

Education Scrutiny Committee
Meeting to be held on 10th July 2012

Electoral Division affected: All

Elective Home Education
(Appendices 'A' and 'B' refer)

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Executive Summary

The County Council's revised Elective Home Education (EHE) procedures were approved in March 2012.

At the Education Scrutiny Committee on 13th March 2012 a further update on how the new procedures are working was requested along with information on how the procedures address some of the concerns raised at that meeting.

Recommendation

Members of the Education Scrutiny Committee are asked to :

- consider the progress being made in implementing the new procedures;
- note the areas where amendments to the procedures have already been identified as part of the planned review;
- consider the additional areas for development in respect of support for families on EHE; and
- consider the extent to which the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group have been achieved.

Background and Advice

In March 2012 the Education Scrutiny Committee received a report relating to the revised County Council procedures relating to Elective Home Education (EHE). A copy of the new Elective Home Education Procedure is attached as Appendix 'A'.

The procedures are currently being followed for all new notifications to the EHE team, for cases where families are requesting contact or support from the EHE team and for those cases where concerns have been identified indicating that additional enquiries should be undertaken. For other cases currently known to the local authority the procedures will be implemented from the start of the new academic year in September.

The revised procedures are already impacting on the work of the EHE Team and are assisting the team in achieving the balance between being available to provide support to home educating families as required, and also to ensure capacity to provide additional input to families experiencing difficulties or where concerns have been identified requiring the authority to undertake more detailed enquiries regarding the nature of provision being made.

In March 2009 the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and approved the final report from the Elective Home Education Task Group, a copy of which is set out at Appendix 'B' to this report.

The Task Group made 15 recommendations, of which one (recommendation 13) related to changes to legislation and is therefore outside the control of the authority's officers. Of the remaining 14 recommendations, several have been completed for example the EHE team have new job titles (Rec. 2), the structure of the EHE team has been reviewed to increase capacity to respond to EHE cases (Rec. 4), the EHE1A form has been withdrawn (Rec. 9) and the Overview and Scrutiny report was passed to the then DCSF (Rec. 15).

Good progress has also been made in respect of most of the other recommendations but as these generally relate to improving the quality and types of support available to home educating families they are areas which we would see as constantly under review and ongoing improvement – but feedback from the Lancashire HE Forum group indicates they acknowledge the progress that has been made in these areas (Recs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12).

For example, currently work is being undertaken to redevelop the website to ensure better signposting to resources and the team is compiling details of examination centres available to home educators within Lancashire. In addition the Pupil Attendance Support Team will accept requests for assistance from any family who indicates they are considering EHE due to difficulties arising from their child's current school place. This service has already been accepted by a number of families, with some families able to resolve their concerns and keep their child in school whilst others have continued with the choice to withdraw their child but have indicated they felt more reassured regarding their decision to home educate and their capacity to follow this route.

Discussions involving the Inclusion and Disability Support Service and representatives from the EHE community have already identified the need for an additional section within the procedures to clarify the instances where support differs for children for whom the local authority maintain a statement of special educational needs, and further meetings are planned to explore how the annual review process can be adapted to become more appropriate in instances where children with statements receive their education otherwise than at school. The change of approach within the authority in terms of initial and annual contact will ensure there is sufficient capacity within the EHE team to assist families through attendance at Annual Reviews where this is requested by the family.

The final recommendation of the Task Group (Rec. 14) related to working to establish the best way to ensure the County Council's responsibility for the

safeguarding of every child in Lancashire can be achieved in respect of home educated children. This issue was a clear priority for us in developing the new EHE procedures but discussions with the Safeguarding Unit proved very helpful in allowing the procedures to be finalised. There is a very clear understanding within the Safeguarding Unit and the EHE Team that all safeguarding concerns are addressed within the relevant procedures for children in need and the Local Safeguarding Children Board's procedures, as with all children within Lancashire; where actions are required to safeguard children who are being home educated they will form part of the child in need/child protection plan whilst any concerns related to the quality of educational provision will continue to be the remit of the EHE team. The relevant workers will liaise closely in all such cases and the action plans will clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each worker in supporting these children and families.

In addition, we are currently finalising the pathways for how we work with colleagues in other teams where parents request assistance with a return to school based education from EHE and also in cases where the authority's duty to investigate is triggered.

Nationally, there is an increasing awareness of issues relating to Elective Home Education, as can be evidenced by the attention devoted to this area by the Parliamentary Education Select Committee and one focus for their work relates to how local authorities seek to support children in their area who are being home educated. The County Council is actively exploring further ways in which we can support children and families within the home educating community, and additional developments planned for next year include:

- Awareness raising sessions for relevant staff within the county council and partner agencies to help professionals understand the role of the local authority in respect of EHE, and also to assist partner agencies in considering how that impacts on the services they offer.
- Identifying how best to signpost EHE families for careers advice following the transfer of the duty to provide careers advice from the local authority to schools.
- Associated discussions relating to information sharing to ensure that EHE families are able to benefit from the September Guarantee related to Further Education provision.
- Discussions will also take place with the Young People's Service to ensure the needs of EHE families are considered in the development of work to support the Raising of the Participation Age agenda.
- Exploring the option to access funding via the Alternative Census to assist EHE families to access FE provision during their final two years of compulsory school age education.
- Work with colleagues from other teams to assist families in accessing some form of employment opportunities within the limitations of child employment regulations, in the absence of opportunities for formal work experience.
- Clarifying where Flexi-Schooling sits within the range of educational provision available for children in Lancashire, and issuing guidance to support schools in responding to requests for such arrangements.

Consultations

We have invited members of the home education community within Lancashire to volunteer to join an informal ongoing consultation network. One meeting of that group has taken place to review the documentation used by the EHE team, and meetings have also been held with members of the Lancashire Home Educators Forum including a consultation meeting with the Inclusion and Disability Support Service.

Implications:

N/A

Risk management

There are no implications for risk management arising from this report.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
Lancashire County Council Elective Home Education Procedures	March 2012	Frances Molloy, CYP, 01772 532722
Overview and Scrutiny Elective Home Education Task Group Report	2009	Frances Molloy, CYP, 01772 532722

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A