

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 12 December 2023

**By:** Assistant Chief Executive

**Title:** Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions - Report of the People Scrutiny Committee

**Purpose:** To provide an opportunity for the Cabinet to consider the report of the People Scrutiny Committee.

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**To consider any comments the Cabinet wishes to make to the County Council on the report of the People Scrutiny Committee.**

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### **1 Background**

1.1 In March 2023 the People Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Review Board to undertake a Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions in response to an increase in the number of school exclusions in recent years and the disproportionate numbers of vulnerable pupils who are subject to exclusion, including those in receipt of free school meals and those who have special educational needs (SEN).

1.2 The Review focussed on the Council's role in developing understanding amongst schools of appropriate responses to children at risk of permanent exclusion, including vulnerable pupils, as well as whole school approaches and targeted preventative measures.

### **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The People Scrutiny Committee has completed its Review of School Exclusions. A copy of the report is attached as appendix 1.

2.2 The Review considered a range of preventative strategies, including inclusive behaviour policies, a focus on whole school relational approaches and support at transition. The Review also identified appropriate responses to children who are at risk of exclusion, including those who are identified as vulnerable, including the use of youth voice and the effective use of alternative provision. The Review also explored how the Council could further develop its training and support to schools, trusts and governors, as well as its messaging on the need to reduce, and benefits of reducing, school exclusions and the support available.

2.3 The Board found that the Department was progressing a number of projects and initiatives to reduce permanent exclusions and concluded that there was a strong commitment from most schools and trusts to achieve this. However, the Board learned that schools were dealing with increasing demands and complexity of needs of children and their families post pandemic, including mental health and SEN. The Board was concerned that some schools were using part-time timetables to manage behaviour and concluded that clearer guidance and support was needed to help ensure appropriate use of these was consistent across all schools and trusts. The Board also found that strong engagement with, and support for, families could also benefit pupils at risk and reduce the likelihood of exclusion.

2.4 The Board recognised the limitations of this Review; the decision to exclude is a school one and academies are wholly outside of the remit of the local authority. However, the Board, through exploring a range of evidence, including conversations with witnesses and on-site school visits, found that the Department could work with schools and trusts to develop strategies to reduce the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions and the report makes a number of recommendations to help build on existing work in this area.

2.5 The Committee's report will be submitted to the County Council on 6 February 2024. The Cabinet has the opportunity to comment to the County Council on the recommendations in the Scrutiny Committee's report, although it cannot alter the report. Elsewhere on this Cabinet meeting agenda there is a separate report by the Director of Children's Services commenting on the Scrutiny Committee's report and recommendations.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 Cabinet is invited to consider any comments it wishes to make to the County Council on the report of the People Scrutiny Committee.

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