

**Report of Virtual School Head**

**Report to Director of Children and Families**

**Date: December 2019**

**Subject: New to Care Personal Education Plan Co-ordinators**



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary**

**1. Main issues**

- During two inspections of the local authority, the quality and consistency of personal education plans (PEPs) and the benchmarking of children’s progress from their entry to care have been noted as areas for improvement. As Leeds seeks to safely reduce the number of children needing to be looked after there is an increasing range of interventions to support children either safely return to the care of their parents, live with extended family members in kinship care arrangements, leave care through permanence (adoption, special guardianship, child arrangement orders) or access a short-term residential service.

**2. Best Council Plan Implications** (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- These plans entirely support our Child Friendly ambitions and the Three A’s Strategy to put learning at the heart of our services.

**3. Resource Implications**

- These posts will be funded using Pupil Premium Plus in order to provide a service to as many children as possible who experience care, regardless of their ultimate care plan.

## **Recommendations**

- a) To agree to creation of three, temporary for two years, “New to Care PEP Co-ordinators” to the structure of the Virtual School to be managed by Virtual School Education Consultants and at the job evaluated score of grade PO3.
- b) To agree to fund the costs of the posts from the retained Pupil Premium Plus to fund up to three posts for a maximum of a 2 year pilot.

### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To set out how the use of Pupil Premium Plus to create three “New to Care PEP Co-ordinators” will improve learning outcomes for children in care and improve the quality of personal education planning by working more closely with schools and services at the point children become looked after, supporting improved transitions when it is not possible to maintain a school place and ensure that regardless of the ultimate outcome of their care plan, children can be better supported in all aspects of their learning, fulfilling corporate parenting duties and realising improvements in the attendance, attainment and achievement of vulnerable learners.

### **2. Background information**

- 2.1 The role of the Virtual School Head has been statutory since 2014. During that time, outcomes for Leeds looked after learners have improved and outcomes at GCSE in 2018 meant that Leeds was in the top quartile in terms of attainment and progress, demonstrating that working in partnership, the Virtual School is having a positive impact on outcomes.
- 2.2 This is in the context of Ofsted identifying that the quality and consistency of PEPs was an area for development and that there was not sufficiently robust benchmarking of children at the point they became looked after and from that point forward.
- 2.3 Using the retained Pupil Premium Plus grant, it is proposed that improving the quality of the very first PEP when a child becomes looked after will not only address the quality of PEPs overall, but contribute to accelerated progress in learning for children regardless of their ultimate care journey (kinship, return to family, foster care etc).
- 2.4 It is well known that educational outcomes for children that could be deemed to be ‘on the edge of care’ or ‘child in need’ are poorer than for children who do become looked after. The review of residential care services provides an opportunity within the context of the ‘short-term’, 28 day provision to help children return to their families with a robust plan that enables the family to ensure education serves as a protective factor, helping to reduce the need for children to become looked after and having a measurable impact on educational outcomes for the ‘edge of care’ cohort.

### **3. Main issues**

- 3.1 The Virtual School Head (VSH) performs the statutory duty on behalf of the local authority in regard to promoting the education of children looked after and part of this duty includes the management of the Pupil Premium Plus grant which is made available to support the improvement of learning outcomes for children looked after. Each looked after child attracts a total of £2300 to the Virtual School, of which £1900 per child is allocated to the school they attend, subject to their sharing of attendance,

attainment and achievement data. £400 per child is retained by the Virtual School for targeted support/interventions such as 1-1 tuition, delivering training in attachment/loss/trauma, work within clusters, securing capacity around Youth Justice, inclusion and post-16 transition and additional funding where schools can demonstrate the child's needs warrant additional grant.

- 3.2 The development of “New to Care PEP Co-ordinators” using Pupil Premium Plus provides an opportunity for the Virtual School to address all these priorities, impacting on the attendance, attainment and achievement of children in care. Co-locating the posts with the area/child protection/RES teams and directly supporting the short-term residential intervention will have the added benefit/impact of increasing the knowledge and skills around how learning and education can better be captured and placed at the heart of planning for children who might be deemed to be on ‘the edge of care’.
- 3.3 The posts will support learning pathways for children who will return to birth families, move to kinship placements, be placed for adoption or other kinds of permanence and those who will remain in long term foster care and including the development of the “Breathing Space” residential provision in the city.

#### **4. Corporate considerations**

##### **4.1 Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1.1 The Have a Voice Council have been consulted about how they engage with PEPs and have given clear advice they would like a range of ways they will be offered to do so. These new posts will ensure the voice of the young person is captured as part of their plans and in their preferred way of doing so.
- 4.1.2 Advice has been sought from trade union representatives who have not raised any concerns as to the creation of the posts.

##### **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

- 4.2.1 This plan will enhance the ability of the Virtual School to work directly with schools and services at the point at which children become looked after and to support the prioritisation of their attendance, attainment and achievement in care planning to secure the best possible learning outcomes and helping to reduce the gaps that children often have as a result of the neglect they have experienced prior to their entry to our care.
- 4.2.2 Where children return to the care of their family or move on to be placed for adoption, their plans will ensure that their needs are clearly understood and that parents and carers can access the support they need to ensure children are attending, attaining and achieving at every stage of their learning journey.

##### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 These plans entirely support our Child Friendly ambitions and the Three A’s Strategy to put learning at the heart of our services.

##### Climate Emergency

- 4.3.2 There are no implications.

#### **4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money**

- 4.4.1 The posts will contribute to increasing the knowledge and expertise of early help services, residential staff, adoption support workers and social workers which will have a greater impact beyond that of the children and young people on their direct caseload, building sustainability and contributing to an uplift in the quality of a range of different plans to better describe how they can be turned to improving educational outcomes for vulnerable children.
- 4.4.2 In the early stages of care proceedings, social workers will be supported by an expert in education and learning to develop the best quality plans whilst schools will benefit from ensuring that decisions such as changing school are fully informed by experts in education, supporting successful planning for transition and ensuring key information follows children.

#### **4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in**

- 4.5.1 There are no legal implications and the decision is a Significant Operational Decision and is not subject to call-in.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

- 4.6.1 As with any aspect of staffing budget, a spending review or changes to legislative framework in regard of local authority/schools' funding could impact on the posts during the two year pilot.
- 4.6.2 Leeds will move into a new Ofsted inspection window in 2021 and must be able to demonstrate the impact on the quality and consistency of PEPs and the ability to demonstrate the impact of services once children become looked after.

### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 Children who experience care have poorer educational outcomes than their peers. Ensuring the PEPs of children who are new to care of the highest quality, informed by a holistic view of the child in their learning at whatever age and stage they are at, is a priority for Leeds not only because Ofsted identified this as an area for development but because we are ambitious for the children and young people who need, for whatever period of time, to come into our care.
- 5.2 Whether they are placed for adoption, return to their birth parents or remain with a foster family, the New to Care PEP Co-ordinators will enable those children to achieve their potential, galvanising the support available to help them attend, attain and achieve and ensure the attainment gap between them and their non-looked after peers is diminished.

### **6. Recommendations**

- a) To agree to creation of three, temporary for two years, "New to Care PEP Co-ordinators" to the structure of the Virtual School to be managed by Virtual School Education Consultants and at the job evaluated score of grade PO3.

- b) To agree to fund the costs of the posts from the retained Pupil Premium Plus to fund up to three posts for a maximum of a 2 year pilot.

## **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.