

PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM REVIEW

Committee name	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Ryan Dell – Democratic Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1 – Updated Scoping Report Appendix 2 – Guidance on Policy Reviews Appendix 3 – Updated revised draft recommendations
Wards	All

HEADLINES

Background

As part of the review into persistent absenteeism, Members are requested to consider findings, conclusions and early draft recommendations in relation to the review for broader discussion and stocktake of the review to-date.

Summary

The Committee has held six witness sessions. The intention of these sessions was to obtain feedback from a wide range of stakeholders with a view to improving school attendance.

1. At the first witness session Members heard from key officers representing the Council's Education Team – Kathryn Angelini (Assistant Director for Education), and Sally Edwards (Attendance Support Officer).
2. At the second witness session Members considered a range of information from other Local Authorities.
3. At the third witness session, the Committee heard from representatives from schools, who discussed their experiences of persistent absenteeism.
4. The fourth witness session afforded Members the important opportunity to hear directly from young people as to their personal experiences.
5. The fifth witness session was attended by key officers from the safeguarding team – Alex Coman (Director for Safeguarding, Partnerships and Quality Assurance) and Donna Hugh (Safeguarding Manager).
6. Finally, the sixth witness session allowed Members to meet with a large number of parents and carers.

Members are now requested to start to firm up their conclusions and recommendations so these can be worked up in more detail and ultimately incorporated into the final report to Cabinet.

To assist with this, in March 2025, a meeting was held with the Chair, Opposition Lead and Officers to formulate 8 draft recommendations which are presented for consideration and to assist

the Committee following a substantial process of distilling all the relevant information and findings from the review.

Following discussion at the March Select Committee, the draft recommendations have been revised as per the attached.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Children, Families & Education Select Committee:

- 1. Agree the revised recommendations to be included in the final report; and**
- 2. Agree to delegate approval of final report and its submission to Cabinet, on behalf of the Committee, to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chair, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead.**

Note: given the next Committee meeting is in June 2025, the Committee may wish to delegate finalisation of the report and its submission to Cabinet, to ensure it's consideration by Cabinet at the earliest opportunity. However, all Members will be given the opportunity to review the final version prior to this.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In considering this item, Members should bear in mind the following:

1) Scoping report – looking at the original parameters of the review

The updated review scoping report is attached so Members can be reminded of the original Terms of Reference as set out below:

1. To identify the prevalence and patterns of persistent absenteeism in statutory school age children in Hillingdon, including a reference to primary planning areas
2. To explore the root causes and contributing factors of persistent absenteeism in statutory school age children in Hillingdon
3. To consider the impact of persistent absenteeism on academic outcomes on statutory school age children in Hillingdon
4. To understand and explore the nature of partnership working in relation to persistent absenteeism in statutory school age children in Hillingdon, including parents/ carers, young people, teachers, officers and other stakeholders
5. To review the effectiveness of existing interventions and policies in place for children and families struggling with persistent absenteeism in Hillingdon
6. To explore the measures in place for child protection and safeguarding in relation to attendance
7. To review and identify the trends and patterns of persistent absenteeism when considering demographic factors such as age, race, religion, wealth and disability, as well as considering differences between the North and South of the borough.
8. To review how other Local Authorities, including statistical neighbours, are tackling persistent absenteeism
9. Subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet

2) Policy review guidance

Members are reminded of the guidance issued on undertaking policy reviews, and asked to consider if the draft recommendations:

- Meet the initial aims/ objectives of the review (as above)
- Be SMART, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
- Not be a short-term fix, but a lasting outcome
- Consider the financial aspect, e.g. cost neutral, provide savings or if at a cost, then affordable – and if possible, aligned with the MTFF (budget planning process)
- Are based on a broad evidence base as possible and ‘user or resident’ insight
- Not create additional bureaucracy, e.g. if it relates to a policy, then to seek to review or amend existing policies (unless there is an absolute imperative for a new policy)
- If publicity or wider engagement or education is recommended, to target such communications as best as possible rather than generally
- Consider ‘conclusions’ as well as any specific recommendations.

3) Minutes of previous meetings

Minutes of the six witness sessions (including the confidential sessions) have been shared, which may assist in Members’ considerations.

Committee Members may also wish to bring their own findings and thoughts based upon the various witness testimony received.

Democratic Services will then “road-test” any draft recommendations from the Committee, looking at their feasibility with the relevant service area and report back to the Committee to a subsequent meeting, in preparation for shaping the final draft report for the Committee’s approval.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

It is intended that the review will support the work of the Attendance Support service in helping to shape its ways of working, identifying areas of weakness and how overall engagement with key stakeholders can be improved.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Updated Scoping Report

Appendix 2 – Guidance on Policy Reviews

Appendix 3 – Updated revised draft recommendations