

**Meeting: Policy Development and Decision  
Group (Joint Commissioning Team)**

**Date: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

**Wards Affected: All**

**Report Title: Torbay Virtual School: Annual Report**

**Is the decision a key decision? No**

**When does the decision need to be implemented?**

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## **1. Proposal and Introduction**

1. Local Authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a specific duty to promote the child's educational achievement wherever they live or are educated.
2. The Children and Families Act amended the Children Act 1989 to require local authorities to appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children. That person, termed the Virtual School Head (VSH), must be an officer employed by the authority or another local authority in England.
3. Torbay's Virtual School was established in 2010 and consisted, at that time, of a Head teacher (0.5 full time post) and an Advisory Teacher (1 full time post). It now comprises a Headteacher (0.6 full time post), Primary Teacher (1 fulltime post), Secondary Maths Teacher (1 full time post), Secondary English Teacher (1 full time post) and an Attendance Officer (1 full time term time only post). The Virtual School Team is co-located with Children's Services Social Care staff in Tor Hill House.
4. As with a mainstream school, the Virtual School is overseen by a Governing Body who receive regular reports on performance, as well as the Corporate Parenting Group which provides for oversight by elected members and partner agencies. Attached at Appendix 1 is the report of the Virtual School Head to the Governing Body for the academic year 2016/17.

## **2. Reason for Proposal**

- 2.1 Children Looked After (CLA) start with the disadvantages of their pre-care experiences and often have special educational needs. The Virtual Head and Virtual School have a key role in ensuring children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full potential. This includes asylum seeking and refugee children.
- 2.2 All children looked after should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which forms an integral part of the child's care plan or detention placement plan for those children in a secure setting. The PEP should cover the full range of educational and developmental needs. It is an evolving record of what needs to happen for looked after children to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. The quality and effectiveness of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority responsible for the child and the school or education provider.
- 2.3 Arrangements for the operation of the Virtual School should follow the DfE statutory guidance for local authorities: Providing the Education of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children (February 2018). This is statutory guidance which means it must be followed when there are exceptional circumstances that justify departing from it.
- 2.4 The Annual Report attached at Appendix 1 is the seventh report since the Virtual School was established in the academic year 2010/2011. The Annual Report describes the educational performance of children looked after and the wider work of the Virtual School. It also includes a self-assessment which the school as 'good':- based on the outcome for children looked after. All of the data about the Virtual School performance is for the academic year 2016/17.
- 2.5 The Virtual School is comprised of three cohorts of children looked after:
- Children looked after educated in Torbay schools or education provisions in Torbay;
  - Children looked after who are educated in other local authority or independent schools; and
  - Children looked after from other local authorities who are educated in Torbay schools.
- 2.6 The key responsibilities of the Virtual School are: -
- To ensure there is a robust system to track and monitor the educational attainment and progress of children looked after;
  - To ensure that all children looked after have a robust and effective personalised education plan, including access to 1:1 support and personal tuition; and
  - To champion the educational needs of children looked after across the authority and then placed out of area.

- 2.7 The VSG Annual Report provides a detailed breakdown of the progress and attainment of CLA across all educational phases and a performance summary highlighting the direction of travel and comparisons with national performance. Key highlights include: -
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at Foundation Stage has improved;
  - Performance at Key Stage 1 has improved with increases in the proportion of children achieving at least expected outcomes in reading, writing and maths;
  - Key Stage 2 performance was much improved with increases in the proportion of children achieving at least expected outcomes in reading, writing, maths and Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPAG). The performance gap between CLA and their peers also reduced.
  - Key Stage 4 was a mixed picture with a small increase in the proportion of CLA gaining 5 A\* - C including English and Maths (13.6%) against a national figure for CLA of 15%. Attainment increased marginally however progress declined.
  - At Key Stage 5 two young people were studying level 3 courses whilst the remainder were following level 1 and 2 courses.
  - There have been continued success in ensuring no permanent exclusions for children looked after and the proportion of children experiencing at least one fixed term exclusion decreased to 3.72%.
  - Attendance has improved to 96% and numbers of children achieving 100% attendance rose from 34 children to 54 for this academic year.
- 2.8 Looked after children receive Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) as additional funding to help improve their attainment and help close the gap with their peers. In Torbay this is held by the Virtual School and only released in support of educational or developmental provisions approved by the Virtual Head. As the VSG report highlights, the greater part of PP+ is expended with pupil level interventions as part of the Personal Education Plan.
- 2.9 Alongside the work of the Virtual School engaging individual children, their school, social workers and carers, it also plays a key role of influencing the wider education system in meeting the needs of children looked after. Key initiatives in 2017/18 have been an extended programme of training for schools and practitioners on Attachment Theory and Mindfulness training for school staff. Both programmes aim to equip schools and practitioners to respond to the behaviours and needs of children looked after arising from their pre care experiences and avoid them being characterised as 'problem learners'.
- 2.10 Torbay Virtual School is now well-established within the local arrangements to maximise the educational opportunities and outcomes for children looked after. Performance for the academic year shows improvements in most areas with the exception of Key Stage 4, which is more mixed. The need for stability and continuity in both education and placement settings is important at all stages but particularly so at Key Stage 4 and this is a key area of focus for improvement activity. The Virtual

School is also playing a leading role in using research to inform practice and upskilling practitioners in attachment theory and mindfulness. The VSG Report 2017/2017 will also be considered by the Corporate Parenting Group in due course.

### **3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision**

- 3.1 The Elected Mayor is asked to note the report of Torbay's Virtual School for 2016/17 and agree to receive further updates on the educational progress and attainment of children looked after.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Report of the Virtual School Head to the Governing Body 2016/17