

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 21 April 2011	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Establishment of the Virtual School For Looked After Children	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		Children Looked After	
From:		Deputy Director, Specialist Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Corporate Parenting Committee comments on the Virtual School proposals and the outcome of the staff consultation process.
2. That Southwark continues to endorse the proposal to explore opportunities for formal joint working with Looked After Children (LAC) teams in neighbouring boroughs, including Lambeth and Lewisham, and develops stronger partnerships with local authorities that are further afield such as Kent, given that a significant proportion of Southwark LAC are in schools in other local authorities.
3. That the Virtual School Head commissions much of the school's work from staff with specific expertise in other services including Special Educational Needs (SEN), Early years, School Improvement, Admissions, 14-19 and Connexions to help formalise their responsibility as corporate parents. It may also be appropriate to commission work from external organisations.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Why replace the current LACES Team with a Virtual School?

4. This report sets out the key elements of the proposals for a change to the service, and the feedback from staff consultation.
5. The core purpose of a Virtual School Head (VSH) is in driving improvements in the educational attainment and progress of all LAC, including those that have been educated in schools in other LAs. They work in partnership with Virtual School Heads in other LAs to support the educational progress of children in their schools but looked after by other LAs. The Ofsted lead for Safeguarding and CLA Inspections reports that the cumulative evidence from inspections of authorities is that virtual headteachers and virtual schools can make a difference. They can play an important role in coordinating and monitoring provision for schools. Attainment appears to be rising at a faster rate in authorities where there is a Virtual School Head.
6. The Virtual School Head is also expected to strengthen the dialogue with headteachers to ensure that LAC receive the best possible provision; and schools understand and are compliant with the statutory guidance. This engagement will take on greater importance as funding is likely to move from authorities to schools and will include the payment of a LAC pupil premium. The Virtual School Head pilot concluded that those with experience of education at a senior level are best placed to oversee these responsibilities.
7. Southwark is untypical in that all of the LACES team are qualified teachers. However, they do not always engage in activities generally associated with teaching. Recent experience of working with the LACES team has amplified the fact that the dividing line between their remit and other professionals is blurred. Much of the work of the LAC team

could undoubtedly be undertaken by staff from backgrounds other than teaching from within Children's Services or external agencies.

8. There are also several aspects of their work that could be more efficiently undertaken by a project/data officer which is a very common element in virtual schools.
9. There is an expectation that the Virtual School Head also has a strong role at post 16, building relationships with post 16 institutions and care leaving services. Except for the recent work around NEET, the involvement of the LACES team with 16-19 LAC has not formally been part of their remit. This work needs to be developed to ensure continuity for young people who are leaving care.
10. The current LACES team does not use standard practices for tracking adopted children in schools and by school improvement teams and therefore does not meet the needs of a virtual school, despite some recent improvements.
11. The Southwark Personal Education Plan (PEP) format is generally well constructed but the quality assurance process needs strengthening. A strategy for the training of Designated Teachers and other groups needs to be developed whereby training is offered to larger groups such as school clusters or commissioned from an external provider or schools.

Proposed Structure of the Virtual School

- 12 The current structure of the LACES Team is set out below. There are currently 5.34 FTE permanent staff costing approximately 289K in this financial year. There is also a 0.5 agency worker funded from short term funding streams.
 - CLA Education Team Manager (1.0 FTE)
 - Senior advisory teacher: (1.0 FTE)
 - Teachers (1.84 FTE) supporting CLA 3-12
 - Teacher (1.0 FTE) supporting CLA 13-16
 - Teachers (0.5 FTE) supporting CLA post 16-19 NEET
 - Agency Teacher (0.5) supporting CLA 13-16
- 13 The proposed staffing structure for the Virtual School is set out below. It is proposed that there will be a 2.6 FTE permanent staff, and this will deliver significant savings at a time when overall funding to Councils is being reduced.
- 14 Given that several elements of the job description for the position of LAC Education Officer are similar to that of the position of Education Adviser it is likely that this will not represent a change of grade. The position of Virtual School Headteacher and Project Officer are new posts.
 - Virtual School Head Teacher (0.6 FTE) – Advocate for LAC with key stakeholders, strategy and policy development, interface with other LAs, quality assurance
 - LAC Project Officer: Commissioning administration/tracking of progress and attendance, tuition, PEP arrangements, celebration event– (0.6FTE)
 - LAC Education Officers (1.2 FTE) to work closely with educational settings to raise the attainment of targeted children.
- 15 The proposed structure greatly simplifies the leadership and management arrangements. It is envisaged that the Virtual School Head would work mainly but not exclusively in a strategic manner and as such it is felt that it could be successfully undertaken on a part time basis. This is consistent with several of the Virtual Headteacher posts in other London Boroughs.
- 16 In terms of line management it is proposed that the Virtual School is placed within School Improvement.

- 17 The LAC Project Officer is seen as a crucial position. They would have responsibility for ensuring the data for tracking and progress is systematically collected and robust. This is vital when planning appropriate interventions and support. It is also envisaged they would be involved in the administration of commissioning, the organisation of PEP meetings, producing timely reports, home tuition arrangements, celebration event and general administration.
- 18 The role of the LAC Education Officer would be to work closely with educational settings in relation to help in raising the attainment for targeted LAC. They would be expected to liaise with the respective care teams, attend PEP and follow meetings in the educational setting.
- 19 It is proposed that much of the work of the virtual school will be commissioned from other teams, for example,
- Early years: Helping to identify appropriate educational provision
 - SEN: Provide guidance and support to LAC with SEN needs, liaison with SEN Departments in other LAs
 - ICSS (Educational Psychologist support): Assessments for LAC as required
 - Admissions: Supporting the process of admissions to schools both within Southwark and in other LA
 - 14-19 Team to provide support to NEET and those in Post 16 Education
 - Teaching and Learning Consultants: Attendance at PEP meetings for targeted students, training of Designated Teachers, advice to teachers in schools
- 20 Further work will need to be undertaken to determine possible costs arising out of commissioning work from these teams. In particular given the fact that over a third of LAC have a statement of SEN, this could represent a significant workload for the SEN team. Notwithstanding this issue, the commissioning approach would seem to be a much more efficient and effective use of resources.

Response to the consultation on the proposal to establish a virtual school for children looked after

- 21 A number of teams and individuals responded to the consultation including the LACES team, social workers, Carelink, independent reviewing officers, SEN, admissions and the designated doctor for children looked after. These have been most valuable in helping determine the final team structure. Below is a summary of the issues raised and how it is planned that each is addressed in the revised structure/decision paper.
22. The proposed **co-location** of the team with achievement staff has raised considerable concern. It has therefore been decided that the virtual school team will continue to be based alongside social care colleagues with the expectation that this will be kept under review. This will enable the team to pick up on issues quickly and work more closely with allocated social workers to improve educational attainment.
23. The post of **Virtual School Head** is to remain as described in the original proposal, together with the job description that went out for consultation. Responses indicate that this post is not contentious and there is some acknowledgement of the benefits that the post would bring to the team. The Virtual School Head will lead a team that has a clear focus on raising attainment, working with schools and other local authorities on tracking performance, planning interventions and ensuring that PEPs drive performance. A key part of their role will be to broker a shared responsibility for CLA with other authorities and support joint working in order to provide an effective and efficient service that is value for money.
24. Areas of particular concern that were highlighted in several responses included **support for social care staff** on educational issues, **support for foster carers** and ability to intervene in **crisis situations**. In addition the Head of SEN and Inclusion presented a powerful argument around the need for dedicated support for CLA with a statement of special educational need. On reflection it is clear that there is a need for this support to

continue but in order to be more effective and work within a more clearly defined system it has been decided that the post of designated teacher be retained and moved to work within the SEN team. This would ensure a clear link to SEN for the Carelink multi-agency team as well as social care staff. The role of the designated teacher will be relocated under SEN with a change of emphasis in the job.

25. Some concern was expressed at the proposed **reduction in the number of education workers** and it is accepted that the proposed 1.2 members of staff would not have enough capacity to undertake the work. It has been decided that this will be increased to 1.5 staff members; with the aim of having one staff member (part-time) focussing on primary statutory school age children and one staff member (full time) focussing on the secondary phase
26. The **Education worker's job description** has been re-evaluated and it has been decided not to ring-fence these posts for teachers only. As stated in the JD, any applicant needs to have knowledge of the education system but these are Hay grade posts and not on teachers' pay and conditions due to the fact that staff are not required to teach as part of their JD.
27. The **project officer** post is to remain. It is considered that this post is vital to the successful refocus of the team's work as effective tracking and data collection is crucial to demonstrate impact. In addition it is expected that the PEP process should be slicker and more effective if it comes under the direct management of one staff member.
28. Although it is recognised that having a qualified **educational psychologist** in the team has been useful this is an area that can be provided by the Integrated Child Support Service (ICSS) where necessary. The recently published SEN and Disability Green Paper is leading to a national debate on how Educational Psychology (EP) services will be provided in future and it is possible that it will lead to a model where all EP services are externally procured.
29. A key area of concern expressed in several responses is **support for transition** and the original paper flags up work that could be transferred to the admissions team. This area will be the overall responsibility of the Virtual School Head who will coordinate all involved in the process and design a system to ensure that support in the future is as robust as it is at present.
30. **NEET** support for CLA young people will be provided by the reconfigured Connexions team that is to be reorganised over the coming year to reflect the change in national policy. The LA is to continue to have responsibility in terms of support to this group of young people and it is our intention to have a dedicated NEET task force whose role will be to provide direct support for our most vulnerable groups, including CLA.

Policy implications

31. The recommendations are in line with the statutory guidance and support the priority and actions outlined in the Southwark Children and Young People's Plan to help LAC achieve.
32. In terms of governance of the Virtual School it is not thought necessary at this stage to establish a management committee. The Virtual School Head will be expected to report on the work of the Virtual School to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Community impact statement

- 33 It is envisaged that there will be a positive impact on the community

Resource implications

34. The relocation of the team to education could impact on accommodation.

35. Relevant budgets currently held by the Social Care Team will need to be reallocated to the Virtual school

Legal implications

36. The recommendations are in line with the statutory guidance.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark Corporate Parenting Committee Agenda papers 7 July and 10 November 2010	160 Tooley Street and available on the website at http://moderngov.southwarbsites.com/ieListMeetings.aspx?XXR=0&Year=2010&CId=129&	Constitutional Team 020 7525 7232

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Jane Bailey, Assistant Director 11-19 and Youth	
Report Author	Alastair Wilson Interim Virtual School Headteacher	
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	No	No
Finance Director	No	No
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