

NOTICES OF MOTION – BRIEFING NOTE

Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Recommendation

that consideration be given to any recommendations to be made to the Council in respect of the Notice of Motion set out hereunder having regard to the relevant factual briefing/background papers and any other representations made to the Cabinet.

Introduction

The Notice of Motion submitted to the County Council by the Councillor shown below has been referred to the Cabinet in accordance with Standing Order 8(2) - for consideration, reference to another Committee or to make a recommendation back to the Council.

A factual 'Briefing Note/Position Statement' prepared by the relevant Director is included, to facilitate the Cabinet's discussion of the Notice of Motion.

(a) Flexibility and Action against holiday firms exploiting families, those working in schools and the holiday industry - Councillor Biederman

We must stop the exploitation by Holiday Firms on families and staff in our schools.

Devon County Council recognise the importance of children being at school for the maximum time possible in order for them to be able to thrive and succeed in life after school.

Central government policy, Ofsted and this Council adopt a strong stance against schools and parents, who wish to take children out of school for a family holiday in term time. A five day unauthorised absence can mean a fine of £240 for a family with two school aged children.

The main reason for parents taking children out of school, with the financial and life pressures facing families in these incredibly tough times, is the cost of holidays in the holiday seasons. Holiday firms are clearly exploiting them.

From research on four holidays for a family of four, two adults and two children aged 5-15 for summer 2024, checking dates of 12th July 2024 and 9th August in the same accommodation, the figures are staggering.

1. Butlins Minehead - £946 July & £2437 August, difference £1491

2. Centre Parcs Longleat- £1748 July & £2348 August, difference £600
3. Ruda Croyde - £649 July & £1039 August , difference £390
4. Cyprus Pathos All Inclusive - £4239 July & £5769 August, difference £1524

Research proves that a family holiday can be very important and have massive positive outcomes for both children and parents.

Research conducted by the Family Holiday Association, the charity that helps struggling families to have a break, found that 49% of British people said their happiest memory is being on holiday with their family. The results from the poll of 2,000 British adults revealed that emotional, psychological and social benefits of family holidays last long after the break itself ends.

On these positive outcomes, McDonald of the Family Holiday Association said 'We consider these to be a 'happiness anchor' – reflecting on our happiest memories of joyful time spent together as a family can be extremely powerful in bringing relief and respite when faced with the darker times that life can bring. "By using these memories as an anchor to take us back to more cheerful moments, we're often able to approach problems with a fresh sense of perspective.

"But for many without such memories, reigniting a sense of optimism for getting through the tougher times can seem like an impossible.

It also found children that have had the benefit of a holiday break are often inspired and learn better after a holiday.

It's not just children that suffer, many vital support staff in our schools are on low incomes and have no choice but to take holidays in the School Holidays and so the way holiday companies are exploiting the prices, affects them too.

Devon County Council will

- (a) Write to Head Teachers, Academies in Devon Schools to urge them to be sympathetic to requests for holiday in term time, giving consideration to individual children's family circumstances, their previous attendance levels, and the importance of the school year that the child is in.
- (b) Write to Ofsted seeking their assurance that schools taking a more flexible approach to school absences for family holidays is not counted against them.
- (c) Write to the Local Government Association and appropriate government ministers to ask for a review of what holiday companies can charge. Butlins for example have increased their price by roughly x 2.5 the price of one month earlier.

The level at which holiday companies are increasing prices of course, means parents are willing to take the fine, as in all my examples, it's far less than the extra cost of taking the holiday in the school holidays perhaps it's the Holiday firms that should be fined if they charge more than 20% extra on any holiday over their average price over the year.

Briefing Note / Position Statement from the Deputy Director & Head of Education and the Interim Director of Performance & Partnerships

It is a legal requirement under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 that parents of children of compulsory school age ensure that their children receive full-time education that is suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs that they may have.

Attending school regularly is crucial - it positively impacts a child's academic attainment, safety, development and wellbeing. Children who are not attending school regularly miss out on chances to learn, to socialise, and to play an active part in their school community.

Government guidance advises that schools should not authorise requests for term time absence unless the school has received suitable evidence of exceptional circumstances. The Government does not consider a family holiday to be an exceptional circumstance.

At its meeting on 13 December 2023, the Cabinet approved the School Penalty Notice Code of Conduct for unauthorised irregular attendance at school or exclusion from school ([report CS2322 refers](#)). All schools have a legal obligation to inform Devon County Council of any child not attending regularly. The Code of Conduct, together with links to the associated policies and processes are set out [here](#)¹.

Since the pandemic there has been a marked change in both the way term time holidays are viewed by many parents and carers, and scale at which they are being taken. The cost differential makes that option difficult to ignore and term-time holidays allow some families to take holidays they would not otherwise be able to afford.

This Report has no specific equality, environmental, legal, or public health implications that will not be assessed and appropriate safeguards and/or actions taken or included within the detailed policies or practices or requirements in relation to the matters referred to herein.

MARIA PRICE

[Electoral Divisions: All]

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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<u>Background Paper</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>File Reference</u>
NIL		

¹ <https://www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/school-information/school-attendance/>