

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28th September 2007

TRUANCY PATROLS

1.0 **Purpose of report**

- 1.1 At a meeting on 4th July scrutiny committee requested that a report be provided outlining the LA's involvement in truancy sweeps (known as Truancy Patrols in North Yorkshire).

2.0 **Background**

- 2.1 Failing to attend school regularly can have a major impact on children's education, their future and their life chances. Data shows a strong correlation between absence levels in schools and pupil attainment.
- 2.2 The 2004 Youth Crime Survey showed that 62% of 10-16 year olds who have committed criminal or anti-social behaviour have also truanted.
- 2.3 Truancy patrols are one of a range of approaches that feature in North Yorkshires strategy to deal with the issues associated with absence from school. Others include early intervention, direct support to pupils and their families and legal measures to re-enforce parental responsibility where necessary.
- 2.4 Truancy patrols are carried out during normal school hours. They involve stopping any young person believed to be of school age, whether accompanied by an adult or not. The intention is to establish whether or not the young person is registered at school and, if so, whether he/she is out of school legitimately. If the authenticity of the absence is in doubt the education social worker (ESW) will follow up each case individually to substantiate the reasons given for the absence.
- 2.5 Truancy patrols can be useful in identifying children with attendance problems and providing them with appropriate support to make sure that any problems are resolved. Patrols can also help to identify parents who are not taking their child's attendance sufficiently seriously.

3.0 **The law**

- 3.1 The Education Act 1996 requires parents to ensure that all of their children of compulsory school-age are educated. They must ensure that the education meets each child's needs but they do not have to send their children to school. If they wish, parents can elect for their children to be educated out of school, for example, at home.

3.2 Where a child is registered at a school the parents must ensure that they attend regularly. If parents fail to meet their responsibilities they may be prosecuted for the offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school of a registered pupil under s444 of the Education Act 1996. Alternatively, they may be issued with a penalty notice under the terms of the LA's agreed protocol governing the use of penalty notices.

3.3 Section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as amended gives police officers and police community support officers the power to take school pupils back to school or to another designated place. However officers do not have the power to remove pupils from a private place or to remove children who are educated outside the school system.

4.0 **Roles, responsibilities and partnership working**

4.1 Local authorities usually take the lead in planning truancy patrols and in North Yorkshire this is carried out through the Education Social Work Service. However, under Section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Section 8 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 only police officers and police community support officers can remove truants

4.2 Truancy patrols in North Yorkshire have been carried out by a partnership of police officers, community support officers and Education Social Workers.

4.3 Police officers/police community support officers have the power to return truants to their school or to a local authority designated place. It is not a power to arrest or detain children because they are out of school without a good reason.

4.4 Schools have a significant role to play in truancy patrols and are notified of any scheduled patrols so that they can ensure that systems are in place to receive any pupils returned to school.

5.0 **Planning truancy patrols**

5.1 Operational parameters are agreed between the ESWS and the police service. These include:

- clear geographical boundaries for the exercise; and
- where the patrol is to take place.

5.2 Protocols and guidelines are in place between partners to deal with specific issues encountered on truancy patrols. These include:

- returning children to their school or to a designated place;
- children accompanied by an adult;
- dealing with children not registered at school;
- children registered at school in another area;

- collecting data.

6.0 **Guidelines**

- 6.1 The ESWS and police service have guidelines for approaching young people and any adults who may be with them, this includes identify themselves and explaining the reasons for stopping them. Police officers/police community support officers operating the power do so in uniform and are accompanied by an ESW. The ESW completes standard documentation, checks the school status of the young person, contacts schools and parents and carries out any necessary follow up work.

7.0 **Children accompanied by an adult**

- 7.1 Parentally-condoned, unjustified absence can be a problem for some schools and many of these children will have no good reason to be out of school: there are also potential safeguarding issues. The patrol will seek to establish whether the child is a registered pupil, and if so, the reason for absence. Parents are reminded that they are legally responsible for their registered child's regular school attendance and where appropriate, an information leaflet is provided.

8.0 **Evaluation and reporting**

- 8.1 Data is collected by patrols including:

- number of pupils stopped;
- numbers with no valid reason to be out of school;
- reasons given;
- gender and age of those stopped; and
- how many of those stopped were accompanied by an adult.

- 8.2 Since May 2002 the government has asked LA's to be involved in nationally co-ordinated truancy sweeps twice a year and have collected data. The 2006 truancy sweep data collection was the final collection and publication of data by the DfES. The national truancy sweeps were co-ordinated over a 3 week period in the Spring and Autumn terms (Appendices A,B & C). The expectation is that LA's will continue to plan and run truancy patrols organising them to suit local needs.

9.0 **Targeting truancy patrols**

- 9.1 In North Yorkshire we have found that the most effective patrols are those that are targeted on specific locations using local intelligence.
- 9.2 Schools provide much of the intelligence that is needed to make patrols effective, for example, details of:
- regular non-attenders who are absent on the day of the exercise;

- pupils who are legitimately out of school; and
- dates of training days and other school closures.

- 9.3 Experience indicates that it is better not to focus on one locality for more than half a day. It is more effective to move the sweep to another locality.
- 9.4 Patrols may be timed to support local awareness raising initiatives such as school attendance focus weeks.
- 9.5 Other patrols may be based around schools which have particular problems with post registration truancy when patrols return the pupils to the school before they have travelled far from the premises.
- 9.6 Children and young people are not taken to police stations in exercise of the truancy powers as they are not committing a crime; their parents are legally responsible for their non-attendance.
- 10.0 Follow up action**
- 10.1 Once a child has been returned to their school (including a Pupil Referral Unit), it is important that there are adequate arrangements and that pastoral or other staff are ready to receive pupils back into school.
- 10.2 The ESW and school will continue to monitor the attendance records of pupils found by truancy patrols.
- 10.3 Where appropriate a Pastoral Support Plan or a Parenting Agreement may be completed. A Pastoral Support Plan will mainly concentrate on the pupil's reintegration back into school and the support provided within the school. A parenting agreement will concentrate on the responsibilities of the parent and any support that they require.
- 11.0 Children not registered at school**
- 11.1 The welfare and protection of all children, both those who attend school and those who are educated by other means, are of paramount concern. As with school-educated children, safeguarding issues may arise in relation to children who are not registered at school. If any safeguarding concerns become known in the course of engagement with children and families, or otherwise, these concerns will be referred to the appropriate authorities by following North Yorkshire safeguarding procedures.
- 12.0 Children educated outside the school system**
- 12.1 Home educated children and others educated outside the school system are not the target group for truancy patrols. Often, these children are educated outside usual school hours and access other local services such as libraries and sports facilities as part of their education. Therefore, home educated children may encounter truancy patrols.
- 12.2 Although legally not required to, some families do register with their

local authority as home educated. Regular meetings have recently been established between representatives of the LA and a representative group of home educating parents. One of the issues raised has been truancy patrols. The possibility of providing cards for home educated children to carry is being considered by the group. This would enable easy discussion between home educated children, their parents and those carrying out the patrol.

13.0 Children missing from education

13.1 The LA has procedures in place to be followed when a pupil may have gone missing from a North Yorkshire school. Whilst these children are not the target of a truancy patrol, it is important that those involved in truancy patrols are aware of the issue and make the appropriate response.

14.0 Pupils legitimately out of school

14.1 There are a number of valid reasons for registered pupils being out of school during school hours. For example:

- pupils who are on alternative provision and who are travelling between education venues;
- pupils attending a medical or dental appointment which has been notified to the school;
- pupils attending appointments for interviews;
- pupils who may not be able to access full time education because of their medical needs (These children will usually be registered at a mainstream school and receiving education through the REOTAS service;
- traveller children with leave of absence granted for purposes of travelling.
- pupils taking part in performances under the provision of a licence granted in accordance with the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 and associated regulations; and
- pupils on work experience placements arranged through the school;

14.2 Where it has been confirmed that children are out of school for a valid reason, no further action is taken. Some schools operate systems whereby printed passes are issued to pupils to confirm that they have authority to be off-site during school hours.

15.0 Out of area pupils

15.1 Truancy patrols may encounter children truanting across local authority boundaries. North Yorkshire also attracts holiday makers and other visitors.

15.2 There are a number of issues that police officers/police community support officers and ESW's will consider in these situations, including:

- whether the child is registered at a school and out for a valid reason such as approved educational activity, exclusion, or absent with the schools authorisation;
- whether the local authority or school where the pupil is registered is on holiday or closed for another reason; and
- whether the child is being educated otherwise than at school e.g. home education.

15.3 When pupils are found from other areas the ESWS notifies the ESWS where the pupils attend school. If this is not known, the ESWS where the pupil lives is informed.

16.0 **Public relations**

16.1 Truancy patrols provide an opportunity to promote the importance of regular school attendance and can act as an effective preventative measure. They provide an opportunity to demonstrate to the public that in North Yorkshire action is taken to reduce truancy and any attendant anti-social behaviour. They also provide an opportunity to identify vulnerable pupils so that appropriate support can be provided. In North Yorkshire an emphasis is put on awareness raising and the provision of information to pupils and parents/carers which promotes regular attendance.

17.0 **Link to “Every Child Matters”**

17.1 Pupil attendance in North Yorkshire is high both by national standards and when compared with statistical neighbours (Appendix B). However the LA has set ambitious targets through the North Yorkshire Local Area Agreement to further improve attendance. The LA recognises that registered pupils who do not attend school regularly are a vulnerable group who are unlikely to attain well at school, unlikely to stay on in education post 16 and more likely to engage in self-harming activities and anti-social behaviour.

17.2 By focussing on this group of vulnerable young people the LA can make a significant impact across the range of Every Child Matters outcomes.

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