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Norfolk Children's Services Attendance Strategy

Attendance is Everyone's Business

September 2022

“School life provides a crucial platform where the critical components of healthy development can be nurtured. It is not just a place of academic learning; it is somewhere to belong, to achieve, to have meaning and purpose and is an arena for social and emotional development in preparation for adulthood. This SCR requires a culture shift both in terms of how multi-agency services value the multi-faceted benefits of school and a redesign of service intervention so that schools are placed at the very heart of multiagency provision.”

(NSCP Serious Case Review)



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1. Purpose

2.1 Norfolk County Council is committed to working with schools and other partners to improve school attendance and punctuality across the Local Authority. Underpinning this commitment is the understanding that there is a strong correlation between good school attendance and achieving positive outcomes for children. There is a wide range of evidence as to the health and wellbeing benefits of school-age education, and the Chief Medical Officers have been clear that time out of school can hold back young people's development and wellbeing.

2.2 It is recognised that attending school regularly can be a protective factor for children and young people. Learning from national and Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership serious case reviews and child practice reviews highlight the importance of having access to a school place to a child's life and the need to place school life at the heart of multi-agency planning and provision. It is therefore important to ensure that schools and settings offer a safe environment, positive relationships, high-quality teaching and learning, and opportunities to develop social and emotional skills.

2.3 In our work with children and families, we are committed to ensuring that all staff advocate the child's right to a full-time and efficient education. This means that our work with children, parents and schools should be underpinned by the key principle that any child, regardless of their characteristics, needs or the type of school they attend, deserves access to a full-time, high-quality education that allows them to flourish and paves the way to a successful future.

2.4 This Attendance Strategy has been developed to help the Local Authority, schools, settings and other services understand what we need to do to work in a more coherent way, making the best use of resources available, in order to ensure that:

- All children and young people can make the most of the opportunities provided by attending school.
- Systems are developed to provide the LA with accurate and contemporaneous attendance data.
- Data is used to identify patterns and trends and systems are responsive to these supporting schools to intervene early and prevent escalation of concerns.
- Through training and guidance, the workforce understands the LA's responsibilities for school attendance, they know who to contact for support and are confident to address concerns about school attendance.
- Responses to concerns about pupil absence at an individual, institutional and locality level are co-ordinated across teams. Schools, parents and children are clear about what support is on offer as well as their responsibilities.

As a consequence:

- Teams across the LA take collective responsibility for improving school attendance and there is a consistent response to planning.
- Overall attendance improves and levels of persistent absence reduce.
- Children are safeguarded because they attend school regularly and any issues are identified and responded to at the earliest opportunity.
- Parents understand the contribution they can make to their child's wellbeing, achievement and good attendance and know where to go to access help and support.



2. Context

The roles and responsibilities of schools, parents and local authorities are clearly defined with statutory guidance and advice as follows:

Statutory guidance & advice

- [Working Together to Improve School Attendance \(From 1st September 2022\)](#)
- [Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities](#)
- [School behaviour and attendance: parental responsibility measures](#)
- [Children missing education](#)
- [Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children](#)
- [Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Alternative provision](#)
- [Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school](#)
- [School exclusion](#)

Local guidance & policy framework

- [School attendance – guidance for schools](#)
- [Attendance procedures](#)
- [Children missing education – guidance for schools](#)
- [Children missing education - procedures](#)

In Norfolk, the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities for school attendance and tracking pupil movement are overseen by teams within the Education, Quality Assurance, Intervention & Regulation Service and there is a clear offer of training, support and guidance available to schools. Moreover, school attendance has been a priority for Children's Services leadership and this strategy has been developed with representatives from across Children's Services Team including Family Support, Virtual School, Community & Partnerships and Youth Justice Service.

Despite the efforts made to improve pupil attendance, this continues to be a significant challenge for many schools in Norfolk. Norfolk's figures for both overall and persistent absence are consistently higher than the national average and higher than in many other local authorities that are statistically very similar to Norfolk. The issue is one that affects secondary, primary and special schools alike; too many children are persistently absent from school.

3. Methodology

This strategy has been developed by the School Attendance Strategy Working Group. The strategy distils learning from audit, case reviews and relevant local and national developments.

The strategy links to the following workstreams and activity:

- Better Together, For Norfolk. Norfolk County Council Strategy 2021-25
- Early Help & Prevention
- Virtual School for In Care and Previously in Care including the extension of the role of the Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker
- Vulnerable Adolescent Strategy

This strategy was informed by the learning gathered from participating in the joint DfE & Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities action learning set regarding whole family work and school attendance and a meeting with representatives from the DfE and regional attendance leads during the Autumn Term 2021. The strategy working group mapped the current practice against the DfE advice [Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities](#) to identify strengths as well as the areas for further development. Whilst it is clear from the data that we need to do more to improve rates of school attendance in Norfolk, strengths were identified in the following areas of work:

- Response to partial school closures
- Support to schools
- Legal Intervention
- Multi-agency working
- Children not on a school roll
- Support for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children

The draft strategy was subsequently checked against the proposals outlined in the DfE consultation [School attendance: improving consistency of support](#) in January 2022 and [Working Together to Improve Attendance](#) following its publication in May 2022.

Consultation Activity

During March 2022, the Senior Safeguarding Adviser and Attendance & Entitlement Manager attended meetings of the 7 Local Safeguarding Children's Groups that sit under the NSCP in order to seek the views of a broad range of partners. A copy of the draft Strategy was circulated and a presentation was given that provided an outline of the strategy. Attendees at the LSCG meetings were invited to complete a short survey in order to understand their experiences of school attendance, areas for development and their views on how they could support the work of the Strategy moving forward. We received 37 responses to the survey.

We ran three consultation events for schools that included a small focus group, a presentation at the March Attendance Network Meeting and a webinar on 23 March 2022. Schools were invited to complete a survey in order to understand their experiences of school attendance, areas for development and their views on how they could support the work of the Strategy moving forward. We received 73 responses to the survey.

The consultation indicates the four priorities identified within the strategy are the right ones and results will inform the detailed action plan that will support the LA to deliver these outcomes. The consultation indicates that there is a generally high level of confidence from partner organisations and school staff in relation to school attendance. The results highlight that there are a range of organisations and teams that can offer support and guidance to parents as well as schools where attendance issues are evident as well as good practice already happening within education settings.

A number of respondents indicated that they are willing to be part of a focus group to discuss some of these themes further and inform the work that is required. It is important that we utilise the support and expertise on offer to embed an effective strategy.



The delivery of the strategy will be driven by Norfolk's Vital Signs for Children which frame practice expectations as follows:



FLOURISH frames the **outcomes** we want to see for the Children and Young People we work with:

Family and friends

Learning

Oppportunity

Understood

Resilience

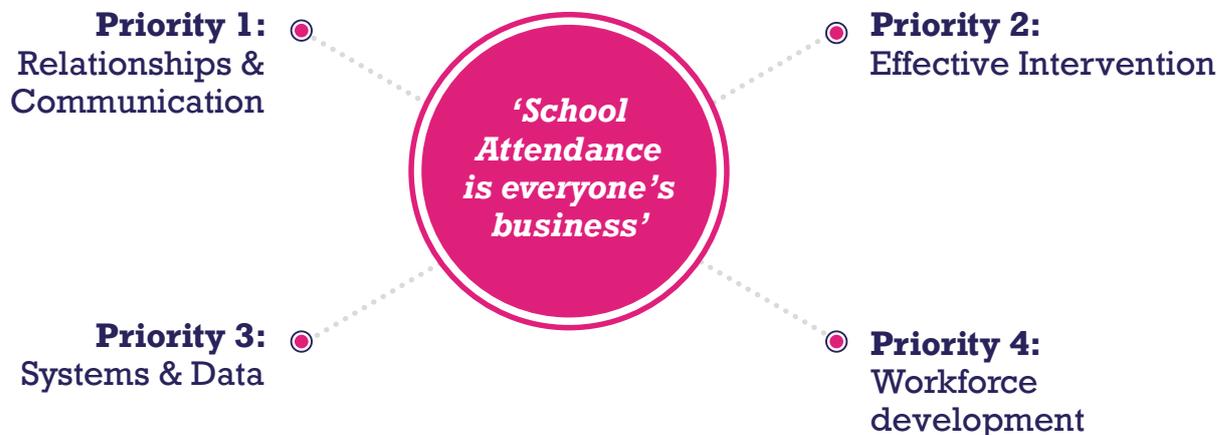
Individual

Safe & secure

Healthy

5. Strategic Priorities

The key priorities of the Strategy are described in this section and can be summarised as:



Priority 1: Relationships & Communication

We will consult with a broad range of stakeholders to identify what is working well and what they are worried about in order to determine what happens next.

Poor school attendance is more than one incident or experience; it is a result of a series of events, interactions, and experiences inside and outside the school walls. There are many stakeholders involved who experience and respond to the challenge of school absence in different ways, bringing different perspectives and approaches to change. Understanding how these factors and stakeholders relate to one another and identifying underlying patterns can help us look for opportunities to intervene early and reduce the likelihood of escalation.

How we will do it:

- consult with schools, children, parents and carers to understand the barriers as well as enablers to good school attendance and what they need help with to achieve this.
- work in partnership with schools to give clear messages about school attendance to parents through a variety of methods including media campaigns.
- co-ordinate strategies and services to ensure that messages on attendance are consistent and that information is shared appropriately.
- connect with targeted services including Voluntary Community Sector partners to understand current service delivery and how their work can support the promotion of good school attendance.

Priority 2: Effective Intervention

We will create a clearly defined pathway for schools, families and other professionals to support them to set clear expectations about attendance, identify and support vulnerable groups at all points of transition and respond to attendance concerns at the earliest opportunity.

Key Features

All pupils

Trauma informed practice

Consistent and restorative approaches to addressing behaviours that challenge.

A strong focus on relational practice

Targeted Groups

Early Identification

Mental health and well-being support

Engaging with families

Multi-agency and community sector response

Academic engagement and support

Staff

Attendance networks

Inclusive school leadership & whole school approaches

How we will do it:

We will review and revise current practice models and guidance so that:

- all plans seek to identify and tackle the root causes of absence.
- the link between school attendance and safeguarding is clearly understood.
- family network and trauma informed approaches are embedded in practice.
- through clear signposting schools, children and their families have access to appropriate support making full use of Voluntary Community Sector partners.
- we continue to consistently apply the full range of parental responsibility measures where required.
- there is a multi-agency response for the most vulnerable learners where interventions have not supported them to access a full-time education.

In order to test the effectiveness of practice models, we will undertake some pilot programmes with targeted schools.

Priority 3: Systems & Data

Through access to contemporaneous data, the LA will have a clear understanding of the current local picture and how this compares to national trends. As a result, the system will be responsive to emerging need and LA Teams will respond to the data strategically, offering tailored support in response at a locality, institutional and pupil level.

How we will do it:

- Drive forward the live data feed to enable the use of contemporary data to target interventions and reduce absence.
- Develop a clear system for monitoring all relevant data which outlines respective teams' roles and responsibility and frequency of the activity.
- Share data and emerging patterns and trends routinely with school leaders and attendance leads individually and collectively through networks and in training.
- Support schools to understand and own their data, analyse it accurately, identify trends and compare it with the national picture, have a clear picture of the reasons for absence, understand their attendance profile, and have in place actions for improvement.

Priority 4: Workforce development

Everyone who works with children, young people and their families has a role to play. These roles should complement each other and work together to support raised attendance. In order to achieve this, we will seek to develop the skills of the workforce ensuring they have the knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the needs of our young people and respond effectively to concerns about school attendance.

How we will do it:

- Enhance the existing offer of training, support and guidance to schools based on consultation, learning from audit and needs analysis. This will include training for governors and academy trusts.
- Create a training offer for staff in other services to ensure our partners understand their role in supporting good school attendance and understand where to access further advice and support.
- Provide opportunities for practitioners to problem solve, reflect on practice, coach and shadow others.
- Identify, collate and share good practice highlighting the impact of those interventions for children and their families as well as on school standards
- Develop an attendance self-assessment for schools to evaluate the whole school approach to managing school attendance.

6. Monitoring & Oversight

An Action Plan has been developed and will be updated on a regular basis. This will address the priorities identified within the Strategy.

The School Attendance Strategic Board will monitor the Strategy and Action Plan. The Assistant Director for Education Quality Assurance, Intervention and Regulation will chair the Board. Membership includes representation from across Children's Services. Report on progress will be made to the Children and Young People's Strategic Board. Terms of reference for the Board can be found at Appendix 1.



Appendix 1: Terms of reference for the School Attendance Strategic Board

Aims

The School Attendance Strategic Board will monitor the Strategy and Action Plan and will:

- Take the strategic lead in improving attendance through providing robust governance to the Attendance Strategy.
- Oversee the implementation of the Norfolk Attendance Strategy and monitor the progress of the action plan to deliver the 4 priorities outlined within the Strategy.
- Ensure that, through the delivery of the plan, the Local Authority, schools, settings and other services work in a more coherent way, making the best use of resources available to improve attendance rates across the County and meet the requirements of Working Together to Improve Attendance.
- Ensure effective links are maintained between Board members and the respective groups they represent, including reporting back progress in each of the workstreams.

Membership

The Assistant Director for Education Quality Assurance, Intervention and Regulation will chair the Board. Membership includes representation of senior staff from across Children's Services and each of the workstream leads:

- Director of Children's Social Care
- Head of Quality Performance & Systems
- Head of Communities and Partnership
- Attendance & Entitlement Manager
- Senior Safeguarding Adviser
- Senior Systems & Reporting Manager

If members are not able to attend, they should send a deputy who is briefed on this area of work and able to make decisions.

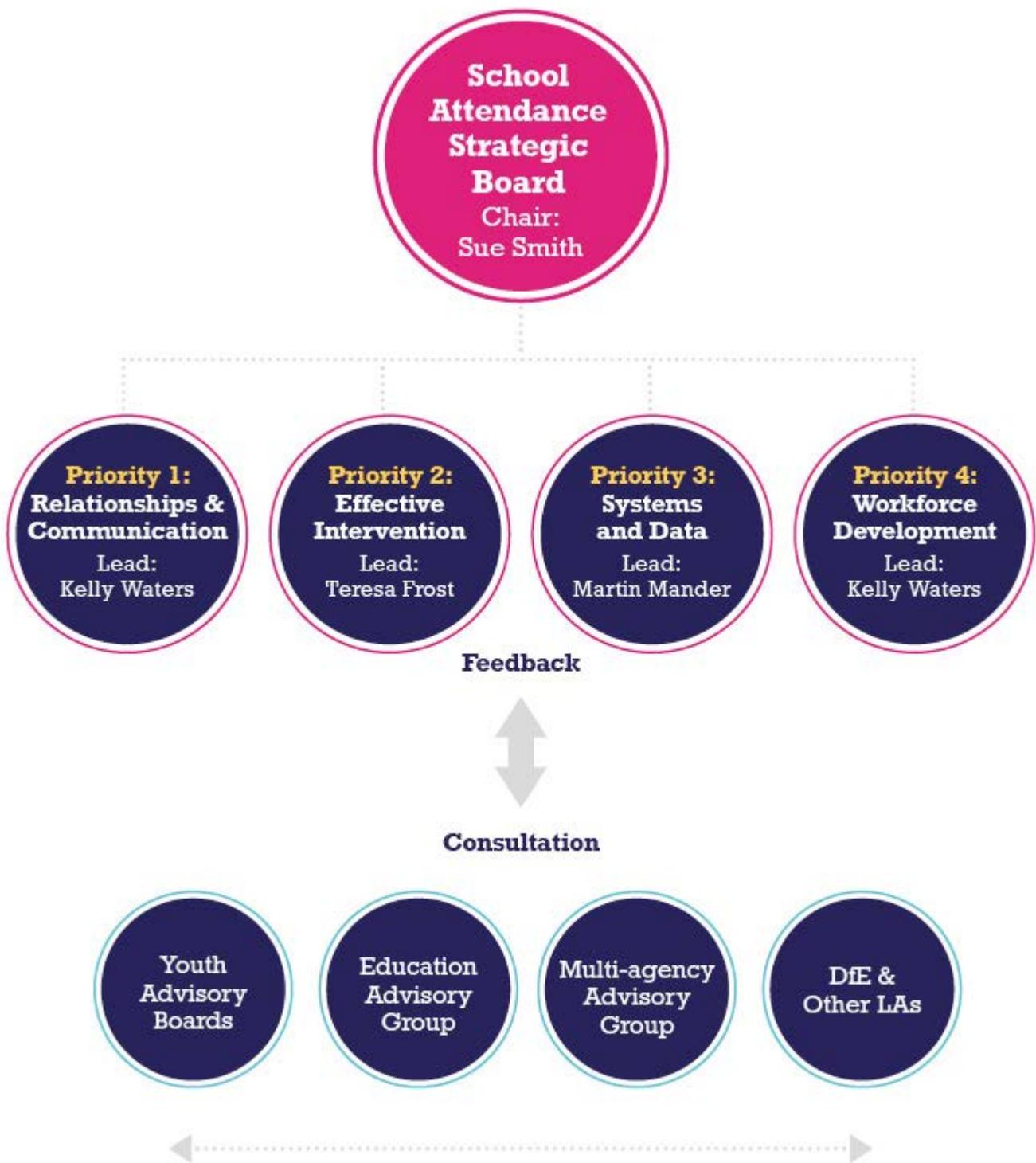
Frequency of meetings

The Board will meet on a monthly basis.

Reporting arrangements

The Board will report and be accountable to the Children and Young People's Strategic Board. Progress reports will be made on a quarterly basis.

School Attendance Strategic Board





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