

# Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

13 November 2022

<b>Subject:</b>	Sandwell Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Children and Education Michael Jarrett
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Executive Head Teacher of STEPS and LACE Virtual School, Balwant Bains <a href="mailto:balwant_bains@sandwell.gov.uk">balwant_bains@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon Sandwell Councils Corporate Parenting responsibilities and the impact of the Sandwell Virtual School for Children in Care (PLAC), Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and those Children with a Social Worker (CWSW).
- 1.2 That the Board considers the feedback from Ofsted and the education and extra curricula support for all Sandwell's Children in Care.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The role of Headteacher for the Virtual School for CiC is a statutory role within all UK council governed by legislation set out in:
  - **Promoting the education of children with a social worker - Virtual School Head role extension. June 2022.**
  - **Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children. Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. February 2018**



All children need love and stability in order to thrive. A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person.

## **Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers**

**Statutory guidance for local authorities. February 2018.**

The 7 Guiding Principles:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

2.2 Sandwell Virtual School for CiC's Strategic Intention is to have high expectations for children so that they are given every opportunity to access the very best education possible and achieve their potential.



2.3 The Scrutiny Board requested an overview of the service to better understand how it operates and impacts the outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><b><i>Best start in life for children and young people. Building our Plan together.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>We want children to be ready for school and for schools to be ready for children. .... prepare young people for adult life and skills, with a particular focus on vulnerable children.</i></b></p> <p>Sandwell Virtual School has the responsibility to empower professionals to prioritise the education of its children in care and use Pupil Premium+ funding to close the gaps in learning to peers.</p> <p>As corporate parent we aspire for our Children in Care to have access to the same opportunities as their peers. This includes a good education and well-being support based upon their individual needs.</p> <p>As they mature, we want all Young People to shape the future of Sandwell and be able to contribute to that future.</p> <p>We want Young People to have access to service that will support their mental wellbeing and meet their SEND needs. So that as local people they can thrive and be prepared for the Sandwell's future jobs market.</p>
	<p><b>Strong resilient communities</b></p> <p>Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we all feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods. As Corporate parents we want those children in our care to feel a sense of belonging and have the skills and resilience to forge their communities and relationships for a stronger and prosperous future.</p>



## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Sandwell Virtual School is co-located with Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS) at Cooper's Lane, Smethwick B67 7DW. Its aim is to promote achievement, raise attainment and ensure equality of opportunity to enhance the life chances of all CiC.
- 4.2 The Virtual School Head should be the lead responsible officer for ensuring that schools have arrangements in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's Children Looked After, including those placed out-of-authority.

VSHs should ensure the educational attainment and progress of Children Looked After are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school.

For Children Looked After, the VSH should ensure that there are effective systems in place to:

- Ensure the status of the child and their entitlement to support is made clear to all the professionals supporting that child.
- Maintain an up-to-date roll of its Children Looked After who are in school or college settings and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress.
- Inform head teachers and Designated Teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is Looked After and ensure they understand their need to know the children on their roll classed as Previously Looked After Children.
- Ensure that social workers, Designated Teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP.
- Ensure up-to-date, effective and high-quality PEPs that focus on educational outcomes and that all Looked After children, wherever they are placed, have such a PEP.
- Avoid drift or delay in providing suitable educational provision, including special educational provision, and unplanned termination of educational arrangements through proactive multi-agency co-operation. Where this requires negotiation with other authorities this should be completed in a timely manner and with the best interest of the child as paramount.



- Ensure the educational achievement of Children Looked After by the authority is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare.
- Report regularly on the attainment of Children Looked After through the authority's corporate parenting structures.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	The Virtual School is co-located at the Hollies Centre with STEPS. The majority of the posts are financed through the High Needs Block. 2 Education Development Officers (EDO) are funded through PP+, the Children with a Social Worker posts are 2 year contracts (expiring 2025) and 2 EDO posts (including Post 16) and funded until 2026) through a government grant. It was vital to expand staffing to meet the continued expansion of responsibilities and the rise in number of Children in Care since I joined in 2014.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	The Headteacher of the Virtual School for CiC is a statutory post in the Local Authority.
<b>Risk:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an aging workforce which has provided stability for CiC; succession planning is very important.</li> <li>• That grants funding EDO posts are cut; reducing capacity to deliver the current model.</li> </ul>
<b>Equality:</b>	The ethos of all in the Virtual School is to stabilise CiC so that they have equality with their peers. Pupil Premium+ is there to provide some equity so it is vital that the Personal Education Plan is a vehicle to close the education gap.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Strengths and Difficulties Questioners are imbedded in the Personal Education Plans; these indicate the mental wellbeing of each CiC; these shape SMART targets. We have the approach that if the child's mental well is addressed there will be in better state for learning.  Staff wellbeing is addressed through 5 Clinical Supervision sessions per year.
<b>Social Value:</b>	In partnership with STEPS Children in Care have the opportunities for Work Placement (2 in "2/23), we are engaging Lovell for the Post 16 Work Experience Programme. Year 11, 12 and 13 NEETS have reduced due



	to the award-winning Sandwell Virtual School Careers Guarantee Programme.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	N/A
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	Long-term there is a potential that Sandwell Virtual School responsibilities will change to 0 – 25 'Vulnerable Young People@ this will have implications for possible realignment with wider services such as the local offer, staffing, networking ...

## 6 Appendices

N/A

## 7. Background Papers

- [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children](#)
- [The designated teacher for looked after and previously looked-after children](#)
- [Promoting the education of children with a social worker: virtual school head role extension](#)
- [Virtual school head role extension: grant determination letter 2023 to 2024](#)
- **Sandwell Virtual School:** <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/schools-education/virtual-school-looked-children-1#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20Virtual%20School,education%20of%20children%20in%20care.>

