
Cabinet Member (Education) Meeting:

1st October 2013

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Education) - Councillor Kershaw

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director, People

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Review of the new Coventry strategy for improving attendance

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on the impact of Coventry's attendance strategy, one year after its implementation in September 2012, and summarises the levels of attendance in the 2012/13 school year.

Data is now available for one full year, allowing analysis of the impact of the service since the Education Welfare Service ceased to exist. The Department for Education are now collecting figures across 6 half terms, previously data was analysed over 5 half terms. Within this report the data for 5 half terms is used. This is to allow an accurate comparison to be made with previous years.

The data shows that attendance figures have been maintained across all phases with slight improvements in overall attendance for both primary and secondary schools. Coventry figures for overall attendance is in line with the 2011-12 national average for secondary schools and slightly below for primary schools.

Persistent absence levels in secondary schools, when compared with the 5 half terms data, shows an improvement and has fallen below the national average. For primary schools there is a slight improvement with a fall in the level of persistent absence, although the Coventry persistent absence level is above the national average for 2011/12.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is recommended to continue to endorse the Coventry strategy for improving attendance and approve a revised approach to the way in which the service works with schools to enhance the strategy.

List of Appendices included:

Coventry Local Authority Attendance Strategy

Other useful background papers:

Nil

Other Useful Documents

(i) Improving attendance at school

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/t/improving%20attendance%20at%20school.pdf>

(ii) Response letter from the Secretary of State for Education to Charlie Taylor on 16th April 2012

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/r/response%20letter%20from%20the%20secretary%20of%20state%20for%20education%20to%20charlie%20taylor%20on%2016%20april%202012.pdf>

(iii) Letter form Charlie Taylor setting out progress on 31st July 2012

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/l/charlie%20taylor%20to%20secretary%20of%20state%20attendance%20review%20implementation.pdf>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

**Report title:
Review of the new Coventry Strategy for improving attendance**

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 In 2012 Coventry's Children Services underwent a Full Service Review regarding the redesign of services to produce efficiency and effectiveness. The main focus was early intervention and prevention and the Children and Families First teams were established. As part of this review the role of staff within the Education Welfare Service was refocused to become Children and Families Workers (Schools). A key focus of their role is to focus on improving levels of persistent absenteeism (a child is classified as a persistently absent if he/she has an absence rate of 15% or more).
- 1.2 A new attendance strategy was developed to reflect the changes in Coventry's approach to supporting and improving attendance. The strategy clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Local Authority, schools and parents for improving the attendance of children and young people.
- 1.3 The new Attendance strategy was developed following wide consultation with a group of head teachers from Primary, Secondary and Special school. As part of the consultation process of the new strategy, all Heads were invited to briefing sessions during the spring and summer terms of 2011/12. It was disseminated to stakeholders within the Children Learning and Young People directorate for their input.
- 1.4 The work of the new Children and Families First Service and the attendance strategy reflect the recommendations made by *Charlie Taylor, Government Adviser's report, "Improving attendance at school" March 2012*. This report identifies the need for early intervention.
- 1.5 The attendance strategy and the Children and Families First Service recognise the need for all services to work in a more coherent way. This ensures that all children and young people can make the most of the opportunities provided by attending school.
- 1.6 The strategy requires all schools to identify early patterns of poor attendance and put in preventative measures and early intervention to avoid non-attendance from escalating. Schools are asked to identify young people at risk of becoming persistent absentees. The Common Assessment Framework co-ordinator and named Children and Families First worker (schools) meet, at least half-termly or more depending on the needs of the school, to discuss children causing concern. If attendance does not improve despite school based interventions, and drops below 85%, this would then be escalated with a referral to the Children and Families Service. All maintained schools have a named Children and Families Worker (Schools). Academies have the option to buy into this area of the service.
- 1.7 The Children and Families First Service has been working hard to embed the new service since it went live in September 2012. The Service Manager, Children and Family First Service with Strategic lead for attendance, have worked in close partnership with the School Improvement Advisor for Attendance and Behaviour to move the strategy forward.
- 1.8 The Local Authority maintains close monitoring of attendance through the *Capita One* Attendance Module, to allow early warning of changes in the attendance patterns for all children and young people, including the more vulnerable sub-groups of children and young people (e.g. Looked After Children). The Capita One system updates school attendance data daily so the Local Authority has an accurate data set to inform our work and to monitor and challenge schools. Data is monitored on a half-termly basis to evaluate the impact of the new strategy and prioritise future resource allocation. One full year of

data now exists to allow analysis of the impact of the service since the Education Welfare Service has ceased to exist.

1.9 Department for Education (DfE) figures from 2011-12 from Coventry and its statistical neighbours indicate that:

- For primary schools Coventry's overall level of attendance (95.6%) was in line with the average for the statistical neighbours (95.6%), whilst the overall level of persistent absence (3.4%) was slightly higher than the average for the statistical neighbours (3.3%). These figures are for the new Persistent Absence measure of 85% or less attendance, introduced in September 2011.
- For secondary schools Coventry's overall level of attendance (93.9%), was again, just below the average for the statistical neighbours (94.1%), whilst the overall level of persistent absence (8.5%) was above the average for the statistical neighbours (7.5%).

1.10 Data on outcomes for the 2012/13 school year are as follows. Table (i), below, shows primary attendance. Our local statistics for 2012/13 shows a slight increase of 0.06% on the previous year's equivalent figure to 94.96%. DfE statistics for 2011/12 show that city attendance was in line with the national average of 95.6% (2012/13 DfE city and national figures are not yet available). Local figures (Year R-6) for primary persistent absence show an improvement from 4.04% in 2011/12 to 3.89% in 2012/13. DfE persistent absence statistics for 2011/12 (which exclude Year R) show Coventry at 3.4% which is above the national Average of 3.1%.

	DfE Statistics (excludes Year R)				LA Statistics (includes Year R)	
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2011/12	2012/13
Coventry	93.82%	94.48%	94.8%	95.6%	94.90%	94.96%
National	94.70%	94.79%	95.0%	95.6%	-	-

Table (i): Overall primary attendance (Source: DfE School Census 2008/09-2011/12; Capita One HT1-5 for 2011/12-2012/13)

Table (ii), below, shows the distribution of primary mainstream schools across bands of attendance.

	DfE Statistics (excludes Year R)				LA Statistics (inc. Year R)
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
< 90%	0	0	0	0	0
90.0 - 90.99	0	0	0	0	0
91.0 - 91.99	5	0	1	0	0
92.0 - 92.99	19	6	12	0	2
93.0 - 93.99	23	20	15	1	13
94.0 - 94.99	22	32	22	17	27
> 95.0%	16	27	35	66	42

Table (ii): Numbers of Primary Mainstream Schools within Attendance Level Bands (Source: DfE School Census to 2011/12; Capita One HT1-5 for 2012/13)

- In 2012/13 there were 2 schools with attendance below 92.99%. In 2011/12 there were no primaries with attendance below 92.99% (13 in 2010/11, 6 in 2009/10, and 24 in 2008/09).

- The secondary school attendance levels in Coventry, and nationally, are shown in table (iii), below. All figures in tables (iii) and (iv) include academies (except one prior to 2011/12, where the data was unavailable to the LA). In 2012/13 the rising trend in secondary school attendance continues to be sustained.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Coventry	92.43%	92.95%	93.10%	93.9%	94.14%
National	92.79%	93.12%	93.5%	94.1%	-

Table (iii): Secondary School Attendance (Source: DfE School Census to 2011/12; Capita One HT1-5 for 2012/13)

Table (iv), below, shows the distribution of secondary schools across seven attendance level bands. The 2008/09 to 2010/11 figures exclude one academy.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
< 90%	1	1	0	0	0
90.0 - 90.99	1	0	0	0	0
91.0 - 91.99	3	5	4	1	1
92.0 - 92.99	10	5	5	3	1
93.0 - 93.99	2	3	5	7	7
94.0 - 94.99	1	4	4	5	8
> 95.0%	0	0	0	3	2

Table (iv): Numbers of Secondary Mainstream Schools within Attendance Level Bands (Source: DfE School Census to 2011/12; Capita One HT1-5 for 2012/13)

Secondary persistent absence had decreased to 6.20% in 2012/13 from 8.5% in 2011/12. This is below the 2011/12 national average of 7.4%.

Special school attendance levels in Coventry, and nationally, are shown in table (v), below.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Coventry	91.30%	84.53%	86.%	87.1%	87.94%
National	89.28%	89.75%	90%	90.4%	-

Table (v): Special School Attendance (Source: DfE School Census to 2011/12; Capita One HT1-5 for 2012/13)

Each special school faces a different set of challenges in promoting attendance. The Children and Family First Team have allocated a dedicated Children and Family Worker to schools, with detailed knowledge and experience of working with Special schools to delivery the family centred approach. The purpose is to further improve the outcomes for these vulnerable young people.

- 1.11 The uptake and engagement by schools in the new strategy and ways of working varies across the city. Some schools are fully engaged, understand their responsibilities, lead on level 2 CAFs and are making appropriate referrals to The Children and Families First teams. Others require further support to fully embed the new strategy.

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Data is available to School and the Local Authority at school, cohort and individual child level. Through improved analysis and better understanding of data by individual schools and by the Local Authority, patterns and trends will be identified and interventions / services planned and reviewed. Data is monitored on a half-termly basis to evaluate the impact of the new strategy and to prioritise future resource allocation.
- 2.2 The Children and Families First Service has been working hard to embed the new service since it went live in September 2012. Although the Children and Families First Service are not suggesting any major changes to the approach outlined in the strategy, it is accepted there are certain aspects of work, previously delivered by the Education Welfare Service, which would enhance the development of the attendance strategy. The Children and Families First Service is proposing to adopt a more flexibly approach with schools to support them with emerging persistence absence issues.
- 2.3 Where the overall levels of attendance in a school have been causing concern then the Local Authority has worked with key school staff to support their self-review and improvement of strategies and actions to improve attendance. The 2012-13 data is currently being analysed to prioritise schools requiring additional input. The Children and Families First Service Manager, with the lead for attendance will work closely with the Education Improvement Advisers to support schools in achieving the National Average for both Overall Attendance and Persistent Absence measures.
- 2.4 The service is proposing to work intensively with a number of priority schools each half term. This work would involve Children and Families First Workers (Schools) going into the school on a regular basis to establish and/or further underpin the use of appropriate systems and processes to monitor and tackle attendance issues within the wider school. In consultation with the school the Children and Families (Schools) Workers would work with teachers, parents and children to improve overall attendance through a variety of interventions and activities.
- 2.5 School Improvement Networks have been established to replace the Overcoming Barriers to Learning (OB2L) programme and these networks have identified attendance and persistent absence as a priority. These networks are looking at ways that they can offer school to school support around early identification and intervention for attendance issues. The Children and Families First Service will continue to support these networks.
- 2.6 The Attendance Strategy proposes that schools become more challenging to parents who wish to take their children out of school during term time for holidays. It proposes that parents put in a written request to the school for exceptional leave of absence, which the head has the discretion to approve. Schools should have in place a clear attendance policy that is communicated to all parents which sets out the schools ethos toward holidays/leave of absence in term time. The policy should also inform parents of the possible consequences of taking their children out of school without first seeking permission or if the take children out of school after permission has been denied or if more days than have been authorised are taken. This has now be supported by a amendments made to the 2006 attendance regulations in the **Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013** regarding term time holiday. These amendments came into force on 1 September 2013. The attendance strategy will be updated to include these amendments.

2.7 There have also been amendments to the **Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007** which also came into force on 1 September 2013. These amendments reduce the timescales for paying a Penalty Notice. Parents must, from 1 September 2013, pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. This brings attendance penalty notices into line with other types of penalty notices and allows local authorities to act faster on prosecutions. The City Council's Code of Practice for issuing Penalty Notices is required to incorporate all these amendments.

2.8 All schools will continue to be asked by the Children and Family First Team to identify targets for the reduction of persistent absence. In 2013/14 there continues to be a greater focus on primary schools and early identification and intervention.

Using the data gathered, each school is being asked to:

- Identify which pupils make up their persistent absentees and, recognising that some pupils may have a chronic or serious illness or injury, take specific action as appropriate.
- Identify pupils meeting the persistent absentee criteria who have high levels of unauthorised absence or a mixture of unauthorised and authorised absence.
- Identify pupils who meet the persistent absentee criteria where there is a reason to doubt the justification for their authorised absence.
- Implement actions for those cases through school staff and external service support services/agencies
- Use a whole-school action plan for tackling persistent absence that commits all staff, the senior management team and governors to improving the attendance of persistent absentees and reducing their numbers. Schools are asked to track and monitor the attendance of Children and Young People and put in preventative measures and early intervention to prevent non-attendance from escalating.
- Multi-disciplinary working will continue to be the key element in the drive to support families and reduce absence coordinated by the Children and family First Team.

2.9 The Attendance strategy requires schools to promote positive school attendance. The Children and Families First Service supplied each school with an attendance toolkit, highlighting strategies and good practice. The Children and Families First Service continues to update this tool kit to include new developments.

2.10 The Children and Family First Team retain responsibility for providing both Statutory and non-statutory duties for school attendance including Prosecutions; Fixed Penalty Notices; Performance Licences and Missing Children from education.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 A group of Head teachers from Primary, Secondary and Special schools took part in the consultation process of the new strategy, and all Heads were invited to briefing sessions during the spring and summer terms of 2011/12. On-going discussions continue to be held with head teachers through the half-termly attendance meetings. The newly developed school improvement networks will also be used to consult with schools on attendance issues.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 The strategy will be monitored through quarterly meetings of senior officers in Children and Family First and Education and Learning Services.

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

As part of the FSR, the Education Welfare Service (previously within Education & Learning) was reorganised and placed within the Children & Families First structure – school attendance issues will be supported by Children and Families Workers (schools). For 2013/14 this can be funded through current resources. Additional support will also be provided by CAF coordinators for a time limited 3 year period, resources through the Troubled Families programme.

The Children and Families Workers (schools) team is currently funded by core budget.

The Children and Families First Service is currently reviewing its Service Level Agreements with academies as more Coventry Schools become academies. During 2012-13, only one academy requested a Service Level Agreement with Coventry City Council for support with attendance issues.

There are now a number of primary schools that have become academies and a decision has to be made about how the Children and Families Services continue to support them.

5.2 Legal implications

None. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 establishes that it is the responsibility of the parent(s) to ensure that a child of compulsory school age receives efficient full-time education suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational need, by regular attendance at school or by educating the child otherwise (home education).

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

This proposal is based on a commitment to further improve attendance at schools and other educational settings, which will help to ensure that children and young people are safe, achieve and make a positive contribution

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The risk of further improvements in attendance being compromised by reductions in the capacity of some services will be managed through careful monitoring of progress and targeting the available staff resource in the highest priority areas

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

By improving the attendance of all children and young people, with a particular focus on the more vulnerable, this strategy helps to ensure that all children and young people are safe, achieve and make a positive contribution

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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Appendices

Coventry Local Authority Attendance Strategy 2012-2014

"Promoting positive school attendance is everyone's responsibility"