

DECISION REPORT

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 30 March 2021

Report Title: Cared for Children Education Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

Senior Officer: Laura Rogerson, Virtual School Headteacher

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report will provide an update on education for cared for children and the support from the Virtual School since the restrictions of Covid-19 came into force, in particular during the recent lockdown in January 2021. This report also highlights the progress in planning for children and young people as we approach the full return to education.

2. Recommendation/s

2.1 Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Provide support and challenge to the local authority actions in respect of the report.

3. Reasons for Recommendation/s

- 3.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is an advisory group to the Cabinet and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting

Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1 None; this is an update report.

5. Background

- 5.1. The report provides an update on education for cared for children to the Corporate Parenting Committee as requested in the last meeting. The last report (the Virtual School Headteachers report) was presented in November 2020.
- 5.2. The educational experience of our cared for children has continued to be a priority. Robust measures remained in place to track vulnerable pupils not attending school during the recent lockdown. Close partnership links and communication has remained in place between education and social care to ensure support was in place where needed/ required by children, young people and families/ carers.

6. Education Update for Cared for Children

- 6.1. There are currently 363 cared for children aged 5-16 years in Cheshire East.
- 6.2. The Virtual School has continued to support attendance and education provision for all children. The virtual school advisors have been linking with schools, carers, children and young people, and social workers to keep them updated and offer support where needed. The specialist attendance officers, and virtual school advisors have made contact with all children and young people who have not been accessing school during the recent lockdown to discuss remote learning and current support/ access to education. We have created a temporary support plan document to ensure we have a record of contact and detail of remote learning packages in place. As part of this contact, we have also been collecting children's views and ensuring support is in place where required. The Virtual School has ensured communication with social care has been maintained throughout. Virtual School Advisors have supported with access to school places where needed and/ or requested by social workers, parents or carers.
- 6.3. **The current cumulative attendance** September 2020 – February 2021 is 81%.
- 6.4. **Attendance during the recent lockdown** January 2021 to February 2021 is 56%:
 - Monthly attendance for January 2021 is 54%

- Monthly attendance for February 2021 is 61%.
- 6.5. The Virtual School has continued to focus on completion and quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to ensure that we continue to have high aspirations for our children and young people. We have led a series of virtual training sessions with schools and social care over the past 6 months with a focus on completing PEPs and improving quality to support educational outcomes and how to support the full return to school.
- 6.6. ***Current completion rate of PEPs Sept 2020 to Feb 2021:***
- Age 5-16 years - 365 children in total 90% of PEPs completed
 - Post 16 - 90 children in total 97% of PEPs completed.
- 6.7. The Virtual School Governing Body was launched in February 2021. The Director of Children's Social Care is the Chair of Governors. Core members include representatives from across all partners including schools and carers. This governing body will allow the Virtual School to have the same level of support, scrutiny and challenge that would exist within mainstream and specialist provision and will provide an additional avenue to challenge our statutory responsibilities and outcomes for children and young people, as well as also monitor and support the longer term consequences of the pandemic.
- 6.8. To further embed the culture of TOGETHER we are working with the participation team to introduce a student council that will be introduced and developed throughout the next 12 months to ensure our children and young people are working in coproduction with us to further develop the service and support we offer as a Virtual School.
- 6.9. Since the first lockdown to support our children and families we created an education guide with information and links (including those published by the DfE) to support with signposting to support for mental health and wellbeing and education/ academic resources. Age related guides were created for Early Years and Primary, Secondary and post 16, these has been shared with social care to send directly to carers and have been posted on our website.
- 6.10. A One Minute Guide has been created with how to complete PEPs virtually to ensure that there is clear planning for return to full education and any gaps in learning and support, this has been shared with settings/social care and placed on our website.
- 6.11. The Virtual School has used Pupil Premium funding to ensure all children and young people have access to digital devices including support for devices for our post 16 cared for young people and care leavers. The

Virtual School were kindly donated 15 iPad that were reallocated from council members, these have been issued to children. We have continued to fund additional tutoring to ensure that targeted intervention and support (virtually) has been able to continue for our children throughout the lockdown. We collect termly attainment data from our schools to allow us to continue to track and monitor the impact during this rest of the academic year.

- 6.12. The Virtual School Post 16 tutor has continued to work directly with young people to allow for continued access to English and Maths qualifications. He has supported some of our young people who have been struggling with remote/ online learning to catch up with outstanding work. He has provided additional ESOL (English Speakers as Other Languages) learning with those young people at college, or for those who are awaiting college places that have come into care mid-term. Some young people have successfully gained functional skills qualification since January lockdown through the support that the post 16 tutor has put in place.
- 6.13. NEET Programme: The Virtual School and the Care Leavers Team have run a NEET programme from October to January, this was a targeted intervention for NEET young people. Eight young people accessed the programme which included:
- Team Building activities
 - Employability workshops
 - Health relationship workshops
 - ASDAN qualification gained in Citizenship
 - Community project
 - CV writing
- 6.14 At the end of the programme, of the eight young people, two moved onto the Princes Trust programme, four moved onto a work based placement programme, one moved out of area and support has continued to be available through the Virtual School, and one remains NEET but actively applying for apprenticeships. The next programme is currently in development and due to start in April 2021. Due to success with engagement on the programme we are increasing the offer to 12 young people.
- 6.15 **Current NEET figures as at February 2021:** Year 12 & 13 - 117 in cohort: 15 young people NEET (12%) this has increased slightly by 8% (10 young people) since September, targeted support and intervention is in place for those young people to support with re-engagement. We now have a journey first worker identified to support our young people, they will be

working alongside the Virtual School and Care Leavers Team to offer further support and interventions for our NEET young people and those at risk of becoming NEET. This team meets monthly to track and monitor each young person and ensure clear actions and support are in place.

7. Implications of the Recommendations

7.1 Policy Implications

7.1.1 Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young. Our priorities are supported and driven through the Council's Corporate Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has a clear vision that our cared for children and care leavers are safe, happy, healthy and achieve their full potential.

7.2 Legal Implications

7.2.1 There are no legal implications.

7.3 Financial Implications

7.3.1 There are no financial implications or changes as a result of the recommendations of this report.

7.4 Equality Implications

7.4.1 Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences and so the impact of Covid-19 could mean further marginalisation.

7.5 Human Resources Implications

7.5.1 HR and Public Health have been supportive of officers in ensuring that robust risk assessments are in place and available to staff in undertaking their duties.

7.6 Risk Management Implications

7.6.1 Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, the Corporate Parenting Strategy prioritises these areas.

7.7 Rural Communities Implications

7.7.1 There are no direct rural communities' implications of this report.

7.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

- 7.8.1 The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children.

7.9 Public Health Implications

- 7.9.1 The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report.

7.10 Climate Change Implications

- 7.10.1 There is a commitment to ensure that Cheshire East cared for children live as close to their home community as possible, wherever this is safe to do so. This will ensure that children can continue to feel connected to their families and local community. It also reduces the geographical footprint of children, families and staff as travel is reduced.

8. Ward Members Affected

- 8.1 Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and young people is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

9. Consultation & Engagement

- 9.1 My Voice, our cared for children council, continue to meet virtually on a weekly basis.

10. Access to Information

- 10.1 None.

11. Contact Information

- 11.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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