

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 25th January 2021

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Headteacher of the Virtual School's Annual Report for Halton Children in Care

WARD(S) All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide PPB with the Headteacher of the Virtual School's annual report on the education outcomes and achievement of Halton Children in Care

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) PPB note the information provided.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Please see the attached report for the detailed data, analysis and summary of the work of Halton Virtual School during the academic year 2019-20.

3.2 Due to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions, the formal education of children in care was ceased on 23rd March. This resulted in the suspension of all Primary tests and a change to teacher assessment for the allocation of GCSE results. The requirement to attend school from 23rd March onwards was also altered and was determined by individual risk assessment. All of the above therefore means that there can be no meaningful comparison between previous years and this year's educational outcomes for children in care.

3.3 However, the work of the Virtual School has continued throughout the academic year and the annual report does provide details of how Halton Children in Care have been supported to mitigate against the impact of the COVID restrictions. The report also provides a summary of the Virtual School's progress towards it's identified key priorities and the priorities identified for 2020-21.

3.4 Halton had an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

(ILACS) in February/March 2020. Throughout the annual report the inspections findings are highlighted in relation to the educational outcomes for Halton Children in Care and also the work of the Virtual School.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Please see below regarding national policy changes that will have implications for the support provided through Halton Virtual School.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Halton Virtual School relies heavily on the use of Pupil Premium Plus funding from the Government to support the educational outcomes of Children in Care. This includes support provided through the Personal Education Plan and Progress Coordinators and the ability to commission specialist psychological assessments, as well as direct curriculum support for the children and young people. There is currently an agreement that this funding will remain in place until 2021 but that it will be reviewed to take into account other budgetary changes and pressures, particularly in light of the impact of the COVID pandemic.

5.2 There is a major risk to the outcomes of our most vulnerable children if this funding ceases because Halton Virtual School will no longer be able to provide the high level and necessary educational support for our children in care. Therefore, Council funding of at least the same level will need to be identified to mitigate against this.

5.3 Halton Virtual School continues to look to provide additional employment and training opportunities for Care Leavers through access to apprenticeships and work programmes. There needs to be a review of funding opportunities to support these and also creative opportunities both within the Council and within local businesses.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

The educational outcomes of Children in Care remain a key priority for the Council.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

If Children in Care do not achieve their expected educational outcomes, there is a high risk that they will become NEET and therefore not achieve employment which fulfils their aspirations or enables them to be active participants in the community.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Research has demonstrated that issues related to the emotional health and well-being have a significant impact upon the educational outcomes for Children in Care. Timely and effective services are vital in providing emotional support for our young people to enable them to have positive engagement in their learning and achieve their potential.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Due to their lived experiences Children in Care can be at higher risk of child sexual exploitation, and episodes of missing from care or school. Research does indicate that these factors all have a negative impact upon educational outcomes for our children and young people in care. Therefore, all agencies need to provide proactive support in order to keep children in care safe.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 If the outcomes for our Halton Children in care do not improve then there is a continued risk that they are more likely to become NEET and not become active and positive partners in their community.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Children in Care continue to be a vulnerable group whose life experiences of trauma, neglect and abuse mean that they have not had the same start to life as other young people.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.