



# Portsmouth

## CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
SCRUTINY PANEL

**A REVIEW INTO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND REDUCED TIMETABLES IN  
PORTSMOUTH**

**Date published: 7 December 2018**

**Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.**

## PREFACE

The Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel undertook a review into School Attendance and reduced timetables in Portsmouth. The picture of children's school attendance in the city is not a good one and we would be failing our youngsters if we did not recognise the issue and the implication that it has on their future.

During the review which was carried out between November 2017 and July 2018, the Panel visited several schools across the city to hear about what is being done to tackle the issue and to understand what more needs to be done to ensure that children attend school. The Panel heard from parents, voluntary sector groups, Hampshire police and children's service to not only understand why children are absent from school, but also to understand the impact that absence has on safeguarding, criminality and the future of our young people.

The panel recognised the good work that has been done and the work that all those who work within the city to support children and young people do. There is also an acknowledgement that school attendance is not the sole responsibility of schools: all agencies working with families have a key contribution to make.

Since the review concluded in the summer of 2018, concern about the absence of children from school has continued to grow, both nationally and locally. The national review of school exclusions led by Edward Timpson MP has recently been extended to include the practice by some schools of "off rolling" children; and locally a new protocol with schools has been agreed around ensuring that decisions by parents to opt to educate their children at home are fully informed including through meetings between schools, parents and local authority staff. It is clear that the committee's review was timely and its recommendations are important.

I would like to convey, on behalf of the panel my sincere thanks to all the officers and external witnesses who contributed to this review.

If we do not continue to tackle this issue then we will be failing the children and young people who need our help the most

.....  
Councillor Neill Young  
Chair, Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.  
Date: 7 December 2018

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **1. To understand the main reasons for school absence and review the Council's strategy to improve school attendance.**

Portsmouth's school attendance levels are in the bottom quarter nationally, although in recent years the local authority has seen improvements in attendance through the hard work of schools, parents and carers. The main reason for absence in Portsmouth, which is mirrored nationally, is health related absence which accounts for approximately 60% of absences. The panel received a copy of the Council's attendance strategy to understand the measures currently in place and the priorities, this included the Council's clear protocol on placing children onto reduced timetables. The panel also learned about the effect of education penalty notices and the prosecution outcomes.

### **2. To explore the use of reduced timetables, how children on reduced timetables are supported to resume full time attendance as early as possible and consider how to minimise the use of reduced timetables.**

As part of the review the panel met with headteachers of a small number of schools in the city. As part of the meetings reduced timetables were discussed and the panel noted that use of reduced timetables was very varied. Some schools only used reduced timetables as a last resort dependent on the need of the child, other schools were very much against using these as it means children missing out on education. The panel also learned from the Director of Children Families and Education that the authority has guidance in place which sets an expectation that schools plan how pupils on reduced timetables will progress back to full education within a maximum 6 week timeframe. The panel also noted that pupils must only be moved onto a reduced timetable with the agreement of their parents/carers and if it is judged to be of the best interest of the child.

### **3. To investigate where we have good practice and where there is scope for improvement in relation to ensuring children attend school. Particular focus shall be given to vulnerable children, children with SEND, persistent absentees, those on reduced timetables and elective home education.**

The panel met with headteachers of two primary schools, two secondary schools and one special school in the city to see where good practice is taking place in relation to ensuring children attend school and where there is scope for improvement. It was noted that there is a lot of good practice taking place in the city including working with the families of persistent absentees, rewards for good attendance, employing an attendance officer and creating an environment where children want to attend school. Members felt that the passion of the headteachers for delivering the best outcomes they can for young people in the city was notable.

### **4. To review arrangements for ensuring that where children and young people are out of school for significant periods through reduced timetables or poor attendance, there is good multi agency risk assessment and action where necessary to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation.**

The panel heard from a number of local authority staff and partners about the arrangements in place to protect children with poor attendance from crime and exploitation. The Early Help and Prevention Locality Manager (South) informed the panel about the targeted approach to chronic non-attendance where children identified as having attendance of less than 50% are discussed at a multi-agency safeguarding hub to either develop a co-ordinated plan or to support schools to refer into the Early Help and Prevention team for family support. The panel also heard from the District Commander of Hampshire Constabulary and the Head of Programmes of the Active Communities Network about work they are doing to protect young people missing school from drifting into crime and being at risk of exploitation. Evidence was received from three different officers within the Council's children's social care team about the work they are doing with partners to protect vulnerable young people who may also be missing from school. All partners had serious concerns about the use of reduced timetables due to the increased risk of exploitation of the children whilst they were not attending school and reduced timetables can also put pressure on placements for children in care.

**5. To investigate the reasons why parents are choosing to home educate their child and how their progress can be monitored and their safeguarding ensured.**

In England, education is compulsory but school attendance is not. Parents are not required to register or seek approval from the local authority to educate their children at home. Portsmouth City Council has a clear policy on Elective Home Education (EHE) and makes it explicit to parents the responsibilities they are assuming in electing to educate at home. Numbers of pupils in Portsmouth who have at some point been registered as electively home educated are increasing each year: which is a trend mirrored nationally. The panel received some written evidence from Portsmouth Parent Voice who collated some responses from EHE parents at a home education workshop. The panel also heard the views of some parents who electively home educate their children for ideological reasons and their reasons for doing so. The relationship between EHE parents and the local authority was also discussed and the panel heard the views of parents on how this relationship could be improved.

**Conclusions**

Based on the evidence and views it has received during the review process the Panel has come to the following conclusions:

1. The panel noted that Portsmouth's school attendance levels are in the bottom quarter nationally, with secondary school attendance levels of particular concern. There has been some improvements in attendance rates over recent years but more progress is needed and the Council needs to be proactive in campaigning for this within the community (paragraphs 3.1-3.3).
2. The panel recognised the good leadership taking place in the schools they visited. They were keen that the best practice should be effectively disseminated across all schools in the city. They noted that some schools take active steps such as sending minibuses to collect children and supported this

approach. They also recognised the role of businesses in recognising and responding to truancy (paragraphs 5.1-5.6, 6.14 & 6.16).

3. The panel heard about the use of reduced timetables in the schools visited. While they appreciated that the circumstances could sometimes be complex, particularly at the special school whose head teacher they met, they noted that two headteachers of good/outstanding schools did not use them, and that the approach in those schools generally provided a good model for other schools to follow. The panel also noted that the use of reduced timetables increases the risks of exploitation and criminal activity (paragraphs 4.1-4.9, 6.31).
4. The panel noted that the numbers of children who are home educated is increasing annually and were concerned regarding the lack of regulation around home education (paragraphs 7.2 & 7.3).
5. The panel noted that some parents are choosing to home educate their children for ideological reasons and have a very positive experience of home education. It was also noted that some parents are withdrawing their children as they are dissatisfied with the education provision, including provision for children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND). There are routes for dialogue with schools which parents should be encouraged to pursue; responsibility for addressing issues raised by parents lies with schools. The panel was concerned however that some parents are taking on home education when they do not appreciate and/or struggle to meet requirements, and that they may not always be taking a fully informed, independent decision (paragraphs 7.11-7.26).

### **Recommendations**

1. That the Council's attendance campaign is endorsed and officers consider a segmented marketing strategy tailored for different groups of parents. The Council should also include in its literature that it is parents' legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school. (conclusion 1)
2. That good practice taking place in schools should be shared through the Portsmouth Education Partnership website and this be used as a mechanism to pair good and poor performing schools with each other in order to share expertise across the city. (conclusion 2)
3. That practical ways to keep children in school should be used such as using minibuses to collect those not in school and schools be encouraged to consider this. The authority should also encourage businesses/partners to actively challenge any children they see out of school during the school day in term time (conclusion 2).
4. That the current review of alternative provision through the Portsmouth Education Partnership should explore how schools can keep children and young people engaged so that reduced timetables are only used when it is in the best interest of the child in exceptional circumstances, as this presents an increased risk to the child. Parents/carers should also be made aware that they do not have to accept a reduced timetable for their child. The panel supported the rigorous challenge provided by the department to schools

around the use of reduced timetables. (Conclusion 3).

5. That if alternative provision is necessary schools must ensure that there is meaningful educational provision, ideally on the school site. The number of children on reduced timetables should continue to be monitored and challenged by the local authority (conclusion 3).
6. That the Council strongly support the line taken by the Portsmouth Education Partnership on the private members bill on elective home education that the local authority should have that right and duty to ensure effective safeguarding of EHE children and also to the introduction of a compulsory register of EHE children (conclusion 4).
7. That the Council continues to help promote community projects or non-curriculum courses that look to raise the aspirations of children and encourage them to attend school (conclusion 3).
8. That the Council note and support the rigorous action which the department is taking to challenge schools who have a relatively high number of pupils who have been taken off roll to be electively home educated, and to make sure that parents are making a genuine choice (conclusion 5)
9. That the Council note the context of people choosing to electively home educate for ideological reasons and should positively engage with these parents. However it was noted that some parents are choosing this option as they are not satisfied with the SEND provision provided in school. The panel noted the funding pressures in meeting SEND provision in schools and believe that schools are doing their best to offer a broad range of provision for children. The Council should support representations being made to government about the high needs area (conclusion 5)

The budgetary and policy implications of these recommendations are set out in section 12 on page 35.

## **1. Purpose.**

The purpose of this report is to present the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel following its review into school attendance and reduced timetables.

## **2. Background.**

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Management Panel agreed on 29 September 2017 that the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel's topic for the municipal year should be to review school attendance and reduced timetables in Portsmouth.
- 2.2 The review was undertaken by the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, which comprised:

Councillors Neill Young (Chair)  
David Tompkins (Vice Chair)

Will Purvis  
Ben Dowling  
Paul Godier  
Suzy Horton

2.3 Following Annual Council on 15 May 2018 the panel comprised:

Councillors Neill Young (Chair)

Tom Coles  
David Fuller  
Frank Jonas  
Will Purvis  
David Tompkins

In addition, as stated in the Council's constitution, each relevant policy and review panel dealing with education matters shall include in its membership education representatives (referred to in Article 6.2 of the Constitution). Representatives for the review were Sara Denham (Governor Forum representative), Helen Reeder, (Teachers Liaison Panel representative) and Rob Sanders (Director of Education for the Anglican diocese).

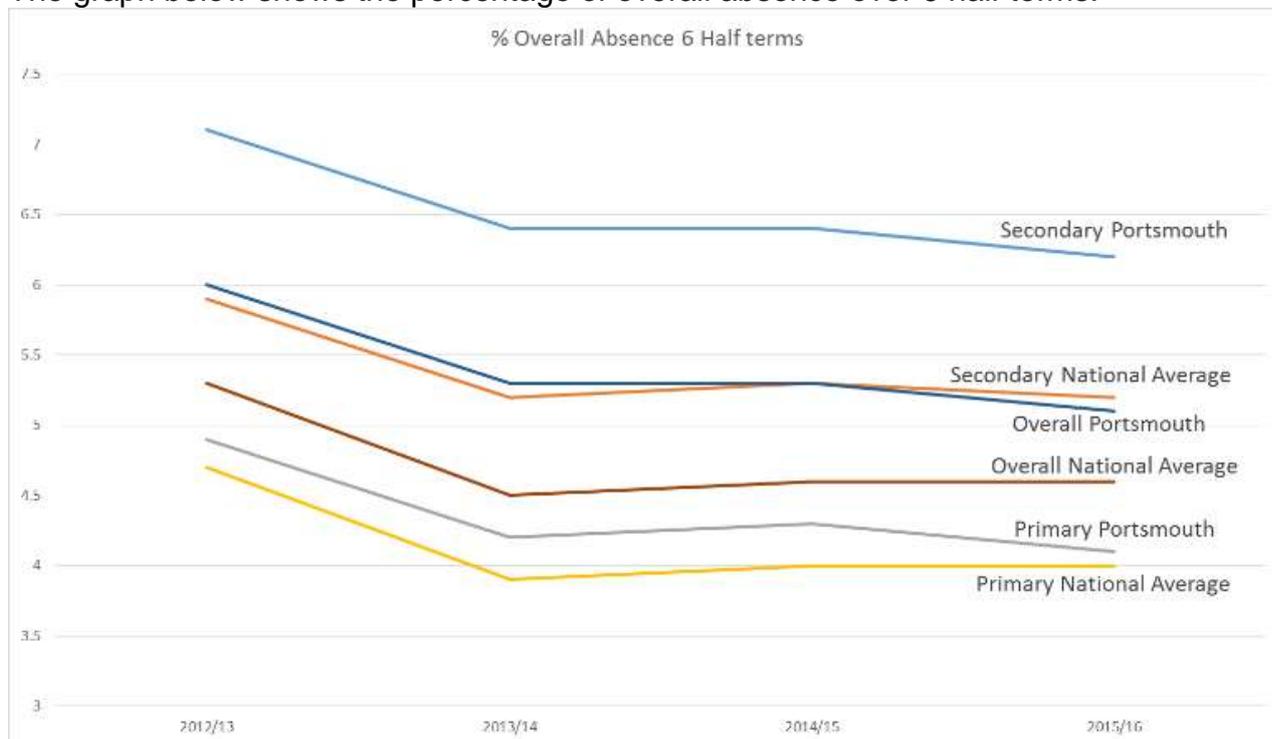
2.4 At its meeting on 3 November, the Panel agreed the following objectives:

- To understand the main reasons for school absence and review the Council's strategy to improve school attendance.
- To explore the use of reduced timetables, how children on reduced timetables are supported to resume full time attendance as early as possible and consider how to minimise the use of reduced timetables.
- To investigate where we have good practice and where there is scope for improvement in relation to ensuring children attend school. Particular focus shall be given to vulnerable children, children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), persistent absentees, those on reduced timetables and elective home education.
- To review arrangements for ensuring that where children and young people are out of school for significant periods through reduced timetables or poor attendance, there is good multi agency risk assessment and action where necessary to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation.
- To investigate the reasons why parents are choosing to home educate their child and how their progress can be monitored and their safeguarding ensured.

2.5 The Panel met formally to discuss the review on five occasions between 3 November 2017 and 13 July 2018. A list of meetings held by the Panel and details of the written evidence received can be found in *appendix one*. A glossary of terms used in this report can be found in *appendix two*. The minutes of the Panel's meetings and the documentation reviewed by the Panel are published on the Council's website [www.portsmouthcc.gov.uk](http://www.portsmouthcc.gov.uk).

**3. To understand the main reasons for school absence and review the Council's strategy to improve school attendance.**

- 3.1 The Director of Children, Families and Education explained that Portsmouth's school attendance levels are in the bottom quarter nationally. There has been a drive to improve attendance with some success but more progress needs to be made.
- 3.2 In recent years the local authority has seen improvements in attendance rates in Portsmouth schools. These have been achieved through hard work by schools, parents and partners. However, the fact is that Portsmouth pupils do not attend school as regularly as their peers nationally, so there is still more work to be done. The graph below shows the percentage of overall absence over 6 half terms.



The work needed to improve school attendance is outlined in the priorities within the strategy and is overseen by the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG). It must however be noted that there is also other legislation, guidance and vulnerable groups that sit within the broad umbrella of non-attendance: those on reduced timetables and those who are not on roll of a school; classed as children missing education. Equally there are those who have elected to home educate, and the Council may have concerns around the reasons for this parental decision and whether education is taking place.

- 3.3 The Director of Children, Families and Education said that the LA know those most likely to be absent from school in Portsmouth are white British, eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and children who have a history of absence. The main reason in Portsmouth for absence, which is mirrored nationally is health related absence. These account for approximately 60% of absences.
- 3.4 Persistent absentees (PAs) (those that were absent for 10% or more of the possible sessions) are a local and national focus (in 2015/16 the percentage of PAs was 12.8% in Portsmouth and 10.5% nationally)<sup>1</sup>. These figures are reviewed

<sup>1</sup> [Most Recent National Data for a whole academic year 2015/16](#)

electronically with schools on a six weekly basis. This ensures that schools discharge their duty to report all irregular attenders to the LA and also provides the opportunity for the LA to monitor action being taken as well as to advise of action that should be taken. In 2016/17 there were 3509 pupils reported whose attendance was below 90% (see appendix 2).

- 3.5 Portsmouth has also selected to identify a further subgroup of absentees and has termed these Chronic Non-attenders (CNAs) (those who attend school for less than 50% of the possible sessions). These are a subgroup of PAs. There is no comparable national data available for this measure but given that there is a wealth of evidence around school as a protective factor, it is key that this group have particular focus. In recognition that it is likely to be the services and agencies other than schools that can affect the most change, these are referred to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to be picked up by the multi-agencies teams in each locality by assigning a key lead to each case. From this academic year, schools will refer cases to the MASH but the school attendance team will also provide a list of those identified to the MASH and Early Help locality leads each half term.
- 3.6 In recognition of the need to combat absence due to health related reasons, a pilot is currently running with 11 schools to increase the amount of school nurse time and intervention.
- 3.7 In Portsmouth the LA encourages supportive pastoral action to be taken alongside the more punitive legal routes. Evidence shows that consistency of application in respect of the framework of legal action is supportive to early help intervention.
- 3.8 **Attendance Strategy**  
Portsmouth has an attendance strategy which has 4 main priorities:
1. That parents meet their responsibilities to ensure their child attends school regularly.
  2. That schools have effective leadership and management of attendance in place.
  3. That partners provide additional needs based support that contributes to improvements in attendance.
  4. That a high profile of the key attendance messages is maintained in the community.

Within the strategy each of those priority areas (which were widely consulted on and endorsed by the Behaviour and Attendance Group) are expanded to explain how to move forward to achieve that result.

- 3.9 The Director of Children, Families and Education explained that the Council has a broad strategy for increasing school attendance and a very clear protocol in place covering decisions to place children or young people on a reduced timetable. She said she had written to all schools at the beginning of term to confirm this protocol, reminding them that children should not be on reduced timetables for longer than 6 weeks. It is predominately secondary schools that use reduced timetables. The Council's guidance underlines the safeguarding risks to children and young people who are not in full time education.

#### Education Penalty Notices and Prosecution outcomes

- 3.10 The Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager, said it is important to note that it is not the LA who initiates education penalty notices but the school who make the request of the LA. The LA will review the case and then take it up with the Magistrates Court.
- 3.11 It is fair to say there has been an increase in education penalty notices with the only fluctuating figure being the one around leave of absence. Persistent Absentees are those whose attendance is below 90% and schools have a realisation that in order to improve their overall attendance they need to focus on this group in order to meet national targets. Schools are obliged to report those who attend irregularly. Every 6 weeks the LA review all schools and ask what they are doing about this. Schools issue penalty notices, most schools choose to and attendance does improve. It is important to have the continued pastoral support coupled with the legal framework.
- 3.12 In January for regular attendance there were 35 penalty notices issued for irregular attendance and 54 for leave of absence. In 2016/17 there were 1,042 issued in terms of leave of absence and 418 issued in relation to irregular attendance. If the LA does not have details as to who the child is living with, both parents will be prosecuted.
- 3.13 In terms of repeat offenders, the Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager said the LA has this data. It is of more concern when a child is frequently away on a Friday and Monday. Schools have the right of discretion on whether to issue an education penalty notice.
- 3.14 Members commented that some countries such as France stagger school holidays around the country, so there is not the same net effect of everyone going on holiday at the same time. If Portsmouth were to consider this it would need to be done in conjunction with Hampshire County Council as some children in Portsmouth attend school in Hampshire. Members noted that Flying Bull Academy have decided to use all their inset days at the end of the Summer holidays so that parents can take their children away for that week at a lower cost. Although the parents find this useful, the panel heard a view from one professional that from a professional development point of view this may not be as useful as teachers need professional development throughout the school year.
- 3.15 The Director of Children, Families and Education explained that schools do lose funding for a child who is permanently excluded. For headteachers exclusion is a last resort and they will do everything they can, including reduced timetables to avoid excluding a pupil. The Teacher Liaison Panel representative who is also a teacher at a primary school in the city explained that hard to place pupils are discussed at the Inclusion Support Panel. Each year group at the schools are RAG rated so if there is a hard to place pupil they will be placed at a school with a green rating for that year group. The Director of Children, Families and Education said that this system is very valuable for the city and envied by other local authorities. The Attendance, Admissions, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager said attendance is not an indicator itself of a pupil being hard to place, but could be an indicator alongside others when making judgements as to whether a pupil should be categorised as hard to place.

**4. To explore the appropriate use of reduced timetables, how children on reduced timetables are supported to resume full time attendance as early as possible and consider how to minimise the use of reduced timetables.**

4.1 The Panel were advised by officers that reducing a pupil's timetable is a strategy that a school might look to employ in order to regain success with a pupil who is displaying challenging behaviour, to reintegrate a pupil from a prolonged period of absence or for medical reasons. Portsmouth has guidance in place to ensure that schools carefully assess the relevance of this strategy and as part of this plan how the pupil will progress back to full-time within the 6 week timeframe that the guidance gives as the maximum length.

4.2 The current activity data (current picture of those on a reduced timetable (not for medical reasons):

Number of primary aged pupils at mainstream on a reduced timetable = 26,  
Number of Secondary aged pupil at mainstream on a reduced timetable = 35,  
Number of pupils in special school on a reduced timetable = 19. If those that were on reduced timetables for medical reasons are excluded in the academic year 2017/18, there were 207 pupils that at some point had their hours reduced.

4.3 Members asked headteachers during their meetings whether they used reduced timetables and if so what they felt the benefits/pitfalls were by using them.

4.4 Victory School

The Head of Victory Primary School said that the school only use reduced timetables occasionally for a particular purpose and is dependent on the need of the child. For example they will use a reduced timetable if a child is at risk of permanent exclusion they are used because the child's got more chance of being successful in school for a shorter period of time or untargeted time. At the time of the meeting the school had two pupils on reduced timetables.

4.5 Flying Bull Academy

The Head of Flying Bull Academy said that the school does not use reduced timetables as it means children are missing out with their education. There has only been one child they have done this for recently as the child could not cope with being in school all day as a result of their mental health. A therapeutic timetable was put together for them.

4.6 St Edmunds

The Head of St Edmunds said reduced timetables would only be used for students with medical issues, but he did not like to use them personally. The school have just worked with the Attendance Service where they put a child on a reduced timetable to return them into school. He said that generally he did not believe this was effective and there were other strategies that could be used. It was not used for SEND children and the key is knowing the children/families.

4.7 Admiral Lord Nelson School

The Headteacher of Admiral Lord Nelson said that the use of reduced timetables depended on the case and the individual as to whether reducing it down is going to be the right thing to do. If there was a child who they knew would not engage in any form of education other than on site they might decide to offer them an hour after

school to ensure that they are able to complete their English and Maths GCSEs to ensure that the school maintain contact with them. There are also children where it is not safe to have them mixing with other children and it might mean that other children don't attend school if that particular child is there.

#### 4.8 Harbour School

The Harbour School do reluctantly use reduced timetables. They use them (a) when the funding will only pay for a reduced commission (e.g. medical tuition or young parents) (b) to engage/re-engage some learners back to full time and (c) to break the cycle of repeated violence for some learners. Every learner at the school has an individual risk assessment and this would form part of the decision. The headteacher went on to explain that the pitfall is that it puts those vulnerable young people at further risk in the community and puts extra pressure on their families where there is a lot of tension between families. If children are violent or anxious at school they are usually violent and anxious at home. The school were very aware whenever a young person is put on a reduced timetable, that the pressure is shifted somewhere else. On the other hand there are times when in order to break a cycle of violence or to engage a young person that's been out of school for a long time, they will use a reduced timetable for a period of time.

4.9 The Director of Children, Families and Education said that Portsmouth has guidance in place to ensure that schools plan how the pupils on reduced timetables will progress back to full-time education within the maximum 6 week timeframe. If it is likely that this timescale will not be met, schools must notify the local authority to explain the reasons why. The Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager added that pupils should only be moved onto a reduced timetable with the agreement of parents and if it is judged to be of the interest to the child. A strong case is needed and the expectation is that there are other interventions in place. The Council also make clear to schools the safeguarding risks to pupils if they are on a reduced timetable. This guidance applies to academy schools as well as to LA maintained schools. With regard to numbers it was predominately secondary pupils on reduced timetables.

### **5. To investigate where we have good practice and where there is scope for improvement in relation to ensuring children attend school. Particular focus shall be given to vulnerable children, children with SEND, persistent absentees, those on reduced timetables and elective home education.**

5.1 The Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager advised that the biggest reason given for non-attendance in the city is medical. Some of those are genuinely ill and the LA need to support them and make sure they receive the right health treatment and access to services. Some of them were ill but actually could have returned to school sooner if their parents were better informed. There are others that did not need to be off in the first place and the LA needs to navigate those groups but sometimes people within education do not feel they have the skill set, knowhow or level of gravitas to be able to undertake that challenge. Schools have been given the opportunity to buy into the school nurse project as a pilot and the LA is hoping that will make a difference. Members met in pairs with headteachers of two primary schools, two secondary schools and the Harbour School which is a school for children with special educational needs, during December 2017 and January 2018 to

discuss a number of matters around school attendance.

#### 5.2 Primary Schools, Flying Bull Primary Academy and Victory Primary

Members reported that both schools were reflective about the range of challenges that local families faced, which could act as barriers to better attendance if not addressed. Both schools offer rewards scheme for children who obtain a certain level of attendance each term. Both schools had also mentioned cut backs in the school nurse service having an impact on school attendance. The headteacher of Flying Bull added that although the Early Help offer is good and the team leader of the MASH is brilliant, the school have to ask the parents' permission before they could give any advice, an Ofsted requirement, but it slows down the process.

5.3 Members reported that they had been very impressed with Flying Bull's approach to working with the families of persistent absentees and this was now not an issue for the school, although they were aware that they still need to monitor this and not become complacent. The key message from both primary schools visits was that schools need to create an environment where children want to attend school. An example was given that the headteacher of Flying Bull Academy had shared where pupils who are off sick have asked to go back to school before the 48 hours as they did not want to miss a particular lesson they are enjoying. With regard to how everyone could work together to help parents meet their responsibilities for their child's attendance, it was felt that parents should be targeted. The headteacher said that there are a generation of parents where issues were not dealt with when they were younger which can affect the attendance of their children. There needed to be a family strategy around all aspects of parenting and attendance should be part of that. Flying Bull use pupil premium money to employ a full time attendance officer to monitor and improve attendance who is linked to the school's learning and pastoral team. The officer provides advice and support to families and when he meets with them for an attendance support planning meeting they will draw up a plan with targets for both the school and the child. Members had also been interested to note that at Flying Bull they have all of their inset days at the end of the summer holidays in September. This encourages parents to take their family holiday during a cheaper time of year and stops some parents taking their children out of school during term time.

5.4 Mr Hartley, Head of Victory Primary said that the local authority had sent a leaflet about winter illnesses out to schools which they refer to when parents ring to report their child unwell. The headteacher also held an assembly about how to keep yourself healthy e.g. washing their hands. The school also inform parents when they should keep their children off school e.g. 48 hours if they have a stomach bug. In some extreme cases children are constantly unwell so he has started the early help process with team around the child meetings which were attended by a paediatrician. With regard to their persistent absentees, these included the mental health of parents, compassionate leave due to family member passing away, involvement with children's services/becoming a looked after child and medical issues. The school do try and get parents involved in school life and with the early years this has massively improved with parents coming in for reading sessions etc. Parental participation is still a concern.

#### 5.5 Secondary Schools, St Edmunds and Admiral Lord Nelson

St Edmund's has a very high attendance record and members heard about a number of good practice initiatives. The school works with individual children to address barriers to attendance. There have been cases where the school have bought school uniforms for children of low income families. The school had highly personalised interventions and attendance was a key priority for the school. The school understood their attendance data and constantly monitor and review this. The school has a strong senior leadership team and their key priority was creating somewhere that pupils wanted to attend. The headteacher of St Edmunds explained that he made it clear to parents that before their child starts secondary school they would have to meet with him or one of the senior team to discuss any issues already highlighted by their primary school or any issues of concern for the parent. The school employ a school attendance officer. The school did not like to use reduced timetables and these are only used for pupils with medical issues. Another key point to note was the outreach work that the school does includes staff going to meet with every parent before their child starts at the school. This is a big time commitment but it was felt this helped parents understand expectations. The headteacher was also reflective about the range of challenges faced by local families which could act as a barrier to better attendance if not addressed. The cut backs to school nursing has also had an impact on school attendance.

5.6 The headteacher of Admiral Lord Nelson Schools said their biggest concern is their persistent absentees and they have focussed heavily on this to ensure these pupils have a good individual attendance plan with lots of parental engagement. The school has an alternative provision at Broadside which is on site. The school created this as the number of students finding mainstream curriculum challenging is increasing and there are not always the spaces to move them to alternative provision in the city. They also have students who are dual registered at the Harbour School. These students have got very good plans for family that either the Early Help Team are involved with or they are children protection cases. The school has an extensive and experienced pastoral team with a lot of staff support. In terms of rewards these include a leadership programme similar to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme which they can only attend through achieving 96% attendance. They also run rewards trips such as ice skating. The school have an attendance officer.

#### 5.7 Special School - The Harbour School

Members learned that attendance at the Harbour School has improved although it is not as good as the headteacher wanted it to be. Attendance is approximately 69% across the whole school compared to 70% for similar schools nationally. The head is very committed to improving attendance and there is a vocational curriculum which has really helped with school attendance as children are doing subjects they enjoy. All pupils study English and maths and there have been a number of successes. Members had been most impressed with the attitude of the headteacher and the fact that according to the headteacher no children are permanently excluded, the school work with pupils to achieve the best outcome for them. They were also impressed with the headteacher's knowledge of the school and the individual approach taken. The Director of Children, Families and Education added that there is an expectation that attendance will improve further when the Fratton part of the school moves into the new Vanguard site with purpose built facilities for vocational education.

5.8 Mr Hunkin said that the school has a good relationship with the local authority and also Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS). They provide the school with

consultants where they come and provide advice and support. The difficult thing is where families do not meet the criteria for a statutory intervention like social services but will not engage with the early help. These are often families with young people who are not attending school and if the school can get to those families it would make a difference.

- 5.9 The school do lots of physical outdoor activities including sports BTEC, physical education and also run a forest and beach school. It also has a sports hall, gym, dance studio and as this can help children with SEND express their feelings.
- 5.10 At their meetings, headteachers were asked their views about how the Council could collectively ensure that key attendance messages maintain a high profile within the community. The headteacher of Flying Bull Academy said he felt there were three key areas (a) the personal face to face with the family on how the school can support them, (b) personal rewards for good attendance and (c) getting all staff on board and having a named person be responsible for school attendance. Often parents do not want to speak to the headteacher and prefer to talk about personal issues with the attendance officer who has links with the community.
- 5.11 Members felt that they had heard about much good practice taking place at the schools they had visited. The passion of the headteachers for delivering the best they could for young people was notable. It was now important that this good practice is shared among schools in the city.

**6. To review arrangements for ensuring that where children and young people are out of school for significant periods through reduced timetables or poor attendance, there is good multi agency risk assessment and action where necessary to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation.**

- 6.1 Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. A report to the PSCB in September 2017 outlines the current position and recommendations. All schools must notify their local authority when they are about to remove a pupil's name from the school admission register under any of the 15 grounds listed in the regulations and also must make reasonable enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the child jointly with the local authority before deleting the pupil's name from the register. There were 172 pupils that were deemed missing at some point last academic year (2016/17) but all but 4 were located without having to refer to the police at the point of the snapshot.
- 6.2 During the meeting two of the panel members had with the headteacher of the Harbour School, it was noted that the school has a good working relationship with CAMHS with supporting learners with mental health needs. The headteacher however felt that the Early Help Service needs to support the school more with their hard to reach families.

Evidence from the Early Help and Prevention Locality Manager (South)

- 6.3 The panel received a presentation from the Early Help and Prevention Locality Manager (South) on a proposed targeted approach to chronic non-attendance (lower than 50%). He explained that there are three localities; north, central and south and

each has their own business plan looking at the core objectives. School attendance is a high priority for each of the localities. In terms of chronic non-attendance, there are lots of reasons for this outside of the school environment.

- 6.4 Under the proposed approach, the Council will examine data to identify all children whose attendance is less than 50%. The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) will triage this data to see if any children who are below 50% attendance are already known to children's social care. If services are already involved but there is no lead professional identified, the three Think Family mentors based in the MASH will identify a lead professional and support the development of a co-ordinated plan. Where there are no agencies involved, schools will be supported to refer into the Early Help and Prevention team for whole family support.
- 6.5 The Early Help and Prevention Locality Manager (South) referred to the chronic non-attendance flow chart (appendix 3) and said route 1 is something the LA will be trialling but hoped in the long-term that this will not be required. Where children are not attending school the service will work directly with their family. In some instances poor attendance is linked to the wider family and parenting capacity so the family worker is linked to the family to ensure that parents are engaged. This approach to chronic non-attendance will be piloted to schools in the south locality and at King Richard School during the spring term and then reviewed before rolling out to the other two localities.
- 6.6 The Director of Children, Families and Education added that the Council is encouraging schools to use the child sexual exploitation (CSE) toolkit more extensively. Currently children at risk are identified to the Safeguarding Board through the MASH but these are predominately only the high risk children and they do not hear as much about the low risk children. It was noted that children can move from low to high risk very quickly and it is important to pool intelligence so that the true level of risk can be accurately assessed and appropriate action taken.
- 6.7 The panel learned from the headteacher of the Harbour School that within their chronic non-attenders there are some who are on the Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET) list. There are some young people who are putting themselves at risk when they are not at school through potential CSE and the school are seeing more people being groomed into gang cultures. The headteacher attends these meetings where the children will be discussed so there is joint information sharing about vulnerable young people. When it was identified that the school had a number of children that were at risk of CSE they put training in place for all staff.
- 6.8 When asked how he thought everyone could work together to better help parents meet their responsibilities to ensure their child attends schools regularly, the headteacher of the Harbour School suggested:
- Commissioning a higher number of places for learners with the most significant and complex Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs;
  - Further develop the multi-agency locality team support for chronic non-attenders;
  - Where a child has to change foster carer because of a placement breakdown, it would be helpful if a school place near to the new home could be found quickly. The Director of Children, Families and Education advised that this is always a high priority for the Virtual School for looked after children, often working with other local authorities.

Maggie Blyth, District Commander for Portsmouth, Hampshire Constabulary

- 6.9 The District Commander explained that Hampshire Constabulary is responsible for all policing in the city and children missing school is a priority for the city. Over the last 12 months they have seen a significant rise in serious violence in children aged between the ages of 12 and 17. This is reflected across the whole country. There is concern that some young people are committing a series of crimes and that many of these young people will be exploited as being under 18 they are vulnerable. Hampshire Constabulary see these young people as children first, who need protecting and they know they can only do their job by working with other agencies. The police have been looking at what is behind their behaviour that makes them drift into crime, and one of the biggest indicators for the police is the number of children that go missing on a repeat basis from home/care and school.
- 6.10 Children who are missing repeatedly are more likely to be exposed to other forms of exploitation taking place in the city. This is a continuing priority for Hampshire Constabulary to look at working with other sectors to reduce the harm. Hampshire Constabulary are working with partners to improve attendance at school and improving engagement in meaningful activities. It is recognised that full time schooling is not always appropriate for some children but there is a concern that without the wraparound that school provides that children can quickly link with other children in the city as Portsmouth is a small city.
- 6.12 There are particular forms of criminal exploitation related to county lines which is the running of drugs from outside and inside of Portsmouth. Established criminals are using young people to transport drugs as it is easier for them. There are also issues of grooming linking with CSE. County lines is just one issue and they are looking at how to work with other agencies to ensure young children do not get drawn into this activity which seems very tempting as they can earn hundreds of pounds each week rather than attending school.
- 6.13 Hampshire Constabulary are seeing a small cohort of children who are repeat offenders who are involved with more serious criminality. The District Commander was in a conversation with the YOT recently where it showed that a smaller number of first time entrants into the youth justice system but they are coming in at a more serious level. She was keen to work more closely with schools in partnership to ensure that early signs of vulnerability are quickly addressed. The police treat them as children but also work with others to hold them to account for their behaviour.
- 6.14 As Portsmouth is a small city, there is some good information sharing across the city. Schools are generally good at reporting children going missing but this could be better and they know that schools do not always report despite there being a statutory duty for them to do so. Anything the local authority can do to improve this would be welcomed. The District Commander said in some areas of the country they have a minibus that goes out to collect any children missing from schools and this can help with any children who are too scared to come into school. In response to a question, Neil Stevenson added that academy schools still have a statutory duty to report missing children and each school should have a protocol to deal with this. Some schools do have minibuses and track children.

- 6.15 With regard to EHE, the District Commander said she deferred to the report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner published last year on EHE that shows clearly that if there is a statutory maintenance of a register of EHE children it allows everyone know from a statutory context where children are. The District Commander said she completely accepted that some parents choose EHE, however there is a potential issue that at times the local authority do not know who these children are if they are not registered at school or with a GP.
- 6.16 The District Commander said a focus on understanding and tracking the city's missing population and the tracking of these children is important. An acceptance was needed across schools and policing that this is something that needed to be tackled. She added that any practical ways to keep children in school, such as minibuses would be welcomed so that the police can work with headteachers to keep children in school.

Julian Wadsworth, Head of Programmes (Hampshire) Active Communities Network.

- 6.17 The Active Communities Network is a national sport for development charity operating in areas of high deprivation across the country. The charity do work around resilience, positive pathways, employability skills, and reduction of crime and do this using sport as well as cultural, arts and digital means. The charity is nationally known as sports development charity but in terms of the work in Hampshire it is a tool to offer engagement, build trusting relationships and offers pathway opportunities. They have a programme in Leigh Park which has been running over the last 4-5 years and 16 months ago they developed a programme in Charles Dickens and St Thomas wards. In terms of Hampshire the charity has a reputation of successfully working with policing teams, Hampshire Police & Crime Commissioner Home office and across LA departments including Children's Services plus partners within the voluntary sector.
- 6.18 Nationally the charity is secretariat to the cross party Parliamentary Violence Commission and is very aware that youth violence is on the rise in Hampshire which is a highly complex situation. Parent/carer support is a major issue and if the support is not there this does not support that young child being retained in school.
- 6.19 Since they have been operating in the Charles Dickens area they have seen children not in full time education who present with vulnerability and they are working particularly with a female cohort who were identified through their outreach work. There is a mixture of EHE children who have been home educated over a period of two years and have increasingly seen trigger factors such as vulnerability and drugs, there is no evidence of those individuals currently being exploited by organised crime gangs but there are increasing risk factors. The majority of EHE children they work with appear not to be home educated due to ideological reasons. The Head of Programmes said he has a linkage with EHE groups and said he has nothing against them at all as many do flourish.
- 6.20 The Head of Programmes a member and represents at the Home Office Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation UK forum said he was concerned about the increasing risk factors of children not attending school to Criminal Exploitation and Sexual Exploitation. He was also very concerned about the mind-sets of some of the young people coming through. They are seeing 10 and 11 year olds presenting with

adverse child experiences who have already got educational difficulties. The Head of Programmes said he is very concerned about the mind-sets of these vulnerable children who refer to 15 and 16 year olds who are involved in gangs as their role models. There is increased risk of vulnerable young people of all ages gravitating towards Organised Crime Gangs & Urban Street Gangs and undertake drug running to make easy money.

- 6.21 There is a crossover between CCE and CSE and this has been backed up with the latest data from the vulnerability unit looking at trends in themes. Hampshire is very affected by CCE and if the gangs believe police are picking up the most vulnerable children they will move to exploit other students including those within Further Education. Julian felt there needed to be greater awareness in schools about the most effective forms of pastoral care as the situation is fluid and organised crime gangs are sophisticated in their approach.
- 6.22 The Head of Programmes felt that looking at transitions was very important as children are very vulnerable at these stages. He felt that schools needed to increase Early Intervention and target Year 5 and 6 pupils to put more creative pieces of work in place in to change the mind-set of young people and offer pastoral support in both schools and community. There are other cohorts of really vulnerable young people, particularly females who do not present with serious risk factors of violence but present with risk factors of vulnerability.
- 6.23 The Head of Programmes said in terms of pastoral welfare a more collaborative approach in years 5 and 6 is needed to help with the transition to secondary schools. He was also concerned about the increase of CCE. There had already been great work in Portsmouth on CSE through multi-agency and MET groups. He considered that understanding of County Lines Criminal Exploitation of Children is key and needs more work in conjunction with a youth service offer across city. In terms of the wider cohort for retaining children in school it is very complex regarding EHE and more robust legislation is required from the government. The charity have a good relationship with academies and are working positively with them.
- 6.24 With regard to part time timetables, the Head of Programmes said that now there are a lot more complex situations and higher levels of vulnerability. It is a highly complex and difficult situation.
- 6.25 The Head of Programmes said that although there are resource issues both nationally and locally, the year 5 to year 7 age group is vital and is where this is make or break for some young people. The Head of Programmes said he is meeting with heads as he would like to see some awareness training for pupils and staff on CCE. Year 10 pupils on very limited timetables is a particular issue that his charity are currently dealing with and he has a few young people on this model.
- 6.26 The Education team are working in a very difficult situation due to a lack of resources and external challenges. CCE has rapidly increased over the last 2-3 years. The Head of Programmes said he is really concerned with those young people whose parents are not able or willing to offer pastoral and parenting support and may not realise they can skip school and are earning money but putting themselves in danger.

6.27 Active Communities approached a particular school about training and initially they were very sceptical however three months later they were very keen for the support due to a number of incidents that had occurred. The charity are doing as much as they can go to get schools on board but continue to deliver awareness and safeguarding, increasing credible youth development opportunities for young people within the community and operating robust safeguarding practices, which is equally important.

### Children's Social Care

6.28 Sarah Newman, Deputy Director Children and Families, Adam Shepherd, Head of Assessment and Intervention and Jude Findlay, Service leader gave evidence to the panel from the children services perspective.

In terms of numbers there are currently:

- 197 home educated children, with 28 of these open to the Children and Families service.
- 166 children on part time timetables with 42 of these open to children's social care and 35 are open to early help.
- 210 non-attenders, with 69 open to CSC and 44 open to early help.
- 7 CSE children, 6 at risk of CCE. For part time pupils there are 3 CSE and 5 CCE.
- Of those home educated there are 3 at risk of CSE.

6.29 The Head of Assessment and Intervention said that those children who are not attending school and not open to children's social care or targeted early help may not be on anyone's radar outside school and therefore risks are not always picked up. Partners need to ensure these young people are not dropping through the net. The Service Leader said that there are very few CSE toolkit assessments (matrix of scoring children at risk of CSE) from schools and very few completed unless children are open to social care.

6.30 The Deputy Director Children and Families added that where children are going missing from home, Children's Services are very alert to whether they are also at risk of being exploited. Where children going missing from school, schools are not always making the link to exploitation as readily and that is a vulnerability across the system. Barnados are doing work around their exploitation tools and thinking about how to better engage with education so schools are much more alert if children are missing school.

6.31 The Head of Assessment and Intervention said that they have serious concerns about the use of part time timetables by schools. Out of the part time timetable list there are a significant number open to children in need, including those in need of protection and looked after children. This is putting increased pressure on families, carers and increasing the risk of exploitation. It also has a significant impact on the police, children's social care and the young person.

6.32 The Deputy Director Children and Families added that when Children's Social Care get involved to address issues within families, including increasing school attendance, there is often improvement but when social care end their involvement,

without careful oversight this can slip and the cycle resumes. The Council is trying hard to with services across the whole system so that improvement is sustained.

- 6.33 The Deputy Director Children and Families said that based on the figures discussed earlier that on a normal school day there could be potentially up to 573 children out of school across the city at a particular time. Those children who CSC know are vulnerable will have services in place to support them. However, across the system partners need to ensure that they know about all of those 573 children and how vulnerable they are. Schools are getting better at reporting to the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) where school attendance is an issue. The targeted early help teams are picking up more cases and assessing young people who are not in school, to be clear of the level of vulnerability. Continued vigilance is essential.
- 6.34 The Deputy Director Children and Families agreed that focusing on school transition groups from primary to secondary school was the right age group to target. From a CSC perspective they see where the needs of those children are not fully understood and there are issues that can be missed. Whilst community engagement is great, it has to be supported by schools having a sense about what is going on with each child in order to understand what is making them vulnerable and whether the right services are in place to ensure their needs are met.
- 6.35 With regard to reduced timetables, the Deputy Director Children and Families said they put more pressure on placements for children in care which can lead to placement breakdowns. Parents are not always aware that they can challenge reduced timetables which can put a huge strain on family dynamics. The Edge of Care service has been set up to work with adolescents where there are those kinds of issues to provide more support. There has also been training for social workers and early help workers to ensure they understand the PCC protocol and can challenge schools.
- 6.36 In terms of recommendations CSC would like included in the panel's report the Deputy Director Children and Families added that there needs to be a link between children missing school and completing the CSE risk assessment so they fully understand the implications of them not attending school.
- 6.37 The Service Leader added that there is a pan Hampshire group looking at the CSE toolkits and it would be helpful if they could get schools to participate in this to ensure that the toolkit is right for them and to understand why it is not working currently. The Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions & Reintegration Service Manager added that this could be due to time involved in completing the assessments. It should be the schools safeguarding lead completing the toolkits and they are responsible for making staff aware of the toolkit.
- 6.38 In response to a question, the Deputy Director Children and Families said that referrals into CSC always increase at the end of July, once the school summer holidays begin. The school pass on any concerns about children they are worried about so Children's Social Care can provide support. During the 6 week school summer holidays it is very important to talk to children in care about the next school term before they return to ensure that any issues with attendance are resolved before September. The Service Leader added that there are also issues with post 16 adolescents who are not in employment or training turning to risky behaviours.

6.39 The Head of Assessment and Intervention said some schools do not use reduced timetables and he would be interested to know what the schools who do not use them do instead to keep their children safe. He would be keen that a recommendation about the minimising the use of reduced timetables be included in the report.

Case study examples and learning from Portsmouth Youth Offending Team prepared by Sarah Reed, YOT Education Officer.

**6.40 (1) Year 8 pupil subject to a Youth Rehabilitation Order**

Child was home educated - he had 26 day exclusions whilst at primary and low attendance. YOT began the EHCP process with Mum during a period of Home Education in 2016 and this was continued when he started a new school in the same year. There was a prompt response at that school with an EP assessment. An EHCP was then issued and the child transferred to an alternative provision where again review of need prompted a further move to a different site provision where attendance is now at 69.3%.

**6.41 (2) Year 9 pupil subject to a Referral Order**

Child was placed in Portsmouth by an out of area LA. Child had little engagement with his school in his home LA, and this continued in Portsmouth. With the support of his YOT Case Manager, the child was encouraged to attend a Music Studio (Youth Provision); as this was highlighted as an interest. He had rarely left his home address, but this was something he really wanted to do. He engaged really well with the project and, with the help of his case YOT manager and the studio, his confidence increased. He is now engaging with his education provision and has chosen his options. He now presents as a confident young man, who engages well with all professionals.

**6.42 (3) Year 10 pupil subject to a Referral Order**

Child was on roll with SEND and EHCP but minimal attendance in Autumn 2017. He started reparation sessions with YOT in January 2018, building a bird box which he completed at the YOT Reparation Workshop. With a renewed self- belief from being able to learn something in a practical environment, he started attending school significantly more from March 2018.

**6.43 (4) Year 10 pupil subject to a referral order**

Child had been Home Educated for over a year. He wanted to return to original school but this was declined at LEA Panel. He was allocated an alternative school. This school was approached re: offering an off- site provision because he had committed an offence against a pupil at this school and felt threatened going to this school as a result. The allocated school invited family to go into school, but family did not attend. School were going to refer back to panel this did not occur and he remained as home educated status. Application to pre 16 colleges was supported and he has a place for September 2018 but has also applied to another provider in order to make an informed choice re: where he will attend year 11.

**6.44 (5) Year 10 pupil completing a Youth Community Resolution.**

Child had not attended any education for over two years. He was on roll but had not attended. YOT submitted his case to LEA panel to see if he could return to his original school which is what he wanted. After being notified that his original school would not permit his return, he accepted that he would need to go to the existing provider. They were happy to facilitate a pre-16 course at college and work experience as he lives a considerable distance from the school but he wanted to attend an actual school so has started on a reduced table there. The voice of young person was listened to, the team tried to re-apply to original school, but when this did not succeed the child had to acknowledge what was on offer and agreed the provision he would engage in.

**6.45 (6) Year 11 pupil subject to a Referral Order**

Child had not been attending provision since January 2017. He has an EHCP and stated that he felt scared attending school. The YOT and Early Help Team negotiated a curriculum that he could manage whilst checking that work was being sent home. A CAMHS assessment evidenced his anxiety and substantiated a change of provision to home tuition which he has engaged with since February 2018.

**6.46 (7) Year 11 subject to a Youth Rehabilitation Order**

Child was due to reduce to a part-time table from March 2018. This was not acceptable to mum or to YOT. School was challenged and work sent home and provision provided 1:1 in the library for 2 weeks prior to a full-time return to school.

**6.47 Learning acquired from these cases:**

- The longer young people are out of education the more support they require to establish confidence in their ability to return to school. This support may well consist of out of school activities with a professional.
- Parents are generally unaware that they do not have to accept part-time provision.
- Cases often arrive with YOT when there has been significant absence from school - in one case over two years. This could have been identified at an earlier stage and potentially could have prevented youth crime.
- The voice of the young person should be listened to and the LEA processes explained to them.
- Parental awareness of the LEA panel process and the expectation for their child to attend school should be reinforced but supporting practical hurdles like getting a bus pass, talking about time to buy school uniform, starting with a reduced timetable that does not commence too early in the day are factors that can support a successful reintegration into school.
- It is important to ensure schools are not encouraging challenging pupils to leave without officially excluding them which results in them being home educated as in case.
- Liaison with the LEA SEND team re: expectation of provision via annual review and starting the EHCP process.

- Additionally, the LEA panel process can be hindered by schools not completing paper work on time so a child is swiftly out of education by at least a month by which time a child is often displaying significant anxiety about returning to school. Anxiety is a significant hurdle to attendance.

### Children in Care Council School Attendance feedback

6.48 The panel received written evidence from a Participation Officer at Portsmouth City Council who asked two questions to some of the members of the Children in Care Council (CiCC):

**1. Can you advise of what support helped you in improving your attendance at school? (asked to care leavers and Looked After Children whose attendance had improved)**

- Moving to live back with my Mum
- When I found out I could move out of Harbour into a normal school
- My friends helped me by supporting me
- Once I settled in with my new foster carers
- I found it really difficult to go back because I thought people would judge me for not being there for so long, but the teachers helped me a lot and when things got to hard I was able to go into a part of the school on my own and calm down. (ALNS Broadside)

6.49 **2. Looking back what could have helped you with your attendance in school? (Asked to Looked after Children and Care leavers whose attendance did not improve)**

- I was left at home because I caused too many problems in school, this put lots of pressure on me and my foster carer which made things much worse. I think if I still had to go to the school but maybe be on my own it would have made it easier.
- Staff in my residential unit should have been more strict because none of us were going to school so it was like no one cared.
- Sometimes I just had a bad day and I did not speak to anyone so when I had to go back to school I was scared. Maybe a sort of option to go to school but in a way you're not chucked back in.
- I really hated it when meetings were held about me in school and these made me cross, I would then get angry and shout and throw things. School should be a place where I can just be a normal person.

**7. To investigate the reasons why parents are choosing to home educate their child and how their progress can be monitored and their safeguarding ensured.**

### Evidence from the Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions & Reintegration Service Manager

7.1 Elective home education is the term used by the Department for Education to describe parents' decisions to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school. The responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. In England, education is compulsory, but school is not.

## 7.2 What are parents and the LA's responsibilities in relation to Elective Home Education?

Parents may decide to exercise their right to home educate their child from a very early age and so the child may not have been previously enrolled at school. They may also elect to home educate at any other stage up to the end of compulsory school age. Parents are not required to register or seek approval from the local authority to educate their children at home. Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, inserted by the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to make arrangements to enable them to establish the identities, so far as it is possible to do so, of children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education. The duty applies in relation to children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being at school.

## 7.3 Numbers

Academic Year	2010/1 1	2011/1 2	2012/1 3	2013/1 4	2014/1 5	2015/1 6	2016/1 7
Number of Pupils who have at some point been registered as Electively Home Educated at some point within the academic year	101	139	143	191	205	221	256

### Current Snapshot (Feb 2018)

Year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Total</b>	4	11	9	9	12	10	10	9	14	17	21	34	1

EHA	Total	Count of Stud ID							
NO	138	CIN	Total	SEN	Total	Gender	Total		
YES	23	NO	151	School Action	3	F	71		
Grand Total	161	YES	10	Education Health and Care Plan	3	M	90		
		Grand Total	161	SEN Support	31	Grand Total	161		
				No Identified SEN	91				
				School Action Plus	3				
				Statement	1				
				No SEN coding	29				
				Grand Total	161				

## 7.4 Of the current local cohort (February 2018)

- 5% parents want to meet at an alternative venue to the home
- 26% parent have a home visit
- 11% parents submit reports
- 42% parents do not wish any meetings/send reports/respond to letters
- 14% parents have yet to respond

- 2% SEND

- 7.5 An article on home schooling in *The Guardian* on 12 April 2016 stated that: "...freedom of information responses provided to Education Guardian indicate numbers are rising. Responses from 134 of England's 153 local education authorities list 30,298 children as receiving home education in 2014-15. Of these, 13,007 are of primary age, and 17,291 of them are between 11 and 16.
- 7.6 Among 103 authorities that provided data back to 2011-12, the number of primary-age children recorded as home educated rose by 60% in the three academic years to 2014-15. In the secondary phase, the increase was 37%. About 85% of local authorities documented a rise in home education over those three years, with 27 authorities reporting a doubling of numbers.
- 7.7 This may be part of a longer trend. In December 2017, the BBC reported home education numbers had risen 65% across England and Wales in the six years to 2014-15, while in 2007, Channel 4 news documented a 61% increase in home educated children in the five years from 2002"
- 7.8 Portsmouth has a clear policy around Elective Home Education (EHE) that endeavours to be as robust as current guidance allows and makes explicit to parents the responsibilities they are taking on in electing to educate at home. A recent report to the PSCB shows the trend data and a breakdown of the reasons that parents choose this option. There are currently 139 pupils who are registered with the LA as electively home educating.
- 7.9 The Panel heard from the Director of Children, Families and Education about the home education (Duty of Local Authorities) bill currently being debated by Parliament. The bill is to make provision for local authorities to monitor the educational, physical and emotional development of children receiving elective home education. The Portsmouth Education Partnership's view on the private members bill on elective home education was that the local authority should have that right and duty to ensure effective safeguarding of EHE children and also to the introduction of a compulsory register of EHE children.

#### Feedback from Portsmouth Parent Voice Workshops (written evidence)

- 7.10 Portsmouth Parent Voice (PPV) is a parent carer forum and were contacted to see if they could assist the panel with talking some parents who electively home educate. PPV collected some comments from home education workshops around home education which were shared with the panel. This can be read in appendix 4 to the report.
- 7.11 During some of the school visits, home education was discussed. The headteacher of Admiral Lord Nelson School gave a couple of recent examples. They had one pupil struggling with behaviour who the school were succeeding with, however the parent made the decision to remove them from school as their experience was too negative and educate them at home. An example was also given where a parent removed their child from school however after a short amount of time asked for their child to return to school as they found it more difficult to teach due to the diversity of the subjects. Some parents do not know exactly what it means to home educate and

their attendance officer will always explain the options available to them if a child is struggling at school.

7.12 The Headteacher of Harbour School said that they get a number of young people that have previously been home educated who then come back through the inclusion support panel as their parents have not been able to home educate them.

7.13 The Panel received evidence from two parents at one of their meetings, who choose to home educate their children. They also received three other written statements from parents who home educate.

Mrs A, EHE parent

7.14 Ms A is parent who has been home educating her two children for the last eight years. One of her sons was diagnosed with Aspergers however he was not diagnosed immediately. He is a very bright child who started reading aged two and when he started at school he was reading books from the junior school as there was nothing at infant level that would challenge him. He attended Willows which is a special nursery and he was very happy there as they understood his needs. When he started at school however Mrs A felt there was no support from the school although they had tried and there are a lot of things for the school to manage. She explained that for a child with Aspergers the school environment can be very loud and hectic, especially having 30 children in a classroom. The teachers were not able to give him the support required. Mrs A was told they were waiting for staff training on the Makaton system which her child and another in his class were due to use. As Mrs A's Son was verbal and his friend was not, her son became a translator for him.

7.15 Mrs A went on to explain that her son attended school for five weeks part time and begged her not to go back. He was trying his best to hold it together whilst at school but was very upset at home. When they spoke to his teacher, their assumption was that there was a problem at home as he 'seemed fine whilst at school', which was very frustrating. This is something Mrs A hears often from other parents choosing to remove their child from school. Mrs A therefore made the decision to remove him from school and home educate him and it took him a year to get back to his normal, happy self. Her son is now 13 years old and has no desire to go to school and when asked whether he would prefer to be at school he replies 'why would I want to?' Her son would like to take GCSEs however he wants to do GCSEs that are not available in school such as Law. Her reasons for continuing home education are now more ideological.

7.16 Mrs A felt that better communication between the LA and the home education community was needed. She explained that EHE parents receive letters from the LA Attendance Service which immediately makes these parents angry as they have chosen not to send their child to school - there is not an issue with attendance. She said the LA would get a better response from EHE parents by simply sending these letters out on different headed paper so they do not feel they are being treated the same as parents who do not send their child to school. She felt this would create a much better response. The EHE parents had asked Portsmouth City Council to add details of the EHE groups on the website, however they said they could not as the groups had not been CRB checked, however most other LAs do this. This would give the children and parents the opportunity to socialise with other home educating

families and would mean the children are seen by other adults within the group.

7.17 It was very difficult to describe an average day of home educating as it depends on a number of things such as their child's interests. Activities they undertake include swimming lessons, trampolining and attending STEM group (science, technology, engineering and maths) once a week. It was sometimes dependent on the weather, for example if it was a sunny day they will go out exploring. One EHE parent's day would be completely different to another. Some EHE parents have a strict timetable so their children are learning from 9am until 3pm and some choose to teach in accordance with school term times. Some bring tutors in to teach their children. Other home educators choose to completely step out of timetabling structure and every day is completely different depending on events and activities and their child's interests. Home educated children meet up regularly during the week.

7.18 In terms of support for GCSEs, Mrs A explained there is lots of support from the home education community but none from PCC and EHE parents must pay for exams themselves. Hampshire County Council is known to be one of the best LAs for supporting EHE parents and they provide funding for each child to take up to five GCSEs. Fareham and Gosport home education group have an exam centre and can assess a child to see if they require extra time to complete exams if they have a SEND. EHE parents will often get a group of people together and pay for a private tutor.

7.19 Mrs A said it would help if the LA does not send letter from attendance team as it immediately frustrates EHE parents as their children are not missing school. Attendance officers have little understanding on how home education works and will ask EHE children if they want to start school 'like normal children'. Some attendance officers are better than others. EHE parents would like better communication with the LA.

#### Mrs B, EHE parent

7.20 Mrs B had home educated her children until the age of 16 and the children had never attended school. She never informed the LA as there is no legal obligation to do so. PCC later found out though through consent forms for her child to perform in a show. She received a call from an officer asking why their child was not on their books. She accepted an attendance officer visit however the first one was very damaging. They came in with the attitude 'wouldn't you rather be in school?' This upset her son as he felt he had been doing something wrong and was very inappropriate. Future visits were from a different attendance officer who had a completely different attitude and had acknowledged their choice to home educate. Visits were really positive as she was interested to see what her child had been doing, and this really helped. Her son used the sessions to show what he had learned and was proud to do so. Mrs B thought that if more of the attendance officers took this approach this would make a huge difference in the relationship with EHE parents and the LA. Some EHE parents are reluctant to let the LA in as they do not want comments about their house for example, as this has nothing to do with their child's education. Mrs A added that pushing to meet children straight away if they have come out of school can also be damaging as the child may have been so damaged from school they are frightened that they will be made to go back to school.

7.21 EHE children mix with other EHE children regularly and it is a common misconception that they do not socialise. There is a huge EHE community with many organised activities they can attend. Parents also regularly meet and socialise. They are always meeting new children as there are always new children coming out of school to be home educated. EHE children also mix with children of different ages. Mrs A explained that her son mixes with older children academically and then children his own age socially. There is also more interaction with adults and the older children are very protective of the younger ones. There is less division between girls and boys playing together. Mrs A also explained that her children socialise with children who attend school through after school clubs such as Taekwondo and Scouts.

7.22 With regard to the LGA Policy around setting up a national register for home educated children to keep track of numbers, Mrs B said that there is still a lot of hostility between the LA and EHE so many parents would not want to be added to this list. She personally would not mind being registered but other EHE parents have had negative experiences so would not welcome that. Mrs A said that she would not want to be included on the register and if/ when they move house she would not inform the LA of their new address. Mrs A said many parents would be worried that once they have their names what would happen next. Mrs A added that they advise EHE parents not to ignore letters received from the LA but to keep the LA at arm's length. Mrs B added that her son had picked up on the negative experience with the first attendance officer and was terrified that he would be taken away into care if he was not performing well. The two EHE parents said it was difficult for them to represent all EHE parents. Some EHE parents will never want to engage with the LA whereas some parents would be willing to engage if the experience was much more positive.

7.23 Bullying of older children is becoming more of a reason for parents to remove their children from school, for younger children it is often due to a child having a SEN. Many parents have said they tried their hardest to keep their child in school but they have felt their child has been neglected and the situation is getting worse.

#### Written evidence received from parents

7.24 The panel also received three written statements from parents who home educate their children. All three had chosen to home educate their children through choice and their belief that this was the best option for them. One parent said 'as the law in the UK currently states it is my responsibility as their parent to delegate their education either to a school or provide it myself. This remains a right enshrined in law and is something I feel very passionate about'

7.25 Each of the parents felt frustrated that EHE is seen by the LA to be linked to school attendance. Although they understood the concerns regarding the level of education at home and the safeguarding of children, they felt these concerns are due to a lack of understanding and fear on behalf of the authorities who do not positively engage with the home education community. One of the EHE parents who works as a paediatric nurse explained that she is not naive to concerns and in her role as nurse meets more school age children with significant safeguarding and mental health issues than she has in the home education community.

## How to improve the relationship between EHE parents and the LA

- 7.26 The two EHE parents who gave verbal evidence felt that training of attendance officers may help. If officers were all much more positive and understood EHE this would make a huge difference in improving relationships. Members of the panel noted that the biggest issue is that there is suspicion on both sides. Home educating parents think the LA does not understand home education and from the Council's perspective they need to ensure that home educated children are adequately safeguarded, as two thirds of EHE are not known to the LA. Until the barriers of them and us situation are broken down, no progress will be made so the LA needs to bridge these barriers and compromises are needed on both sides. The panel noted that every child learns in a very different way, whether it be in schools or EHE; it is about finding the best way of learning for each child and that may not be in a school. Mrs A added that it would be great for EHE parents and the LA to have a positive meeting. They can go back to the online EHE community to say they have had a really positive experience this will help break down barriers. Mrs A added that Hampshire has a very good relationship with their EHE parents, as do Cambridgeshire, Sunderland and South Wiltshire so suggested that the panel may wish to look at what these LAs do. It was noted that the LA needs to undertake more sharing of information.
- 7.27 When asked what they felt could be done to improve the situation for the EHE community if funding was available, Mrs A said training to ensure people understood EHE and the reasons parent chose to do this e.g. if their child has a SEND. Financial help towards GCSEs would also be welcomed that other councils provide, as would help towards music lessons. Also help towards a venue, such as a hall that has storage space to store educational materials, where they can hold different activities. Currently parents must pay for this themselves. This would help as all different home educators could use this space and all share the educational materials.
- 7.28 A further suggestion made by the two EHE parents was that Council owned attractions such as Staunton Country Park, introduce an 'EHE parent goes free' ticket that would really help. In addition she said that most swimming pools in the city will not let children in during school hours so asked if this could be reviewed.

## Evidence from the Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager

- 7.29 With regard to the remit of the LA in terms of EHE, the Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager explained that when a LA is asked to judge what is suitable education, broadly they are asked to measure this in the same way across the board e.g. whether it is a suitable age, aptitude and ability, but with home education the LA are not given authority to look at progress over time and judge in the same ways as schools, as it is a different type of curriculum. Ultimately it is key that children are thriving and doing what they want to be doing. There are stories around the country where parents are home educating their children but the child would much rather be in school. On the other hand some excellent home educator stories have been heard from EHE parents.

## **8 Equalities Impact Assessment.**

A preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as appendix 5 to the report. A full EIA is not required as no specific information regarding protected characteristics was gathered and the scrutiny panel's role is to make recommendations to the Cabinet. If the Cabinet decides to implement the recommendations, individual EIAs would be carried out.

## **10 Legal Implications.**

10.1 The legal basis for comment is contained within the body of the report- there is no need for legal comment of a specific nature.

## **11 Finance Comments.**

11.1 The financial implications of the recommendations set out on page 6 potentially will be spread across a number of departments and agencies. It is not possible to comment on the implications to external agencies, and the following comments concentrate on the impact on Children's Services (Education and Children's Social care) and Schools.

11.2. The recommendations do not indicate that there is any immediate impact on the current financial resources of either the Education or Children and Families budgets. It is anticipated that existing resource budget provision will be sufficient to meet the requirements and, should any additional support be required in a specific area, it is expected that this will be met through the redirection of current resources.

11.3. Funding for schools is provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) under the School and Early Years Finance (England) regulations which, whilst it restricts how funding can be provided to schools and to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), once schools have received the funding, they have local flexibility regarding their spending decisions. Schools will need to consider the costs associated with the recommendations of the report along with the other financial pressures that they are managing.

11.4. The DSG funding received by the authority is based on the number of pupils on the October school census, and therefore will not include pupils not registered at a maintained or academy school. Therefore no funding is available through the DSG for pupils in receipt of Elective Home Education.

11.5. Whilst the authority has seen a small increase in the DSG funding for SEND in 2018-19, the increase in demand and subsequent costs has exceeded the grant and continues to be a pressure that is constantly being managed by the Inclusion Manager within the Education department.

11.6. Schools also receive funding through the use of the pupil premium grant to provide support to pupils who are either looked after, in receipt of free school meals or a service child. The school has the flexibility to use the grant for the "educational benefit of pupils registered at the school" and the report has demonstrated some of the flexible use of the grant to support attendance.

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - List of meetings, witnesses and documents received

Appendix 2 - Glossary

Appendix 3 - Early Help and Prevention Service Chronic Non-attendance flowchart

Appendix 4 - Feedback from Portsmouth Parent Voice on Elective Home Education

Appendix 5 - Preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
BBC News online Article: Rising numbers of pupils home educated 21 December 2015	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35133119">http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35133119</a>
Channel 4 News article online: UK home-school cases soar	<a href="http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/society/education">http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/society/education</a>

## 12 BUDGETARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS.

The following table highlights the budgetary and policy implications of the recommendations being presented by the Panel:

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
1. That the Council's attendance campaign is endorsed and officers consider a segmented marketing strategy tailored for different groups of parents. The Council should also include in its literature that it is parents' legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school.	Director of Children, Families and Education	This recommendation is entirely consistent with the current policy framework.	The costs of the attendance campaign about to be launched are being met through corporate communications.
2. That good practice taking place in schools should be shared through the Portsmouth Education Partnership website and this be used as a mechanism to pair good and poor performing schools with each other to share expertise across the city.	Director of Children, Families and Education  PEP Chair	This is consistent with current use of the PEP website and PEP approaches to mutual support.	Beyond the website information, where less well performing schools seek advice from better performing schools on attendance any funding required will generally be for the receiving school to consider.
3. That practical ways to keep children in school should be used such as using minibuses to collect children not in school and schools be encouraged to consider this. The authority should also encourage businesses/partners to actively challenge any children they see out of school during the school day in term time.	Director of Children, Families and Education	The second part of this is consistent with the Council's overall approach to contextual safeguarding. Given the resourcing implications of sending out minibuses, that option will need to be for schools to consider.	It should be possible to accommodate within existing budgets (departmental or Safeguarding Board) the costs of encouraging businesses to ask questions about children not attending school.
4. That the current review of alternative provision through the Portsmouth Education Partnership should explore how schools can keep children and young people	Director of Children, Families and Education	This is entirely consistent with existing policy.	The administrative capacity of the education service has been

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
<p>engaged so that reduced timetables are only used when it is in the best interest of the child in exceptional circumstances, as this presents an increased risk to the child. Parents/carers should also be made aware that they do not have to accept a reduced timetable for their child. The panel supported the rigorous challenge provided by the department to schools around the use of reduced timetables.</p>	<p>PEP Chair</p>		<p>increased slightly to facilitate rigorous challenge to schools.</p>
<p>5. That if alternative provision is necessary schools must ensure that there is meaningful educational provision, ideally on the school site. The number of children on reduced timetables should continue to be monitored and challenged by the local authority</p>	<p>Director of Children, Families and Education</p>	<p>It is currently for schools to consider what if any alternative provision they need to make available on site. Monitoring and challenge of reduced timetables is already departmental practice.</p>	<p>For schools on alternative provision. On reduced timetable monitoring see comment above on additional admin resource.</p>
<p>6. That the Council strongly support the line taken by the Portsmouth Education Partnership on the private members bill on elective home education that the local authority should have that right and duty to ensure effective safeguarding of EHE children and also to the introduction of a compulsory register of EHE children</p>	<p>Director of Children, Families and Education</p>	<p>Consistent with the departmental policy position.</p>	<p>If local authorities are given new responsibilities there would be a "new burdens" assessment in relation to funding for those responsibilities.</p>
<p>7. That the Council continues to help promote community projects or non-curriculum courses that look to raise the aspirations of children and encourage them to attend school</p>	<p>Director of Children, Families and Education</p>	<p>PCC does not currently promote or provide specific community programmes.</p>	<p>There is no funding within the Education Department to resource or promote community activities outside school.</p>
<p>8. That the Council note and support and rigorous action which the department is taking to challenge schools who have a relatively high number of pupils who have been</p>	<p>Director of Children, Families and Education</p>	<p>This is consistent with current policy.</p>	<p>Activity is covered by the current departmental budget.</p>

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
taken off roll to be electively home educated, and to make sure that parents are making a genuine choice			
<p>9. That the Council note the context of people choosing to electively home educate for ideological reasons and should positively engage with these parents. However it was noted that some parents are choosing this option as they are not satisfied with the SEND provision provided in school. The panel noted the funding pressures in meeting SEND provision in schools and believe that schools are doing their best to offer a broad range of provision for children. The Council should support representations being made to government about the high needs area</p>	<p>Director of Children, Families and Education</p>	<p>PCC has contributed to national surveys about pressures on the High Needs block funding.</p>	<p>There are challenges in making necessary provision within the currently allocated High Needs block funding, hence our participation in surveys designed to highlight those challenges.</p>

Meeting Date	Witnesses	Documents Received.
<b>3 November 2017</b>	Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education	Draft Scoping Document School Attendance Overview report with the following appendices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portsmouth Attendance Strategy</li> <li>• Percentage ranking of on track persistent absentees by each half term 2016-17</li> <li>• PCC guidance on the use of reduced timetables</li> <li>• Reduced timetables report to PSCB</li> <li>• Appendix 5 - Children missing Education report to PSCB</li> <li>• Appendix 6 - PCC guidance on elective home education</li> <li>• Appendix 7 - Elective home education - guidance for local authorities</li> <li>• PCC elective home education frequently asked questions</li> <li>• Appendix 9 - Elective home education report to PSCB</li> </ul>
<b>December 2017 and January 2018</b>	Member meetings with Flying Bull Academy, Victory Primary, St Edmunds, Admiral Lord Nelson & The Harbour School Headteachers	
<b>12 January 2018</b>	Feedback on members meeting with headteachers Anthony Harper, (Early Help and Prevention Locality Manager (South) & Early Years and Childcare Manager)	Presentation on a proposed targeted approach to chronic non-attendance.  Feedback received from Portsmouth Parent Voice on Elective Home Education.
<b>16 February 2018</b>	2 EHE parents Neil Stevenson, Admissions, Attendance, Exclusions & Reintegration Service Manager	Prosecutions Outcome Report 2015-16 Education Penalty Notices Report 2015-16
<b>13 July</b>	Maggie Blyth, District	Children in Care Council School

<b>2018</b>	Commander for Portsmouth, Hampshire Constabulary Julian Wadsworth, Active Communities Network Sarah Newman, Deputy Director Children's Services, PCC Jude Findlay, Service Leader, PCC Adam Shepherd, Head of Assessment and Intervention, PCC	Attendance feedback  Case study examples and learning from Portsmouth Youth Offending Team prepared by Sarah Reed, YOT Education Officer.
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**APPENDIX TWO**

**GLOSSARY**

BAG	Behaviour and Attendance Group
CNA	Chronic Non Attenders
CAMHS	Child and Adult Mental Health Services
CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation
CSC	Children's Social Care
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
ECHP	Education Health and Care Plan
EHE	Elective Home Education
LA	Local Authority
MASH	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
MET	Missing Exploited and Trafficked
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SEMH	Social Emotional Mental Health
PA	Persistent Absentees
PPV	Portsmouth Parent Voice
PSCB	Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board