

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject: FUTURE ROLE, PURPOSE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ATTENDANCE PANEL**  
**Meeting: EDUCATION EXECUTIVE**  
**Date: 28 APRIL 2015**  
**Author: DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**1. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE OF PAPER**

- 1.1 Education Services Attendance Panels are held approximately 3 times per school session. They are chaired by a Team or Service Manager and comprise of a Primary Headteacher and a Secondary representative, usually a Pastoral Head. Letters are sent out to parents/carers asking them to attend with the named pupil in order to discuss ways to improve the pupil's attendance at school. An action plan is then drawn up and the parent/carer and pupil are recalled to the panel after a period of 6 weeks to discuss the progress in improving attendance at school.
- 1.2 This paper seeks to provide Members with:
- (i) balanced information which assesses the level of current resources deployed to facilitate Attendance Panels against an assessment of their perceived impact and effectiveness; and
  - (ii) a recommendation which changes the way in which Education Services deal with school attendance in the future. The proposed change recognises the need to adopt an approach which can be effectively delivered within the staff resources available.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The establishment of Attendance Panels was proposed and approved by Education and Leisure Committee on 30 August 2005 as a result of a review of Attendance Committee in 2004 and Service Circular 29: Non Attendance and Truancy.
- 2.2 The review highlighted in particular the number of referrals considered by the committee which resulted in 'no further action'. This was deemed to merit the move to a two stage process which allowed for an increase in the number of cases which could be dealt with at an earlier stage and would mean the Attendance Committee would only deal with referrals where prosecution was a probable outcome. The proposed arrangements were to be reviewed after one year and a report brought to Education and Leisure Committee.
- 2.3 The report to Education and Leisure Committee on 28 August 2007 highlighted a series of measures to improve attendance and included the rolling out of an automated call system (Groupcall); a revised Service Circular 29 and Attendance Panels. These measures positively impacted on improving school attendance in 2006/07.

- 2.4 Attendance in secondary schools has continued to increase since 2006/07 from 89.9% to 91.8% in 2013/14. This rise, however, cannot be solely attributed to Attendance Panels.

2.5 Role and Purpose of the Attendance Panel

Presently, the role and purpose of the Attendance Panel is set out within Service Circular No 29 Non-attendance and Truancy Guidelines and Procedures (revised February 2011):

*'In a circumstance where the concerns relating to a child's non-attendance or truancy from school continue and it is clear, for whatever reason, that the parent/carer is failing to ensure that the child attends regularly they should be referred to the Education Services Attendance Panel. Normally referrals for non-attendance or truancy will be routed through the MAG where a multi-agency approach will be taken to resolve the issue. The MAG may at a future point refer to the Attendance Panel if other strategies have failed. In a case where there is clear parental collusion a referral may be made direct to the Attendance Panel..... the core function of the Education Services Attendance Panel is to seek to assist the parent/carer in re-engaging with the school and ensure their child's regular attendance.....'*

The Attendance Panel is regarded as a staged approach between the school having exhausted all of its strategies to re-engage families and the Attendance Committee which involves elected members considering referral for prosecution.

- 2.6 Service Circular 29 is currently under review in light of the Scottish Government's publication 'included, engaged and involved part1: attendance in Scottish schools' and also the Scottish Government's approach to improving children's services 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC). The well-being of all children and young people is at the heart of GIRFEC. Services must work together with children, young people and their families to provide quick and effective support when it is needed.

### 3. EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT OF ATTENDANCE PANELS

- 3.1 Most referrals come from the secondary sector and in particular at S3. Schools may view the referral to the attendance panel as a 'last ditch attempt' to keep young people on track and achieve some qualifications before they leave school.

#### **S3 referrals during session 2013/14**

<b>Average attendance at time of referral</b>	<b>Average attendance from referral to recall (6 weeks later)</b>	<b>Average attendance at the end of session 2013/14</b>
44.8%	59.7%	49.6%

The evidence highlights the impact of the Attendance Panel process as being relatively ineffective in terms of 'assisting the parent/carer in re-engaging with the school and ensure their child's regular attendance'. In session 12/13 the average attendance rose by 4.8% (impact calculated from the time of referral to the end of the school session).

The referral to the attendance panel has increased attendance during the referral period by 14.9% but this is not sustained after the recall.

- 3.2 There are fewer referrals from the primary sector. However, here too the sustained impact is only 2.9% till the end of the session.

### Primary referrals during 2013/14

Average attendance at time of referral	Average attendance from referral to recall (6 weeks later)	Average attendance at the end of session 2013/14
74%	79%	76.9%

- 3.3 Over a session, officers' and school staff duties and tasks include screening referrals, preparation reading for the panel, attendance at the panel and composing the outcome letters amounts to approximately **74** hours. Administration tasks carried out by centre clerical staff includes preparing paperwork, establishing panel membership, reception duties and attendance during the panel evenings and word processing the outcome letters is calculated at approximately **48** hours. The total involvement of all Education staff computes to approximately **122** hours. The amount of manpower is not best value if the outcome is translated into increasing young people's chances of achieving their potential through increasing their attendance at school.
- 3.4 The following table gives the number of referrals to the Attendance Committee made over three years, with outcomes:

Year	Number of Referrals to Attendance Committee	Outcome
2011/12	2	Prosecute
2012/13	1	Prosecute
2013/14	1	No further action

With sufficiently robust screening of referrals and with schools exhausting other strategies first, it is not anticipated that a large number of cases would be brought before the Attendance Committee in any one year.

- 3.5 Attendance Panels were introduced in conjunction with other measures at a time when Education Services had to focus on improving attendance which was viewed as an essential element to the 'Raising Attainment' strategy. Over the past 7 years the model has not changed significantly to take into account current thinking which reflects the Scottish Government's advice on attendance in schools and GIRFEC approaches.
- 3.6 The analysis over the past 2 years evidences the limited impact Attendance Panels have had in reality on improving attendance. The diminishing human resources from central teams also impact on the capacity for the Attendance Panels to be sustainable and effective.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

##### **4.1 That Executive agree that:**

- (i) Attendance Panels be removed from the attendance circular and staged process;**
- (ii) a 'pathways' checklist for schools be incorporated into the revision of Service Circular 29 to ensure a consistent and systematic approach; and**
- (iii) schools make Attendance Committee referrals to the Service and School Improvement Division for scrutiny which will either refer back to the school in cases where there is scope for further supportive action or refer to the Attendance Committee.**

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**Director of Children's Services**

**Date:** 15 April 2015

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#### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL