

COUNTY COUNCIL – 3 DECEMBER 2013

WRITTEN QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question by Councillor O’Keeffe to the Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness

The East Sussex Music Service has been rated as outstanding more than once and has a very good reputation for the inclusion of a high percentage of pupils and the very good results they achieve both in beginners music and more advanced studies. A popular and important part of the service offered to students has been the week long summer schools which happen at the end of the Summer Term, or Term 6, which offer the chance for students to really immerse themselves in the study of music, play with larger groups of students at a similar skill level to themselves etc. I have been told that these Music School courses are being counted as unauthorised absences by schools, leading to some parents being unwilling to send their children, and difficulties with schools which previously were happy to send their pupils to the courses. Please can you explain how this has arisen and how it can be rectified? It seems very strange for a valuable educational experience delivered by an organisation very strongly linked to the Education Authority to be classified as an unauthorised absence.

Answer by the Lead Member for Learning School Effectiveness

This query has arisen out of information provided to the East Sussex Music Service from parents who have been told that absences to attend the courses would not be authorised. Although it is an individual headteacher's responsibility to decide whether, or not, to authorise an absence, there is appropriate flexibility available in the legislation to take into account students attending off-site provision, such as music courses. If a school is prepared to accept that they are responsible for the safeguarding and well-being of the pupil off site, then a 'B code' can be marked in the register - an approved off-site activity, which is not an absence. If a headteacher is not prepared to take this responsibility, then a C code for an authorised absence would be appropriate. Of course, individual circumstances will be taken into account when making this decision and, should a child have a history of poor attendance, it may be appropriate for a headteacher not to authorise an absence for such a reason. However, we would not expect there to be any blanket rules in schools on not authorising absences for such approved activities. We will make sure that teachers across the music service are aware of the regulations, so that information can be conveyed to parents should these concerns arise again. Additionally, we will re-issue guidance to all schools in East Sussex of the circumstances in which absences can be authorised in the next Virtual School Bag item.

2. Question by Councillor St Pierre to the Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development

Following an article in the Independent newspaper dated 20 November 2013, would the Leader confirm:

- a) the extent of East Sussex County Council's investment in the tobacco industry, directly or through the pension fund schemes and the extent of profits which accrued to the County or the pension schemes
- b) the expenditure by ESCC on education and health promotions to deter adults and young people to give up smoking?
- c) the cost to the public health from illnesses caused by smoking?

Answer by the Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development

a) The East Sussex Pensions Fund has a Statement of Investment Principles which has been produced and adopted in line with the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2009. Within the investment objectives of this statement, the Pension Panel has considered the issues surrounding socially responsible investment and has adopted an 'Active Shareholder Approach' to encourage companies to adopt best ethical and environmental principles without jeopardising the investment performance of the Fund. Investment Fund managers have been encouraged to engage in constructive dialogue on behalf of the Fund and to use their influence to encourage companies to adopt best practice in all key areas of business which are corporate governance; employment standards; human rights and environmental standards.

The primary duty of the Investment Panel in its oversight of the Fund's investments is to seek the best returns it can for a given level of risk and it therefore needs to be recognised that in this there is a potential conflict between the fiduciary duty to seek best returns and any potential desire to exclude certain stocks, recognising that any exclusions, if the stocks outperform the market, result in a opportunity cost to the Fund.

The Pension Fund now have less active managers (therefore segregated holdings) - many of our investments are in pooled funds which means that it is not possible to give details of investments. Out of the East Sussex Pension Fund investment of £2.45billion, the only segregated holding in tobacco companies was valued at £5.05million, i.e., 2% of the total pension fund

b) As part of a comprehensive tobacco control programme for East Sussex the County Council currently invests around £1.4m in the provision of high quality Local Stop Smoking Services and tobacco control interventions to support adults and young people who wish to quit, and to prevent people from starting smoking. Interventions and services supported include:

- Stop smoking services in G.P.s, pharmacies and community settings
- Training to support people to refer to stop smoking services
- Proven approaches to reduce the prevalence of smoking, such as campaigns and marketing, to support awareness of the harms caused from smoking and the benefits of becoming Smokefree. This year the County Council promoted the national Smoke Free Homes campaign to reduce exposure to second hand smoke in the home, as well as encouraging people to stop smoking through campaigns such as 'Stoptober'.
- The ASSIST peer education programme in schools - tobacco education and promotion to deter young adults from smoking and to give up smoking if they have already started.

We are working through the recently formed East Sussex Tobacco Partnership to develop multi agency plans and responses to addressing tobacco use in East Sussex. An additional one-off resource of £380,000 has been allocated to partnership work to address tobacco use in East Sussex including: social marketing campaign targeting communities where illicit tobacco is thought to be prevalent, work to interrupt the supply chain for illegal/illicit tobacco, training to key community organisations and agencies, enhanced enforcement activity for test purchasing with retailers, timed appropriately within a campaign schedule.

As part of the transfer of responsibilities for public health to the local authority Public Health is reviewing all of our commissioned services over the next three years, including the support to adults and children and young people to improve their health and to stop smoking.

c) In East Sussex there are on average 1,000 smoking related deaths every single year:

- Eastbourne – 200 deaths
- Hastings – 190 deaths
- Lewes – 170 deaths
- Rother – 190 deaths
- Wealden – 250 deaths

(Health Profiles 2013)

The total cost to the NHS from smoking in East Sussex is estimated to be £27.2 million (ASH 2011)

<http://ash.org.uk/localtoolkit/R8-SE.html>

In East Sussex in 2010/11 there were 5,289 smoking attributable admissions to hospital which gives an age standardised rate of 1,247 admissions per 100,000 population. The estimated cost per capita of smoking attributable hospital admissions (2011) in East Sussex is therefore £38.6 per year (Tobacco Control Profiles East Sussex, 2013)

Further information on smoking in East Sussex can be found on the East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment website (JSNA):

<http://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/search.aspx?searchtext=smoking>