school and chose not to accept the place offered by the LA.
- 5.3 In 2009 the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families commissioned Graham Badman to undertake an independent review of home education. His report made a number of recommendations and suggested improving how home education was regulated but the recommendations were not implemented before the General Election in 2010. The Department for Education website states that the current government is considering whether any changes need to be made to the existing home education arrangements and will take into account the views of parents and LAs. There is no indication as to when any new guidance will be released.
- 5.4 If parents contact the LA about home education they are given advice about the implications, in terms of their responsibilities and also provided with a detailed information booklet which includes frequently asked questions, sources of further information and advice, and how the LA monitors home education. The booklet also explains the process for off rolling their child from school.
- 5.5 In Slough each pupil who is home educated should receive a monitoring visit each year. However the LA has no legal power to insist on a visit and relies on parents to co-operate. Parents are notified around 2 weeks in advance and have the option to request a more convenient time. A member of the Attendance Team visits the family and is accompanied by a qualified teacher, so that there can be an assessment of the quality of education being provided. Parents may require additional support and this is considered by the Attendance Team Manager and may involve starting a common assessment.
- 5.6 Visits could take place more often than once a year, subject to parents' agreement. Each visit involves some routine administrative work, planning the date of the visit and time and possibly negotiating with parents if the date suggested is not convenient. The visit itself involves 2 members of staff for around one hour each, plus an additional hour to complete the follow up report, so assuming no further actions are required, the basic staff time assigned to a visit is around 4 hours. There are 26 pupils currently educated at home. To provide an extra visit each year would involve an additional 104 hours of staff time.
- 5.7 If there are any concerns about safeguarding an immediate referral is made to the Social Care duty team.
- 5.8 Of the 26 pupils currently educated at home there are 8 primary pupils and 18 secondary pupils, including 1 with a statement of special needs. For the 26 pupils all but 4 visits have been satisfactory in terms of the education provided. Additional advice and support has been provided for those where the education was considered to be unsatisfactory. There have been no referrals to Social Care.

6. **Comments of Other Committees**

There are no comments from other committees

7 **Conclusion**

The LA provides information, advice and guidance to parents who are home educating or considering home education. Once parents have made the decision to home educate the LA monitors how the education is provided as far as possible within the current guidance and regulations.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Home Education Procedures

9. **Background Papers**

None