



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 11th December 2018

To the Chair and Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Attendance Strategy Update

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Nuala Fennelly, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools	All	Yes/No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of this document is to provide Overview and Scrutiny committee an update of the 'Attendance Strategy' which was discussed in Spring 2018.
2. The original 'Attendance Strategy' document came about as a consequence of cabinet's consideration of the trends in school absence in Doncaster.
3. The Doncaster Children and Young Peoples Plan 2017-2020 clearly articulates 'strengthened partnership working and the acceptance that it is a collective responsibility to ensure that we create the right conditions for children and young people to thrive in Doncaster' (p4) and targets a significant shift in outcomes around attendance.
4. Attendance is one of the three strands of the work of the Doncaster Growing Together Inclusion board, which provides overall governance for this strategy. This is strongly correlated with the work of the Social Mobility Opportunity Area which has provided further support to schools in relation to connected issues such as school exclusion and the narrowing of gaps in outcomes between groups of young people.
5. This report sets out a summary of the work undertaken in the first year of the strategy and a description of its impact in the first two terms of last year, which is all of the data that is immediately available.

EXEMPT REPORT

6. This is not an exempt report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. For the Panel to;
 - i. Note the work undertaken by the council since September 2017 and the impact of the project so far in a number of schools; and
 - ii. Continue to monitor the impact of this work following subsequent release of key data.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

8. The impact of high levels of school absence are a significant problem for citizens, limiting equality of opportunity, employment, economic activity, aspirations and the quality of educational provisions and their outcomes.
9. Whilst children are not attending school they are of much greater risk of harm and this presents a genuine safeguarding risk. For individual citizens there is great risk of longer term problems with employability, engagement and poverty. Reversing this trend is a priority activity.

BACKGROUND

10. Doncaster's attendance and Persistent Absentee figures have been significantly below the National Average in both compulsory phases of education for the last nine year and had worsened in the period leading up to the launch of the initial strategy. The national rank for absence in 2016-2017 was 133 / 151 for primary schools and 150/151 for secondary schools.
11. The previous report noted that 'There are a significant number of schools that are above the National Average for persistent absenteeism, with only three secondary schools at or above the National Average for persistent absenteeism. Seventeen schools have persistent absenteeism affecting over 20% of their cohort.' Students counted as persistently absent have attended school for less than 90%. This represents half a day per week. Young people with this level of absence has a significant effect on outcomes, with over 90% of students in this category failing to achieve 5 A*-C with English and Maths at GCSE.
12. Attendance is one of the three strands of the work of the Doncaster Growing Together Inclusion board, which provides overall governance for this strategy. This strategy has been delivered in tandem with our three year strategy for improving behaviour and reducing exclusions. This work has been accompanied by other initiatives under the Doncaster Social mobility Opportunity Areas aimed at improving engagement and attendance in schools.
13. The strategy was launched in the Autumn term of 2017 with the aims of delivering greater responsibility, accountability and capacity to schools in relation to the leadership and management of attendance, whilst also improving the capacity and focus of local authority teams in supporting improvements.
14. Aims of the Attendance Strategy:
 - To develop collective responsibility for driving improvements in attendance.
 - To deliver greater accountability for Doncaster schools around absence and P.A.

ensuring that schools have a whole school approach to improving attendance.

- To ensure that school improvement services have a clearly defined role in improving attendance.
- Ensure that the attendance service is having a clear impact upon schools

15. The main actions of the strategy were:

- Identifying and working with a number of schools with a three year pattern of high absence to review practice and make improvements.
- To develop a network for leaders and practitioners from all schools.
- To clarify and strengthen guidance around attendance practice.
- To review and strengthen the L.A.s practice around attendance.

16. Summary of activity 2017-2018:

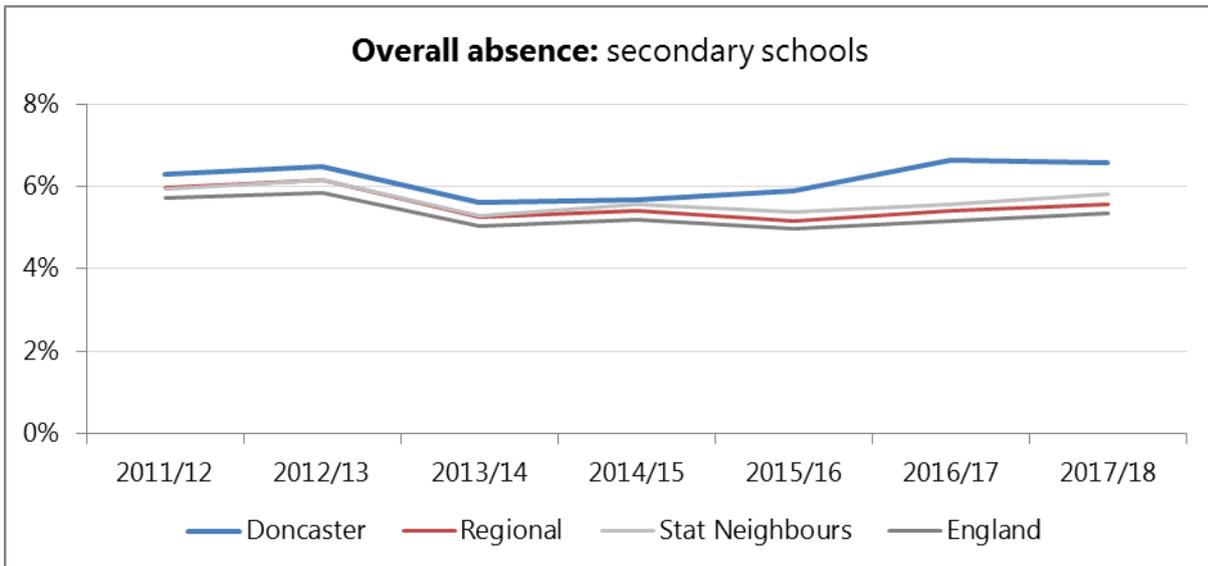
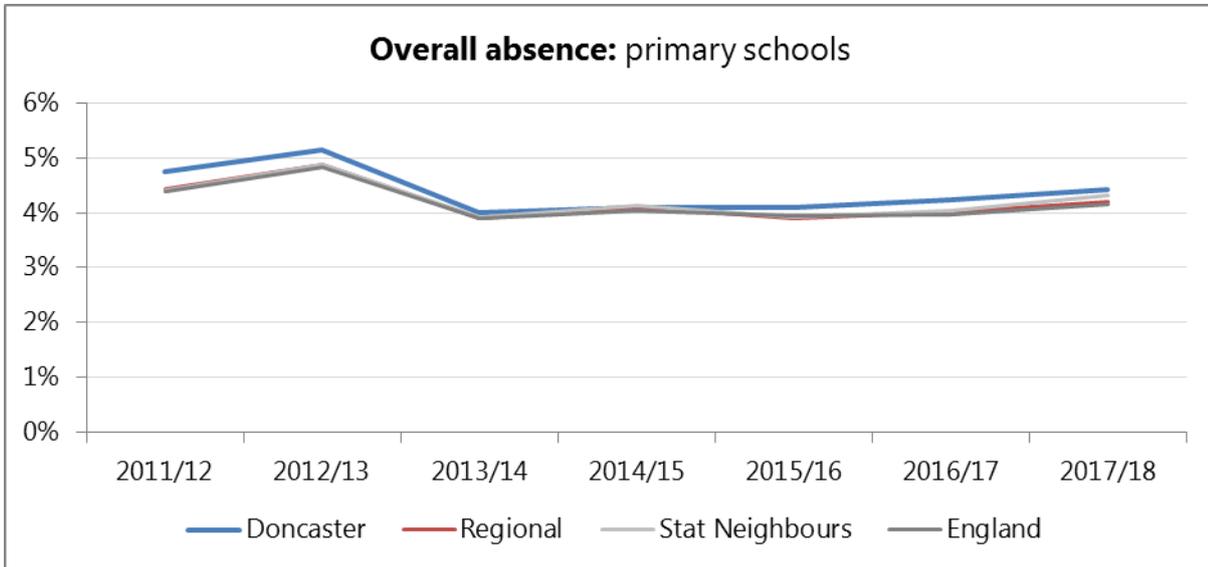
- We wrote to leaders and governors from 64 schools who were identified as having long term concerns around attendance and identified them as schools requiring support. This fed into existing support and challenge processes within the local authority.
- L.A. officers visited schools conducted audits of existing practice and advised these schools on developing action plans and solutions for improving attendance. Schools have been challenged around existing approaches to attendance and a common approach to leading attendance in Doncaster schools has been developed.
- The L.A. conducted termly attendance network meetings in order to share good practice with school leaders across the borough. School leaders have shared a wide range of strategies, supported by attendance team members.
- Attendance and behaviour teams have worked together to identify schools requiring further support to reduce the impact of exclusions upon attendance and to co-develop strategy in relation to reducing exclusions. The L.A. has developed new processes for analysing attendance data alongside other outcomes in order to identify schools for intervention and further action. A growing number of schools have bought in the LA attendance service as a consequence of our work with schools.
- The L.A. conducted a review of its own practice. This triggered changes in our code of practice and the review of roles which came with the functional review. Our enforcement code has changed and our arrangements for staffing and facilitating the enforcement procedure have altered in order to ensure efficiency. A new Code of Conduct has been agreed and shared with schools.
- We have developed partnerships with local schools and collaboratives. This has led to attendance initiatives across the school system and particularly at secondary where the LA has worked with all schools in order to co-produce new policies and practices.

Impact upon outcomes:

17. Attendance data is available only for the first two terms of the strategy (Autumn 2017 and Spring 2018). The SFR (Statistical First Release) report set out the following outcomes and trends:
18. Overall absence has stabilised at both phases of education during Autumn and spring of the last academic year. This is in the context of a national trend which is rising sharply. Overall absence at primary remains 0.2% behind the National

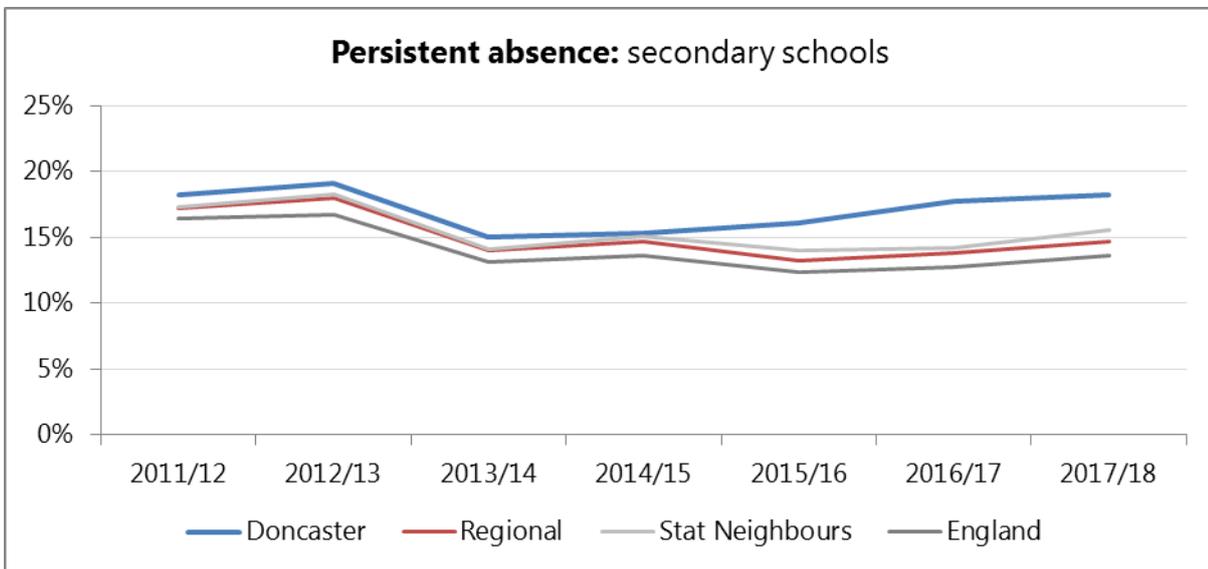
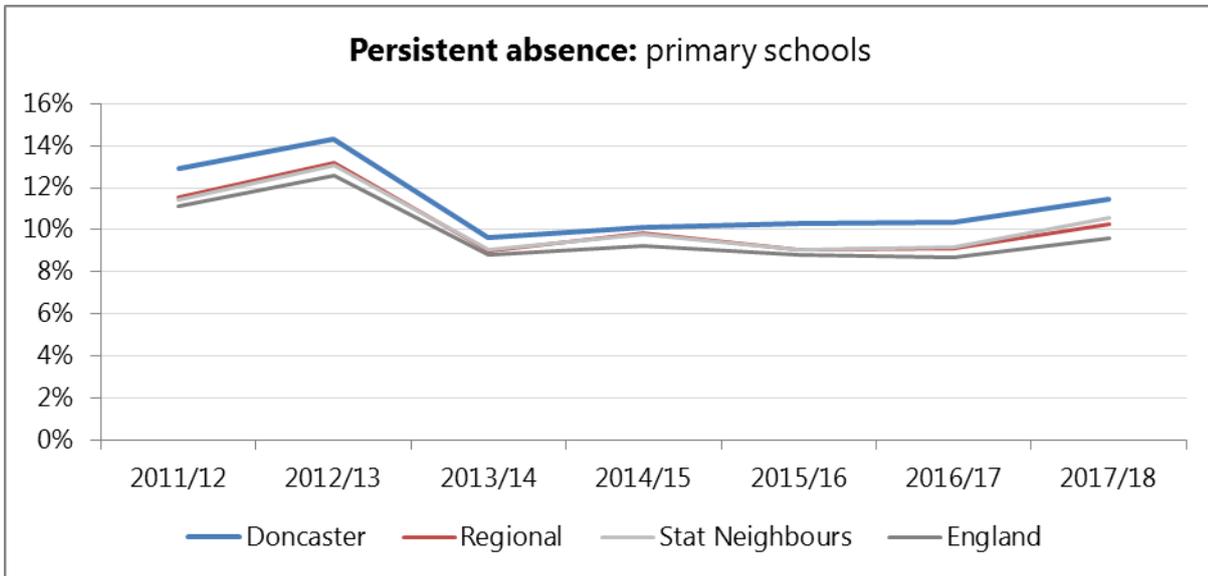
Average, but as absence has increased overall nationally and regionally, this has led to Doncaster improving its national ranking from 133 to 131st and ranking compared to 11 statistical neighbours from 10th to 9th.

19. Our secondary absence rates have remained at 6.6% whilst the national average has worsened to 5.4% and the regional average has grown to 0.2%. This supports an improvement of 2 places in the national rankings from 150/151 to 148/151. The trend in overall absence is reflected in the charts below:

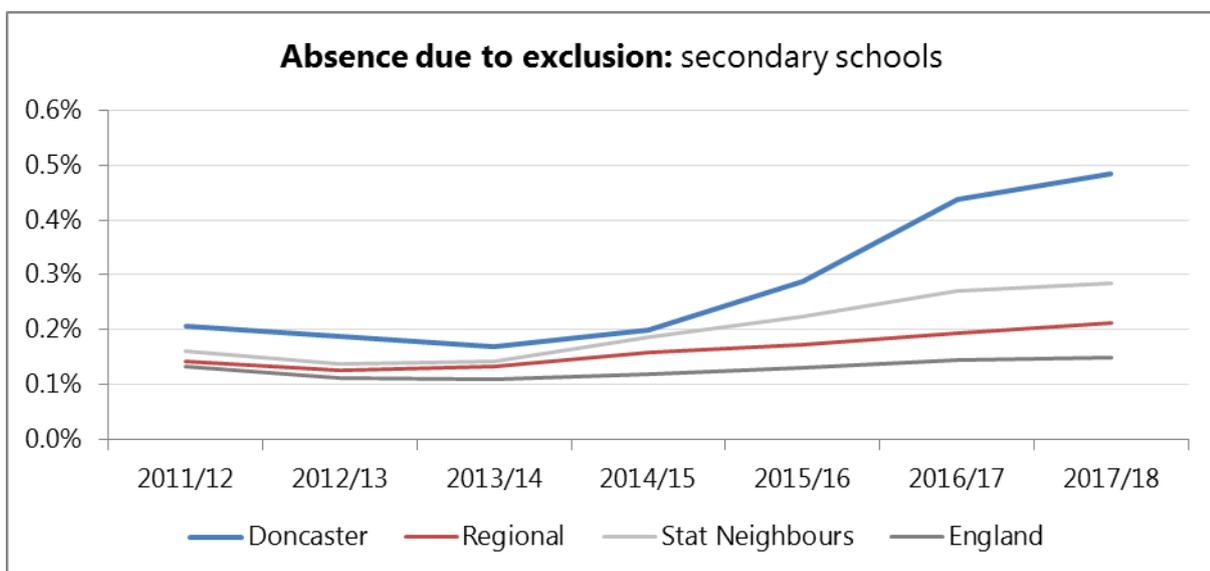
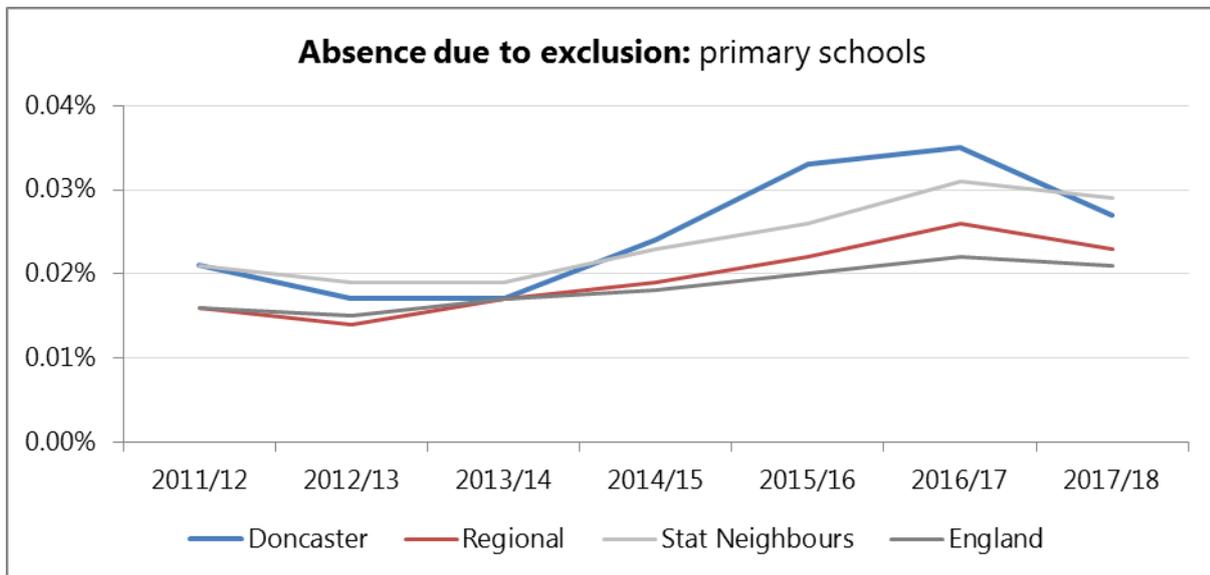


20. With persistent absenteeism (P.A), the Doncaster trends have increased whilst the national picture has worsened significantly during the first two terms of last year. The average proportion of children who are PA is now 11.5% at primary- a growth of 1.1% which is higher than the national jump from 8.7% to 9.6%. This has led to our primary performance dropping from 135 to 137 in the national rankings.

21. Whilst PA 18.1% at secondary level has grown (from 17.8%), there has been a steeper increase nationally, regionally and amongst our statistical neighbours which has led to our national rank shifting from 149 to 145. These trends are reflected in the graphs below:



22. The contribution of exclusions to these indicators is a significant concern. Exclusions in the primary phase have declined and we have improved our ranking in relation to national, regional and statistical comparators.
23. The rate of fixed term exclusions has continued to grow in the secondary sector during this period and Doncaster now stands out against all regional and statistical comparators and is bottom but one in the national ranking of local authority areas.



Data for 'focus' schools:

24. The 64 'focus' schools were identified due to their absence being a concern over the last three academic years. There are a number of schools who are causing concern in relation to other aspects of their performance or who have changed status or trust over the last two years. Nearly all schools engaged with the process and worked with the LA to review processes and develop action plans.
25. The vast majority of these schools attended the network meetings which have all averaged an attendance of over 80 schools so far.
26. 31 out of the 64 'focus' schools made immediate improvements in their overall attendance figure over the first two terms of the intervention.
27. In our focus primaries absence grew at a slower rate than in our other schools and the gap between the focus schools and the national average reduced from 0.8% to 0.7%. In relation to persistent absenteeism (P.A) the gap with the national average also dropped, from 4.5% last year to 3.8% this year. There was a small reduction in unauthorised absence within this timeframe and a small increase in the number of unauthorised holidays. The proportion of authorised holidays during this period dropped.

28. At secondary level, absence reduced by 0.1% and the gap with the national average reduced by 0.3%. Persistent absenteeism (P.A.) dropped by 0.4% across our secondary schools, with the gap with national averages reducing from 8.9% to 7.7%. The proportion of unauthorised holidays taken during this period doubled from 0.2 to 0.4.

Overall comments:

29. Absence rates have stabilised over the first two terms of the project and some schools with stubbornly high levels of absence have made improvements.
30. There has been a high level of engagement from across the sector with the attendance strategy, with strong levels of participation in networks and training and attendance at key meetings. Secondary head teachers have co-produced some key areas of strategy and we have worked with a high number of schools in developing leadership knowledge. The next phase of the strategy will be to sue resources in order to support those schools who have struggled to make improvements during this period.
31. Our intervention with schools has yielded some positive outcomes in schools where progress has been historically slow and we need to ensure that our attendance team continue to build on the dialogue which the attendance strategy has started.
32. The urgent need to address the rising levels of fixed term exclusions is critical. The LA behaviour transformation programme and the OA Inclusion Charter are critical to improving partnerships of schools at each phase and ensuring that there is a borough-wide commitment to reversing these trends.
33. Next Steps for 2018-2019
- We have begun a November public relations campaign to draw attention to the issue of attendance across the borough. This strategy has included attendance sweeps and initiatives with schools alongside a secondary phase cross-borough attendance competition which targets the period of time when attendance is at its weakest in the borough.
 - Developing a parental engagement strategy with inclusion services and wider agency involvement.
 - Ensuring clear accountability about the use of part-time timetables across the school system.
 - Targeting messages around attendance in early years settings.
 - Developing website with attendance resources for school by Spring 2019.
 - Differentiate phase level networks for schools at different phases and stages. Build a single training framework for secondary schools.
 - Refine the list of schools for a relaunched 'focus schools' intervention in Spring 2019. We have developed a model of intervention for our secondary academies who are struggling with attendance which will offer intensive support to our schools with the most stubborn patterns of absence. This has been co-designed with secondary schools and the Doncaster Opportunity Areas programme.
 - The launch of the Opportunity Areas Inclusion Charter in reducing fixed term exclusions across the borough. This will request schools to sign up to principles around reducing exclusions and to action plan to this effect. Schools will be expected to reduce exclusions and to support each other with preventative strategies.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

34. There are no options for consideration

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

35. There are no options to consider

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

36.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	<p>Improve social mobility and economic activity by improving school engagement and outcomes.</p>
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	<p>Reducing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour through school absence. Ensuring that all school prioritise student safety and have robust procedures for minimising school absence.</p>
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	<p>Attendance is critical to all young people having a good experience of education. Our strategies aim to bring about increased engagement and an improved experience of the school system for children and families.</p>

	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	<p>Schools become more effective in providing support and guidance for families and ensuring greater engagement with the school system and other agencies.</p>
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p>We have worked with all partners within Doncaster and beyond to produce strategies and share resources and knowledge. The next phase of this work will require continued co-ordination of leadership responses across the borough.</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

37. Doncaster's schools and academies are monitored and challenged by their governing bodies in order to ensure that their children attend school. The Local Authority monitors school attendance as part of its school improvement strategy.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials SRF Date 28/11/18]

38. The Council has a number of legal duties in relation to the provision of education to school age children. The Council has a number of strategies aimed at improving school attendance and specific legal advice can be provided on these issues as required

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [DA Date 28/11/2018]

39. The total controllable 2018-19 expenditure budget for the Attendance and Education at Home team is £851,380. The staffing posts included within this budget are subject to the on-going LOCYP Functional Analysis. Any additional expenditure arising from the Attendance Strategy will need to be fully costed to ensure that funding is available from existing resources

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [DLD Date: 28.11.18]

40. There are no specific HR implications related to the content of this report. If there are any HR implications arising from specific elements of the Attendance Strategy and associated delivery plans these will be addressed at the appropriate time.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...PW Date...28/11/18]

41. There are no anticipated technology implications in relation to this report. The report author has confirmed that the reference to 'developing website with attendance resources for schools' relates to additional content on the existing Schools Portal.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...CW Date ...28/11/18]

42. Learning outcomes and health outcomes are intrinsically linked. Evidence shows that education, training and employment are key socio-economic factors in determining health status (Marmot, 2010). A strategic approach to improving attendance and reducing the gap in educational attainment is likely to impact positively on reducing long-term health inequalities in Doncaster. As the strategy is likely to impact predominantly on vulnerable young people, this is of particular importance. Public Health support the implementation of the strategy.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials MO Date 28/11/18]

43. We must have regard to the extent to which the council has complied with its Public Equality Duty and give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. The equality of expectation for all children including those that are disadvantaged is a core value of the Children and Young People's Plan. The attendance strategy aims to work with schools in order to reduce the impact of disadvantage and to promote inclusion and diversity in line with these values.

CONSULTATION

44. Communications in the New Year for schools updating the strategy and considering impact so far.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

45. Doncaster Attendance Strategy (January 2018)

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