

**CITY OF WESTMINSTER  
CHILDREN, SPORTS AND LEISURE POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
24 NOVEMBER 2014  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Extract from

<http://committees.westminster.gov.uk/documents/g3733/Public%20reports%20pack%2026th-Jan-2015%2019.00%20Children%20Sport%20Leisure%20Policy%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

<http://edyourself.org/westminstercouncilnov2014.pdf>

## 7. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

7.1 The Committee received a report on Elective Home Education (EHE) which outlined the emerging issues and developments in the provision of services to support children in families who have elected to home educate.

7.2 The Chairman welcomed Alison Farmer, Tri-borough Assistant Director for Special Educational Needs and Liz Spearman, Tri Borough Head of ACE to give a general introduction to the report. They advised that Westminster City Council had adopted a revised EHE policy on 25 March 2014 whereby a Local Authority Home Education Adviser would, wherever possible, meet with all EHE families to discuss education provision and offer advice if necessary. The Committee noted that Local Authorities had a duty to ensure all children receive an education as well as safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

7.3 The Committee then welcomed Stephen Bishop (DfE) who gave a brief overview of the national context. Stephen advised that the subject of Elective Home Education had risen in priority for national government in the last year due to a number of local authorities approaching the department regarding serious case reviews and safeguarding issues.

7.4 The Committee also welcomed Rachel Graham (EHE parent) and Dr Leslie Barson (EHE parent and founder of the Otherwise Club) to the meeting. Rachel talked about being an EHE parent and the parent network and clubs available to home educated children. She emphasised how unhappy she was with the introduction of the new policy and that she did not want to be forced to meet with the Local Authority. She advised that local authorities had a variety of other systems which picked up children at risk and safeguarding issues.

7.5 Stephen, Rachel and Leslie all took part in the Committee's discussion.

7.6 Issues discussed by the Committee included:

- the flexibility, types of education and clubs available in Elective Home Education.
- the uncertainty around how many children are being home educated.
- the difference between children missing education and those in Elective Home Education.
- the impact that the revised policy and procedures of Westminster City Council have had on Elective Home Education parents.

- the duties of the Local Authority to ensure that all children receive an education.
- the duties of the Local Authority regarding the safeguarding of children.
- the tension between Westminster City Council and Elective Home Education parents regarding the annual visit to ensure that children were receiving an education.
- the council systems in place to identify children at risk and the possibility that some people were using Elective Home Education as an excuse not to send their children to school.
- the importance of on-going engagement with advocates, the Local Authority officers and Elective Home Education parents to improve understanding and communication.
- the Elective Home Education policy of other London boroughs.

7.7 The Chairman thanked everyone who had given up their time to attend the meeting and contribute to the discussion.

#### 7.8 RESOLVED:

1. The Committee expressed regret that the change of policy at Westminster City Council (i.e. that the Local Authority will, wherever possible, meet with Elective Home Education families to discuss education provision, and offer advice if necessary) had created tension between the Local Authority and the Elective Home Education parents, but felt that it was now important for everyone to start rebuilding relationships to achieve good communication and understanding in order to move forward and work together in the future.
2. The Committee further noted the comments of the Elective Home Education advocates in attendance at the meeting in relation to the possibility of the Local Authority offering more support to Elective Home Educators in term of offering access to subsidised sports and music classes, teacher training, access to the magazines published for parents in schools, and for forums to meet with officers to perhaps include coffee mornings, and supported these measures in addition to the implementation of the current policy.
3. The Committee were particularly concerned about the possible under reporting of children receiving Elective Home Education, children missing out on education, and the safeguarding and welfare of children (particularly those who the Local Authority are not aware of as being home educated), and were of the view that it would be helpful to Local Authorities if the Regulations could be updated to provide more clarity around how Local Authorities should undertake their duty to ensure that children are being educated in all cases of Elective Home Education.
4. That the Committee be kept informed on any progress which may be made on the updating of the relevant legislation and regulations.