

People Scrutiny Committee – 14th April 2015

Public Questions

Questions from Mr Webb to the Executive Councillor for Children & Learning

Question 1

“Andrew Cook Ofsted Regional director stated that good and outstanding schools are supporting schools with require improvement. He states the problem is there are not enough good schools the to team up with and that is something he is concerned with. What is Southend Council point of view on this situation?”

Answer

Southend Council’s educational ambition for all children and young people is that they all attend a good or outstanding school. In 2014-15 (to date, not a complete year) the figure is 76.9%. In 2013-2014 73.2% of primary school children attended a good or outstanding school, compared with 60% in the previous year (12/13). This increase in good schools is due to a strong partnership between officers and school leaders to secure improvements in leadership, management, teaching and learning not just within their own schools but through providing weaker schools with support. The improvements this year have been slower in the secondary phase. However one secondary school that required improvement has been judged as good and the remaining three have all been judged to be making reasonable progress, mainly because of the support they have been provided with by stronger local schools. In summary, there are more good schools in Southend now than at this time last year and this improvement together with greater collaboration between schools is enabling the improvements to continue.

Question 2

“Will Southend Council fast track cases to court and getting parents to pay £120 if they fail to improve their child's attendance at school be effective in reducing low levels attendances in the short and long term?”

Answer

Southend on Sea Borough Council recognises that the most effective and sustainable approach to reducing absenteeism both short and long term is by working closely with schools to identify and provide early help to families where patterns of absence are only just beginning to surface.

Southend Council only use punitive measures to reinforce school attendance as a last resort and usually only where parents have not engaged with schools and/or Local Authority services attempts to improve school attendance through early help and support. It is due to this approach that numbers of Southend parents fined under section 444 and 444(a) of the Education Act continue to remain low.

Similarly, for the minority group of families that choose not to engage with offers of early help and support and as a result then receive a formal warning of a fine or court action; evidence shows that for the majority of these cases, pupil attendance then improves and as such, a fine is not pursued.

Where however it is identified that a family has complex needs with recognised barriers to ensuring regular attendance and the family is willing to work with services, court action and/or fines are not pursued as the emphasis would be on working together to support the family through an agreed plan using the team around the child and family approach, whereby improvements to attendance can be sustained.

It is proven that persistent absence is a significant factor in children underachieving and gaining lower exam results. Therefore our current campaign to reduce persistent absence is primarily to raise awareness and remind parents about their legal responsibility and to inform of implications, legal powers and sanctions available to the council to ensure regular and punctual school attendance. Starting legal action is not a decision we ever take lightly, but it is a decision we will make if parents choose not to engage with the school and LA to resolve the issues.

Questions from Mr Ali to the Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing

Question 1

“I would appreciate clarification from the Executive Councillor how Southend council expects the relocation of Healthwatch Southend from Prittlewell Chapel to the SAVS Centre to assist the gathering of local views of the health and social care services and making these views known to providers and commissioners of local care services, together with monitoring and scrutinising the quality of provision of our local services?”

Answer

The premises move should not affect the outcomes of the service. The commissioned outcomes remain the same with the provider expected to deliver on championing the needs of local patients, service users and residents within both health and social care. The provider is expected to assist with supporting residents, gathering local views on services, monitoring and scrutinising the quality of services provided and reporting outcomes to commissioners. The role therefore remains unchanged.

Question 2

“The predecessor of Southend Local Healthwatch (LHW) was the Essex and Southend Local Involvement Network (LINK). Is the committee satisfied that the Southend LHW has been as accessible to the public in the way LINK was by having monthly public meetings and raising public concerns and ensuring they were acted on by local care providers and commissioners?”

Answer

The service was commissioned to champion local residents and patients, which means being accessible to residents in different ways. Organisations are expected to evaluate responses and target the community in the most effective manner to achieve maximum engagement and this remains the expectation of this contract.