

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 26 March	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Evolving Role of Virtual Headteacher	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Corporate Parenting Committee notes the progress of the Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) as set out in this report.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) White paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' sets out the steps needed to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care.
3. The need to deliver a first class education for children looked after is a key priority for Southwark, and the White Paper identified a series of initiatives needed to improve education outcomes. Piloting the role of the VHT is one of these initiatives. Although Southwark was unsuccessful in its bid for pilot status, the department established a part-time VHT post to signal its intention to drive up attainment levels for children looked after.
4. The role of VHTs is to oversee the education of children in Southwark's care, wherever they may be placed, and to drive up the performance of schools in relation to this group.
5. The VHT will work both across the local authority and its children's trust partners and with individual schools, including Academies, and Further Education settings that are providing 14-19 education for children in care. The VHT will Act as a source of expertise, and offer capacity to broker arrangements to improve outcomes for children in care. The VHT will work with School Improvement Partners, Headteachers and designated teachers to raise the attainment of children in care. Part of the role also includes a focus on helping to reduce absence and exclusions, and ensuring that provision meets their learning needs.
6. As a champion for the educational needs of children in care, the VHT will spread best practice across schools, the authority and its partners. A key to securing successful outcomes will be the extent to which they can improve multi-agency working, particularly between schools and social care services. The VHT is accountable to the Director of Children's Services and, through the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Lead Member for Children's Services. This is an important element of the corporate parenting role.

7. Where children are placed out of authority, the VHT will continue to champion their cause and local authority officers and headteachers, to drive up performance.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Raising Standards**

8. In Southwark, the VHT is currently working towards a fuller partnership with Southwark Secondary and Primary schools, including Special Schools to:
  - Agree current standards
  - Evaluate strengths and weaknesses in practice
  - Share best practice in building home/school relationships and inter-linked agency/team-around-the-child working
  - Identify and address training needs to establish consistent, good practice for children in care
  - Agree strategies to develop improved virtual learning opportunities.
9. The VHT is working with primary and secondary schools both inside and outside the borough so intervention is identified for complex cases, mainly to prevent permanent exclusion and to ensure appropriate educational provision.
10. In addition the VHT will be tracking Year 11 Students to measure progress Through this data analysis the VHT will be able to develop reliable forecast data to support realistic target setting and progress monitoring.
11. The VHT will also play a key role in monitoring the progress of young people placed with Shaftesbury Young People. There is currently a six weekly monitoring meeting with a focus both on school attendance and standards.

### **Caseload of the VHT in Southwark**

12. The Children Looked After Education Project Team identified 30 complex cases for consideration by the VHT. The initial main criteria for moving a child onto this list was absence of more than 25 school days.
13. The VHT has become involved in a number of interventions to improve the situation for looked after children both in Southwark Schools and those in other authorities.

### **Policy implications**

14. The role of the VHT is in line with initiatives outlined in the DCSF white paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change'. The educational attainment of children looked after is a key performance indicator for children's services, and outcomes are reported to the DCSF as part of a national data set.

### **Community Impact Statement**

15. The VHT oversees the education of children in care who do less well in education than children and young people in the community. Children

looked after are one of the most vulnerable groups in the community, and the post with the support of partner agencies and schools, aims to improve education outcomes, and positively impact upon their life chances.

### **Resource implications**

16. The VHT post has been funded from within existing resources. The post will be evaluated alongside learning from the other pilot areas, and the outcome of this will determine the future direction of the service.

### **Consultation**

17. Consultation and awareness raising about the VHT role has been undertaken through:
  - Presentations to key bodies about the purpose of the role of VHT
  - Published contributions to Learning Matters to reach all readers, especially Headteachers and influence expectations as well as use of resources
  - Interviews with Speakerbox for publication in their own magazine
  - Continued Participation in the Pan-London network
  - Contributed strategic vision to 2008-2009 Development Plan

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services**

18. No legal implications are arising from this report.

### **Finance Director**

19. No comments sought as funded within existing budgets as per paragraph 16.

## **REASONS FOR URGENCY**

20. The VHT is accountable to the Director of Children's Services and, through the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Lead Member for Children's Services. This is an important element of the corporate parenting role. In order for the VHT to be accountable to the Corporate Parenting Committee and to ensure open and transparent reporting to the committee is maintained this report must be considered at the upcoming March committee meeting.

## **REASONS FOR LATENESS**

22. This report is late due to outstanding performance data and analysis hence delaying the report.

## AUDIT TRAIL

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<b>Version</b>	Draft	
<b>Dated</b>	13 March 2008	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services	Yes	No
Finance Director	No	No
List other officers here		
<b>Executive Member</b>	Yes	Yes
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