Children, Young People and Education (CYPE)

PRU, Inclusion & Attendance Service (PIAS)

Targeting Support Meetings (TSMs)

Terms of Reference

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1. Targeting Support Meeting (TSM) - Core purpose
The Department for Education's *Working together to improve school attendance* guidance published in May 2022 placed a new expectation on all local authorities in England (paragraphs 73 and 74) to organise termly conversations with each school in their area from September 2022. The rationale from the Department for Education (DfE) behind these termly meetings, formally known as 'Targeting Support Meetings' (TSMs) is to move towards earlier identification and support for pupils with poor attendance. For Kent's local authority school attendance support team (known as PIAS) this means a focus on:

✓ *Building strong relationships and working collaboratively with the school's attendance leads to identify, discuss, and agree joint targeted actions for pupils who are persistently or severely absent or those at risk of becoming so.*
✓ *Agreeing what support the local authority will provide and which (if any) other statutory or voluntary services should become involved.*
✓ *Identifying areas to focus on in school policies or approaches to attendance (if schools request this and time allows).*
✓ *Helping schools to analyse their data, comparing themselves to other schools in the geographical area or considering how they may learn from or work with other schools who have faced similar patterns or trends (if schools request this and time allows).*

2. Statutory requirement for TSMs
At the time of publication of this document there is no given timescale when the DfE's *Working together to improve school attendance* guidance will become statutory. The TSM process is therefore only an expectation, but Kent County Council fully recognises the benefits of treating the guidance though it were already statutory as improving school attendance is a continued and significant priority in Kent.

3. Membership of TSMs
To ensure TSMs are as effective as possible, the DfE prescribes the following representatives as essential to participate in the whole process:

✓ **Local authority:** The PIAS Officer linked to the school. There are occasions where there may be more than one local authority representative present at a TSM. PIAS will always notify the school in advance and request permission.
✓ **School:** The attendance lead (most likely the senior leader who has strategic responsibility for attendance at the school, such as the Headteacher, Deputy Head or Assistant Head).

Additional representatives may include (at some or all TSMs):

✓ **School:** A member of staff responsible for day-to-day duties around attendance, such as an Attendance Officer, Family Liaison Officer, Pastoral Manager, Office Manager etc. There is no limit to how many school staff attend and will be decision of the individual school.
✓ **Governing board:** A member of the governing board (or trustee in the case of an academy) who has a lead responsibility for school attendance may wish to attend a TSM to contribute to the discussions in line with the DfE's expectations for governing boards/academy trustees.
✓ **Traded services:** For schools who buy in services from an external company to monitor and improve attendance may wish to involve the representative in a TSM.

✓ **Multi-agency partners:** PIAS is exploring facilitating TSMs alongside Early Help staff for schools which have priority need to provide additional support. On occasion, partners from multi-agency services may attend TSMs following greater emphasis in DfE guidance around a multi-agency approach to improving attendance. PIAS will always seek permission from schools in advance.

Contact details for each PIAS Officer and the school to which they are linked with can be found on the Kelsi website here. Please note that whilst occasionally referrals may be allocated to other PIAS Officers to help manage caseloads, the link PIAS Officer will remain the same.

4. Arranging a TSM
It is advised that a date for a TSM in the following term is arranged at the end of each meeting to try to secure availability of all participants in advance.

5. Leading TSMs
The DfE expects the local authority representative to lead the meetings, i.e., the link PIAS Officer for the school. However, the structure of the meeting and conversations held should be based on what topics the school feels need to be addressed rather than what the PIAS Officer may feel needs to be the focus, which may vary from TSM to TSM. The DfE views the school and PIAS as equal partners in the process.

6. TSM frequency
The DfE expects local authorities to organise TSMs on a termly basis with each school in their area (paragraph 73 of the Working together to improve school attendance guidance). Therefore, each PIAS Officer will facilitate a TSM with their allocated schools each term (Autumn, Spring and Summer). TSMs will be limited to a maximum of **three per academic year,** per school.

7. TSM venue
TSMs may be held on site in a school, however it may be more effective for them to be held virtually, for example on Microsoft Teams. Decisions on face to face or virtual TSMs will be made between the school and link PIAS Officer.

8. TSM duration
This will be determined on an individual basis between the school and link PIAS Officer. The DfE is clear that TSM should not be an exhaustive discussion about every pupil on the school roll and should not have a negative impact on the resources of both the school and local authority in terms of preparation and the TSM itself. Schools may wish to briefly notify their link PIAS Officer in advance of any key themes they would like to discuss, and an estimation of how many pupils they have who are persistently or severely absent to enable the PIAS Officer to prepare. Reports which identify individual names, such as lists, must not be sent (please see section 12 - *Data sharing at TSMs*).

9. TSM parameters
The DfE states that termly conversations are not designed to be:

✕ A discussion about the attendance of **every pupil on the school roll**, cases where joint action is not needed because school or local authority support is already in place for those

pupils, or cases of individual pupils are already being discussed at other multi-agency meetings.

- ✗ The **local authority taking responsibility for leading all cases** discussed or acting as lead practitioner in every case.
- ✗ An **inspection or audit** of the register and use of attendance codes (unless linked to statutory or fixed penalty notice cases).
- ✗ The **only conversation** between the school's attendance leads and PIAS.
- ✗ A reason for lots of **preparation** by school and/or PIAS, or cause of additional data recording.
- ✗ A **one size fits all** process for every school in terms of participants from school, duration of the TSM and the conversations which take place.

TSMs should not result in a surge of referrals directly to PIAS. The DfE guidance is clear that the process is about working together and therefore PIAS will never view TSMs as any kind of inspection or audit of the school to report back to the wider local authority.

10. TSM preparation and structure

The format of the termly conversations will be dependent on a school-by-school basis, and it may be helpful for schools and their link PIAS Officer to briefly plan the content of the meeting in advance. It is good practice for schools to run any relevant reports with overall whole school data, cohort specific data (persistent absence and severe absence as well as groups of pupils such as those with SEND, medical needs etc) and names of individual pupils to discuss ready for the meeting.

The DfE recommends the following meeting structure as a broad guide to ensure it is focussed, with the allocated time prioritised in a way that benefits both school and PIAS. There is further information in the DfE fact sheet embedded below. Some ideas from PIAS are also included:

- ✓ Review of actions from any previous TSM (where applicable).
- ✓ Discussion of overall trends in the school's data and any emerging patterns or issues to identify support require at an early stage.
- ✓ Agreeing joint approaches for all severely absent (SA) pupils and examining the overall position for SA pupil and trends for the reasons for absence within this group.
- ✓ Agreeing joint actions for persistently absent (PA) pupils where they have barriers to attendance that require a multi-agency response to overcome them and looking at the overall position for PA pupils, trends for reasons for absence and identifying cases where support may be needed from the local authority or other partners.
- ✓ Summarising any key actions moving forward.

11. Recording TSMs

The DfE has not published a formal document to record termly conversations between the local authority and schools, and there is no duty to record them. PIAS has created a [Termly conversation form] although there is no duty on schools or PIAS officers to use it and schools may wish to use their own recording system to provide evidence of interventions to improve attendance. The Termly conversation form intentionally does not include any sections for the recording and identification of the names of individual pupils and PIAS recommends that schools record any actions agreed in relation to individual pupils using their own internal systems. PIAS Officers will request a copy of the termly conversation form to store on its local database to be able to evidence a visit has taken place.

12. Data sharing at TSMs
There are various references in the [Working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance about the sharing of data, and this may take two forms in TSMs; overall cohorts and individual pupils. Schools reserve the right not to share any information about pupils or their families which is highly confidential and does not require PIAS intervention. Although TSMs may involve discussing individual pupils, PIAS will not request or take any lists of individual pupils away from the school. Schools are advised to not send lists of pupils to their link PIAS Officer in advance of their scheduled TSM.

13. Cancellation of a TSM
Schools should inform their link PIAS Officer as soon as possible in advance of the TSM if the meeting will be cancelled. Due to the high number of TSMs that PIAS Officers are required to facilitate, it may not be possible to reschedule the TSM for the same term in which it was originally due to take place, however PIAS Officers will always try to accommodate the needs of the school where possible.

14. Costs for TSMs
There are no associated costs to schools for support offered by PIAS at TSMs as they make up one of the four core functions which local authorities are expected to provide to all schools regardless of type (paragraph 73 of [Working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance).

15. Evaluation of TSMs
To continuously improve the quality of TSMs, the PIAS team has created an [TSM feedback form](#) which schools are asked to complete following each TSM. Completion of the form is voluntary.

16. Related TSM guidance
Information about TSMs can be found in the Department for Education's [Working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance in paragraphs 40, 46, 67, 72, 73-75, and 79.The supporting [Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance](#) guidance refers to holding 'termly conversations' on page 5 as an expectation for local authorities.

PIAS has created a frequently asked questions document for schools which provides guidance around the TSM process:

PIAS FAQ
TARGETING SUPPOR

The Department for Education published a fact sheet about TSMs in April 2023:

DfE fact sheet -
TSM.pdf

The Department for Education produced a webinar in June 2022 titled *['Holding Effective Targeting Support meetings](#)* which provides examples of effective practice between local authorities and schools.