



AGENDA ITEM 10

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

3 JUNE 2008

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE – REPORT OF THE
CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To update OSB following the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's consideration of information in relation to the issue of attendance in Middlesbrough schools.

BACKGROUND

2. The scrutiny panel's work programme for 2007/08 included the topic of school attendance. Attendance has previously been identified as an area where action/improvement was needed, resulting in the topic being agreed for inclusion in the panel's work programme. As the panel's review of extended schools was still ongoing, Members agreed to consider an overview of school attendance as a "one-off" issue before determining whether to include the topic in the panel's work programme for 2008/09.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION CONSIDERED BY THE PANEL

3. In 2005/06 Middlesbrough was identified as having the second worst attendance record nationally in respect of persistent absentees, defined as pupils who have missed more than 20% of schooling - ie an average of one day in every school week. The level of persistent absentees was 13.4% at that time.
4. The scrutiny panel considered information in respect of the following:

- Targets for reducing levels of persistent absentees.
 - Overall attendance in primary schools.
 - Overall attendance in secondary schools.
 - Proportion of persistent absentees by secondary school.
 - Breakdown of persistent absentees by year group and sex.
 - The strong link between persistent absence and educational attainment.
 - A reduction in persistent absence from 13.4% in 2005/06 to 8.3% in 2007/08.
5. Members also heard of the significant work that has been done to improve school attendance in general and the level of persistent absence in particular. Initiatives have been introduced to promote and reward good and improved attendance and work has also been undertaken to evaluate the factors leading to absence. Steps have then been taken to address these issues in conjunction with schools and parents.
6. It is recognised that the key outstanding issues relating to attendance are as follows:
- Attendance levels of the youngest primary school children.
 - Primary school attendance of children of eastern European origin.
 - The level of persistent absence in secondary schools - especially older girls from the more socially disadvantaged areas.
 - High levels of secondary school absences due to medical appointments and family holidays.

CONCLUSION

7. Having considered the detailed information submitted to it, the scrutiny panel concluded that the Council has made significant improvements to attendance levels - particularly in respect of the level of persistent absentees (Middlesbrough has achieved the third greatest reduction nationally over the past two years). However, the stringent national targets that have been introduced (a reduction to below 5% persistent absentees by 2011) mean that work needs to be continued in this area to ensure that the improvement is sustained.

RECOMMENDATION

8. The scrutiny panel agreed that the information be noted and that, given the importance of the topic, consideration be given to undertaking a detailed scrutiny review of school attendance as part of the panel's 2008/089 work programme. The Overview and Scrutiny Board is recommended to note the current position.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

9. Report submitted to 7 May 2008 Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting - "School Attendance."

COUNCILLOR JULIA ROSTRON CHAIR OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

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