

Accepting the Additional DfE Funding to Extend the Role of the Virtual School Head to Promote the Education of Children with a Social Worker

Date: July 2021

Report of: Head of the Virtual School

Report to: Director of Children & Families

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- In June 2019, the DfE published their findings from a review into the educational experiences of children in need of help and protection: [Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review](#)
- As a key recommendation of the review, the department committed to explore whether there is a case for extending and adapting the Virtual School Head role to include children with a social worker to secure better educational outcomes.
- The DfE departmental leads for children in need have worked closely with the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to explore this recommendation in detail and how it could be delivered including how this additionality could be resourced.
- On June 9th the DfE publicly announced their decision to fund Virtual School Heads to deliver to this programme of work over the course of the remaining financial year. This report sets out Leeds' intention to commit to completing the memorandum of understanding (MoU) to release the funding and how this funding will be used.
- Leeds is ambitious to become the [best council and the best city](#) and that includes being a child friendly city that puts children at the heart of its economic growth strategy. Our [Children and Young People's Plan](#) commits us to place a disproportionate focus on learning to narrow the gap in educational outcomes and ensure that children more vulnerable to poor outcomes can realise their potential.
- This work also sits well within our approach to reducing poverty and tackling inequality by supporting the 'readiness for school-aged education' workstream within the [Thriving: The Child Poverty Strategy for Leeds](#).
- Building on the success of the Virtual School in Leeds in improving outcomes for looked after learners, this additional resource will enable a greater focus on children before they become looked after, supporting all aspects of our C+YP Plan and other significant workstreams including the Special Educational Needs and Disability Inclusion Strategy and work to shape our provision and services using trauma responsive approaches.
- In tandem with this additional grant, the DfE is also making available to local authorities additional funding and resources through the What Works in Children's Social Care

programme and this role will facilitate Leeds' engagement with the range of interventions that are being made available to support the growing evidence base for what is effective in improving outcomes for children with a social worker.

Recommendations

- 1 The director of children & families is asked to:
 - a. sign and return the memorandum of understanding (MoU) to the DfE before 31st July, enabling Leeds to secure the additional funding for this role extension.
 - b. approve the creation of and recruitment on a fixed-term/temporary basis subject to the provision of the additional grant to a Virtual School Education Adviser - Children in Need to discharge the functions as set out in the guidance.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 2 The outcome of the Child in Need review set out 4 areas where the DfE committed to take action to improve the educational outcomes of children who have needed a social worker:
 - a) to increase visibility and recognition of children in education
 - b) to keep children in education, so that they benefit from the safety and security that this can offer
 - c) to raise aspiration for children to realise their potential
 - d) to ensure that children receive effective, evidence-based support in and around school
- 3 Some communities of the city are amongst the most deprived in the country, for example in the high need 'clusters' (locality partnerships of schools and services) of Inner East and JESS (inner South) where care entry rates are well over twice the national average (158 and 163 per ten thousand respectively) and on average, two pupils in every school class are open cases for social work. Recognising both the strengths we have as a city and the challenges presented by size and scale, increased capacity to support improved outcomes for this group of children is welcome and can enhance existing provision.
- 4 These recommendations support the integration/delivery of this new function with restorative approaches, the Leeds Practice Model, Think Family and the SEND Inclusion strategy to make best use of this additional capacity to the city to make a difference for these children and their families.
- 5 This additional capacity can also support the What Works in Children's Social Care programme in Leeds, building research and evidence and supporting work with the local learning community to develop the 'Three As Strategy' (the Three As – Attend, Achieve and Attain) which aims to help every child reach their potential through even stronger partnerships between schools, social workers and wider partners.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 6 This proposal will enable the Virtual School to work with partners and services to promote the education of children with a social worker by raising the profile of this cohort, building on

successful approaches and practices that have realised benefits for looked after children and to contribute to the What Works in Children’s Social Care programme. Around 80% of the current cohort of looked after learners were previously CiN, enabling an earlier focus on learning and educational outcomes and emphasis on the protective factor of education in planning for children with a social worker.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 7 The DfE have worked closely with NAVSH and the ADCS, representing a diverse group of local authorities in different contexts to develop this project and the work is premised on both the CiN review and research that engaged with children, young people and their families across the country and so reflects the voice of those who may stand to benefit from the provision being made.
- 8 Within the delivery of the work going forward, a priority workstream will be the voice and influence of children, young people and their families e.g. the “Super Power Up” group will be key (for children with a child protection plan) and the use of young people’s views from key data sets such as My Health, My School survey.

What are the resource implications?

- 9 The funding is being made available to each Virtual School Head in each English local authority and is set out in the grant determination letter. A base funding element of £100k is being provided with an additional ‘top-up’ based on the number of schools and settings within each local authority: Leeds is being allocated £136,172 in total to be spent before 31st March 2022 and to be allocated in three payments in September 2021, December 2021 and March 2022.
- 10 The expectation from the DfE is this grant is expressly used by the Virtual School Head to add the capacity required to extend their role as set out in the MoU.
- 11 There will be management and other indirect resources such as training and development for social workers, social work team manager/SDM leadership and management time, Designated Safeguarding Leads etc.

What are the legal implications?

- 12 In supporting the Virtual School Head in Leeds to deliver this function, the local authority will be contributing to research into whether it should become statutory and if funding should follow.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 13 The key risks are the short timescales given to implement the delivery of the programme, making appropriate expenditure within the parameters set by the DfE and securing the recruitment of a suitable candidate and wider services and partnerships to deliver the key roles and functions.

Does this proposal support the council’s three Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

- 14 This proposal is entirely aligned with our values and ambitions as a city: securing the best possible outcomes in education for this group of children is going to be essential to promote

recovery from the pandemic and ensure the lasting impact does not prevent young people from progressing into secure education and training pathways in adulthood.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

- 15 This additional grant funding is directly from the DfE and so each local authority and Virtual School Head must operate within the parameters set out by the DfE in what is in scope for delivery and what is not.
- 16 Whilst some aspects of delivery are already significant priorities within the city, the additional funding will secure capacity and provision not currently available to the Virtual School, the wider Learning Inclusion service or children's social care.

How will success be measured?

- 17 The DfE anticipate a range of qualitative measures of success and that whilst direct impact on measures such as attainment and progress may not be realistic for the duration of the project, emerging best practice will identify those approaches with greatest potential impact on quantitative measures.
- 18 Evaluation of impact will consider the extent to which:
 - a) schools and social workers will build stronger relationships, sharing high expectations for CiN
 - b) CiN will benefit from the safety and security of their school/setting
 - c) CiN will have their learning needs better identified, understood and met in the plans that school and social care develop with them and their families
 - d) CiN will have improved well-being from their experiences within school and social care
 - e) CiN will experience better attendance, fewer instances of exclusion and make better progress
 - f) improved attendance and engagement for this group impacts positively on promoting positive relationships with peers and adults
 - g) social workers feel confident to champion and advocate for the education of CiN with schools and families
 - h) teachers understand the context of safeguarding, abuse and neglect and its impact on accessing the curriculum, attending, attaining and achieving
- 19 The project is a model of active research and evaluation will also include exploration of:
 - a) what conditions ensure the role is effective – within Virtual Schools, the LA, wider
 - b) strengths/challenges in delivery
 - c) what foundation/preparation work was necessary to make the role effective
 - d) whether the funding was adequate and how its most effectively used
 - e) whether the role/function should become statutory
 - f) how well the supporting guidance enabled delivery and impact
 - g) how VSH build communication/relationships with education leaders, setting high aspirations and delivering advice/support
 - h) how the VSH identifies the needs of the cohort and barriers to their progress e.g. well-being, attendance, identified SEND and SEMH need
 - i) how data is used

What is the timetable for implementation?

20 The funding is being made available for the remainder of the financial year 2021/22 with delivery expected to commence from the start of the academic year September 2021. NAVSH, ADCS and the DfE recognise the challenges to recruitment and delivery within these timescales which is reflected in the approach to measuring success, the model for evaluating impact and making best use of the funding to inform future policy and intervention that can realise improved outcomes.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None

