

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting27th June 2019

1. Title of Item/Report

Local Authority Attendance Policy and Penalty Notice Code of Conduct

2. Record of the Decision

At the Cabinet meeting in February 2019 it was agreed that schools would be consulted on the proposed changes to the Local Authority Attendance policy and Penalty Notice code of Conduct, together with proposed guidance on the exceptional circumstances in which a headteacher may decide to authorise pupil absence in term time. It is the responsibility of the headteacher to make this decision, not the Local Authority. Following the consultation to headteachers and governors feedback was positive. Some comments regarding exceptional circumstances guidelines and the referral criteria were received and have been reflected in the proposed policy and guidance.

These proposed changes ensure a consistency in referral processes to support decision making; enable a more timely response and assist schools in managing recent unauthorised absence to prevent entrenched patterns of behaviour developing.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The revised proposals be agreed following local authority consultation of head teachers and chairs of governing bodies on the proposed changes to the attendance policy and penalty notice code of conduct ready for implementation from September 2019 as follows:

- Retitle the local authority Attendance policy (Appendix 1) as Stockton Council Pupil Attendance and Absence Management procedure.
- The criteria for referral to change from 'less than 80% attendance during the school year' to '10 unauthorised sessions of absence in the previous eight school weeks'.
- The penalty notice code of conduct (Appendix 2) to change from a three week monitoring period to a four week period.
- The head teacher to be required to state in writing why a request for leave of absence in term time is not deemed as an exceptional

circumstance.

- The attendance team to issue a 'notice of prosecution' to parents who, after 28 days, have failed to pay the penalty notice.

2. The following responses to the consultation be noted:

Four schools responded (one secondary and three primary schools). All agreed to the following key changes previously presented to Cabinet:

- Retitle the local authority Attendance policy as Stockton Council Pupil Attendance and Absence Management procedure.
- The criteria for referral to change from 'less than 80% attendance during the school year' to '10 unauthorised sessions of absence in the previous eight school weeks'.
- The penalty notice code of conduct to change from a three week monitoring period to a four week period.
- The head teacher to be required to state in writing why a request for leave of absence in term time is not deemed as an exceptional circumstance.
- The attendance team to issue a 'notice of prosecution' to parents who, after 28 days, have failed to pay the penalty notice.

Two of the responding schools did not agree that all pupils should be automatically referred to Early Help before an Attendance support plan is put in place; rather such a referral should be made only if the school felt this were appropriate.

Two of the responding schools commented on the proposed guidance for exceptional circumstances for authorised absence in term time (Appendix 3) as follows:

- Schools may wish to devise their own more comprehensive list to support their families in understanding what is and is not exceptional in their context.
- Concerns that it is very difficult to monitor a pupil's attendance at a close relative's funeral in some circumstances and could lead to a pupil missing education for an extended period of time to visit relatives abroad. The school would not want to include this as a standard exceptional circumstance.

It was therefore proposed that:

- 'To attend a close relative's funeral'
- 'To visit a close relative suffering from a terminal illness'

are removed from the guidance for exceptional circumstances as

attached (Appendix 4 – revised guidance for exceptional circumstances for authorised absence in term time).

3. Cabinet supported these amendments to the original proposals and the policy and procedure be implemented from September 2019.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To streamline and increase the impact of the work of the Council and support for schools in addressing unauthorised school absence.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Bob Cook declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 11 - Local Authority Attendance Policy and Penalty Notice Code of Conduct as he had grandchildren attending schools within the Borough.

Councillor Steve Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 11 - Local Authority Attendance Policy and Penalty Notice Code of Conduct as he had grandchildren attending schools within the Borough.

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight, 5 July 2019.

Proper Officer
01 February 2019