

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING	Children & Young People Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
DATE:	30 th January 2018	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Virtual School: Key successes, challenges and future planning to support our Children in Care and Post Care children	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
<p>List of attachments to this report:</p> <p>Appendix 1: Virtual School Annual Report 2016-2017</p> <p>Appendix 2: Virtual School Improvement Plan 2017-2018</p> <p>Appendix 3: Pupil Premium Policy and Moderation guidance 2017-2018</p>		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1** The report is an update on the work of the Virtual School to support our Children in Care and the challenge of fulfilling the new statutory duties for local authorities arising of the Children and Social Care Act 2017, to be issued March 2018. It highlights key achievements, areas for development and challenges as shared at the Corporate Parenting Panel in December 2017. The Annual Report, School Improvement Plan and Pupil Premium Policy are attached as Appendices and provide more detailed information.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1** To note how the Virtual School are responding to the current challenge, including recommendations from the Children's Services OFSTED Inspection.
- 2.2** The Headteacher of the Virtual School brings another report to the panel outlining the increased burdens arising from the Children and Social Care Act 2017 once the statutory guidance is published at the end of March 2018.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

3.1 The new Children and Social Care act 2017 places further duties on the Virtual School and this may require additional funding because there is currently no government grant funding to meet these new responsibilities.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

4.1 The statutory guidance, "Promoting the education of looked after and post looked after children 2018," will be finalised in March 2018, following the Children and Social Care Act, 2017. The draft version stipulates that, "Headteachers of Virtual Schools have a key role to ensure looked after children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential, an important part of why this role was made statutory." The current 2014 statutory guidance already stipulates that local authorities must ensure that, "Headteachers of the Virtual School are in place and that they have the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively".

5 THE REPORT

5.1 The Virtual School

The Virtual School has been rebranded as the, "Prepare 4 Success (P4S) Virtual School," and an identifier designed after a competition for primary age Children in Care. The name not only distinguishes B&NES Virtual School but constantly reminds all stakeholders of the importance in supporting this vulnerable group of Children in Care so that they have successful and rewarding futures.

5.2 Local and national policy changes that impact on Children in Care

This has, and continues to be, a period of significant change and challenge, both within the authority and nationally. Positive movement includes OFSTED's focus on advocating for Children in Care to support closing the attainment gap and its recognition of the increased difficulties for these children due to the impact of previous trauma before and possibly during going into care. Additional challenge comes firstly in the form of a new, more demanding and content heavy National Curriculum, Primary SAT tests and GCSEs which disadvantages Children in Care who often experience large amounts of absence before care and therefore gaps in learning. They often have a number of care and/or school moves which increases the difficulties in catching up. Many Children in Care also have complex EHCPs, which can result in longer time in securing the provision that meets their specific needs. Increased academisation, greater school autonomy alongside more demanding curriculum and exams has also led to a rise in exclusions of Children in Care. These challenges requires the local authority, as Corporate Parent to be more robust in holding schools to account for the achievement of children in care so that they become active citizens of society.

5.2 Cohort information

The number of looked after children continues to increase nationally; it has increased steadily over the last nine years but with a more rapid increase in 2017. This authority has had the most significant increase in the South West, with an increase of 4 children in care per 10,000 children under 18 years old in the last 2 years. This compares with no rise in the South West and 2 per 10,000 children under 18 years old in the South West. There are slightly more males than females and there continues to be a largely white British majority, both locally and nationally. The arrival of unaccompanied asylum seekers in B&NES, bringing the total number of children in care to 14 in education but they are more likely to be educated out of authority. Half the children in care are educated outside this authority and are in schools as far as Liverpool, Wales, Essex and Truro. Around a third of the children in care have special educational needs. The Virtual School now works with over 90 educational providers across the UK, an increase of more than 10 from the year before, with 85% of these being judged, "Good" or "Outstanding" by OFSTED.

DfE Performance Information on eligible Children in Care is provided at the end of March each year. A child must have been in consistent care for a year from the April before to be part of this data. The data provided by the DfE is inconsistent from one year to another, with attendance and performance data produced for 2016 and no exclusion data provided since 2015.

5.3 The 2017 Outcomes for Children in Care

Local 2017 data shows that at Key Stage 1 children achieved well, particularly in reading and writing. Key Stage 2 is an area for development along with continued focus on Key Stage 4 due to a slight rise in the gap between Children in Care and non- care pupils within the authority in these school phases. However, Key Stage 4 students also achieved around 4% higher in English and maths when comparing the new Grade 4 Key against the old C pass. It is important to note that numbers counting in the eligible cohort for the data are very small. Currently there is no available data providing national or regional children in care outcomes for 2017.

5.5 Attendance

Absence for CiC was 0.7 % lower than the national figure. Persistent absence was identified in 2015 as being 2.8% higher than national Children in Care figures. However there was no validated data provided by the DfE for 2016. It is important to note that the DfE now defines persistent absence (PA) as less than 90% attendance which provides a challenge for local authorities as large numbers of Children in Care have complex EHCPs and statutory SEND consultation times have to be administered. These highly complex placements also tend to break down more often than others and finding a new provision is very difficult. There are a number of these students in the current year 10 cohort.

5.6 Exclusion rates for Children in Care in B&NES

Fixed Term Exclusions for Children in Care rose by over 6% which was the second highest in the South West in 2015. 16.67 of the Children in Care had 1 or more exclusion. The 2016 data is not received until March 2018. The rise in the percentage of fixed term exclusion was identified by OFSTED recommendation *“No children looked after have been permanently excluded from school in the past two years, but the level of fixed-term exclusions has risen and is now high, at 14%. No action plan is currently in place to reduce fixed-term exclusions”*.

5.7 Grant Funding

Central government provides grant funding in the form of Pupil Premium Plus to the Virtual School to improve educational outcomes for Children in Care. The Virtual School receives £1900 per child aged to meet their needs. Some of the funding is used to commission a range of support services to meet the specific needs of Children in Care. This includes an educational psychologist, Welfare Call to support attendance and exclusion tracking, students waiting for school provision, top up for high needs students, statutory training for schools and the Letterbox Scheme for all primary and some secondary students. In order to ensure that the most effective use of pupil premium plus for each individual, a new Pupil Premium Plus Policy has been created and shared with schools based on national research by the Education Endowment Foundation and local analysis. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are rigorously moderated and feedback provided to schools to ensure they meet quality expectations and the needs of the child. It is important to note that every child is different and individual needs will always be discussed at PEP meetings. All decisions are made through the PEP moderation process by the Virtual School. This is set out in Appendix 3. In addition the Virtual School benefits from a contribution from the Joint Agency Panel to support the increasing number of pupils with more complex educational needs. The contribution of £35,000 for the 2017/2018 financial year had already been committed to meet specific individual needs of Children in Care by April 2017.

5.8 The School Improvement Plan 2017- 2018

(Appendix 2) focuses on 4 main areas based on the new statutory guidance arising from the Children and Social Care Act 2017, OFSTED recommendations, rigorous self -evaluation and local authority priorities for Children in Care. The key areas are: -

1. Improved outcomes for Children in Care in Key Stage 2 and 4 and increasing proportions of Children in Care aged 16-18 engaged in education, employment or training.
2. Developing teaching & learning experiences with a focus on Key Stage 2 and 4 (and Post Care children from March 2018)
3. Enhancing personal development, behaviour & welfare through collaboration with national attachment awareness organisations and increased accountability on schools to reduce Fixed Term Exclusions

4. Developing the effectiveness of leadership & management at all levels in the Virtual School and partnership teams and within schools to raise capacity.

5.9 Since April 2017, there has been a far greater emphasis on holding schools accountable in providing a quality, balanced curriculum that meets the need of each Child in Care, including early academic and pastoral intervention and ensuring policies do not discriminate against this cohort and support inclusion. A training plan to increase knowledge and understanding of the importance of education for this group of children and how to challenge schools has been created and delivered to all relevant social care and commissioning teams. Statutory training for all schools has been provided at no cost to schools to ensure there is a clear understanding and ability to act on the new statutory guidance on exclusions,(September 2017) which promotes early intervention to avoid Children in Care being excluded. The guidance identified that “The Equality Act allows schools to take positive action to deal with particular disadvantages, needs, or low participation” and the Virtual School is working in collaboration with Kate Cairns Associates and ARC on Attachment Awareness to support schools with this. Rigorous Progress Reviews have been implemented for Key Stage 2 and 4 which involve the Virtual School Headteacher completing work scrutiny in core subjects at each school, speaking to the child about their progress and support needed, analysing performance data and challenging the Senior Leadership Designated Teacher on findings to agree next steps. Any risk of Fixed Term Exclusions must be reported to the virtual school to build greater collaboration but also challenge.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The Virtual School needs to respond to the higher numbers of Children in Care in education and the rise in number presenting with very complex needs. The local authority will also need to consider how the Virtual School addresses the additional statutory duties arising from the Children and Social Care Act 2017.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 none

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Individual Children in Care are spoken with by the virtual school and by social workers, who work in partnership with each other. The In Care Council have raised the need for more meaningful Information and Guidance for a number of years and this is part of the School Improvement Plan. Difficulties and areas for support for schools and carers are also part of planning. The Corporate Parenting Panel and Quarterly Performance Group Groups are also key.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	<i>Corporate Parent Panel Presentation</i> <i>Quarterly reports for the Performance Group</i> <i>SRF validated results-not available until end of March 2018</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	

(Separate Documents)

Appendix 1: Virtual School Annual Review

Appendix 2: Virtual School Improvement Plan

Appendix 3: Pupil Premium Plus Policy 2017-2018

