Committee	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub (Community and Children's Services) Committee	8/2/2021
Subject: Virtual School for looked after children: Annual Report for Academic Year 2019-2020	**Public**
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	n/a
If so, how much?	n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Andrew Russell, Virtual School Headteacher	

Summary

Background and context:

This report presents an overview of the activities and impact of the City of London Virtual School (VS) for the academic year September 2019 to July 2020. Compared with other VSs across England, the City of London Virtual School is very small and almost all the learners arrived in the City as refugees seeking asylum, with very limited English language skills. The vast majority are males aged between 17 and 19 years old. Some are still waiting for their legal status to be confirmed while they are on their education journey with us.

A small cohort means a small VS team – just the VS Headteacher (VSHT) for two days a week. The VSHT is part of the Children's Senior Management Team, with influence in both the Education and Social Care parts. The VSHT also sits on the board of the National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH).

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the learners and the work of the VS. This continues to be the case. The pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to online learning, a move that was only partially successful. KS4/5 learners spent only half their time engaged in online learning. Overall, online learning does not fully meet the needs of looked-after children sufficiently.

Highlights

The City of London VS continues to maintain the high standards reported by Ofsted in March. The majority of learners are well supported and make good progress. Challenges in measuring the progress and attainment for this unique group of learners has been greatly hampered by COVID-19. Progress is measured

individually, comparing a learner's attainment at the beginning of the year with their attainment at year end. Almost all learners show good progress across the year. Overall engagement with education has been higher than the previous year, at 92%, with instances of consistently high attendance. No looked-after children or care leavers have been excluded this year.

There is good partnership work in place to ensure that young people remain in education, employment or training. This work remains a priority for the coming year. The VSHT role in national fora for looked-after children directly benefits the work of the City of London Virtual School. An effective new partnership has started between the VSHT and an experienced headteacher and Ofsted inspector, acting as an independent 'School Improvement Partner' to provide an extra layer of support and challenge.

Challenges in the year included the planned expansion of enrichment and improving looked-after children's much-needed IT skills. More optimistically, the VSHT has firm plans in place for the coming year to take these matters forward.

Despite disruptions, Personal Education Plan (PEP) activity has remained at a good level and quality. The PEP process has provided a focus to plan online learning.

Priorities for next year

The focus this year will be to continue to develop the effectiveness of PEPs, both online and face-to-face. Setting up a procedure to provide IT support will also be a priority. The VSHT will continue to adapt and develop links with City schools to provide enrichment opportunities for a wide range of learners as well as improving the offer around career progression pathways.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

**Background and the role of the Virtual School (VS)**

1. This report presents an overview of the activities and impact of the City of London Virtual School for the academic year September 2019 to July 2020.

2. The VS supports all children in care and relevant care leavers regardless of their length of time in care. The age range for this year covers children in secondary school through to those in college and university.

3. Every local authority has a responsibility to promote the educational achievement of children looked-after. In February 2018, the government released updated guidance, *Promoting the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children'* which reinforces the local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked-after children and previously

looked-after children, and promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated.

4. There is a clear ambition, at national and local levels, to narrow the attainment gap between looked-after children and their non-looked after peers. The attainment gap remains high nationally as this data shows:

*[Note, data for 2020 will not be published until March 2021 **Please also note there are no children in the care of the City of London in this national data as we have not had any taking KS2 or KS4 exams this year**.]*

<u>Outcomes at KS2 (end of Primary /Year 6) – National Data (there is no City data as there are no children in care at this age)</u>
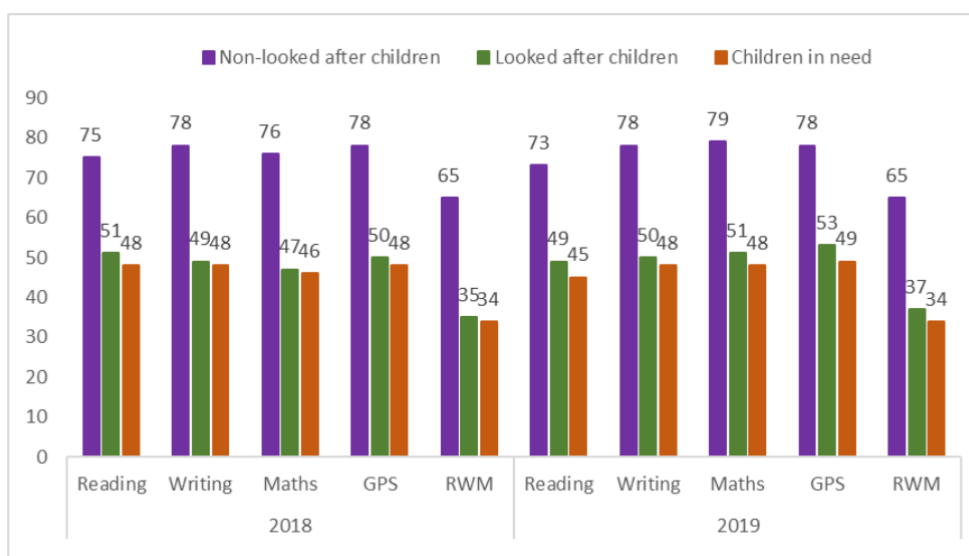
Source: CLA-NPD, CIN-NPD

5. As shown above, in 2019, 37% of looked-after children reached the expected standard in the headline measure for reading, writing and maths, which is much lower than the 65% for non-looked-after children. However, 58% of looked-after children at the end of key stage 2 have a special educational need (SEN) identified, as do 49% of children in need. In comparison, only 18% of non-looked-after children have a SEN.

Outcomes at KS4 (end of Secondary / Year 11) – National Data (there is no City data as there are no children in care at this age)

% Achieving threshold in English and mathematics GCSEs (grade 5 or above)

Year	Non-looked after children	Looked after children	Children in need
2017	39.5	7.4	8.8
2018	40.2	7.7	9.3
2019	40.1	7.2	9.7

- ■ Non-looked after children
- ■ Looked after children
- ■ Children in need
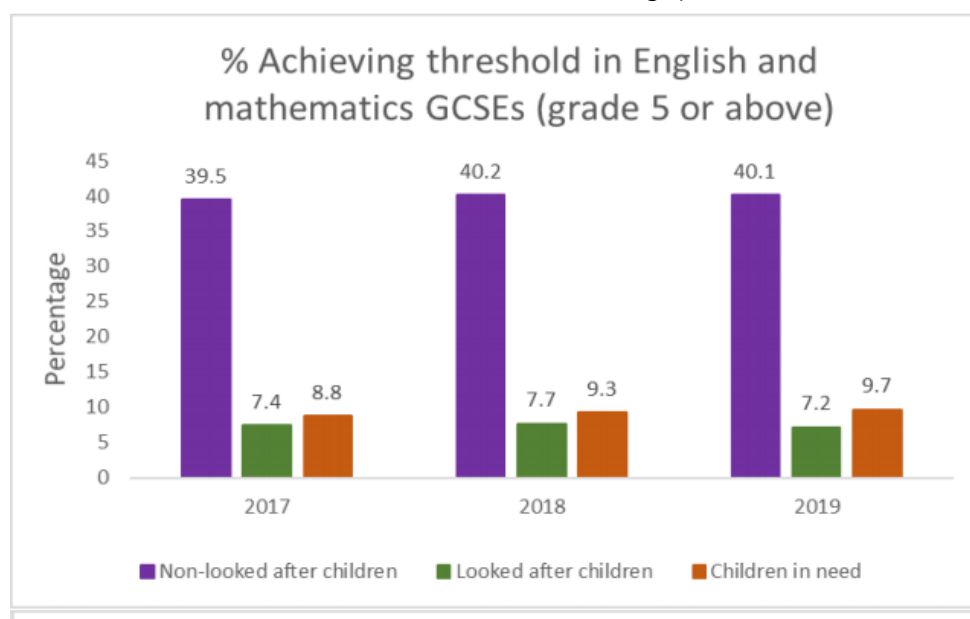
6. Again, it is very clear that there is a large attainment gap between 'all children' and looked-after children (and children in need).

7. Looked-after and previously looked-after children start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences and, often, have SENs. VSs have a key role to ensure that these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential – an important part of why this role was made statutory. The City of London Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that looked-after children and care leavers fulfil their potential at all stages of their learning journey so that they can go on to be successful in higher education, apprenticeships and employment.

8. The City of London Virtual School strives to achieve this by:

   - co-ordinating and quality assuring all PEPs

   - monitoring and challenging schools and colleges to make effective use of additional resources such as the Pupil Premium for looked-after children

   - tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of looked-after children

   - ensuring that special educational needs and disability (SEND) needs are identified and supported appropriately, including applications for statutory assessment if necessary

   - ensuring an effective transition between schools, colleges, higher education or specialist providers, and between such providers when a learner moves to a new placement.

9. The City of London Virtual School has only one member of staff, the VSHT, Andrew Russell. He is a former secondary school Headteacher and has been the VSHT in two other London boroughs. He works two days a week, term time only. Outside of this work Andrew works with the NAVSH, planning and organising their annual national conference He is also a mentor/coach working with other VSHTs as well as leading training with school staff and foster carers. This training specialises in promoting the education achievement of young people in care as well as training in how to overcome the impact of trauma and attachment on behaviour and achievement in school. This work has direct benefits on the work of the City of London Virtual School.

10. The wider team that supports the education of young people in care also includes:

- six Social Workers and their Team Manager
- Lead Education Advisor
- Looked-after Children's nurse
- City & Hackney Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Information, Advice and Guidance Advisor, Prospects
- Children in Care Council (CICC) Co-ordinator
- Two Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- Head of Adult Learning, City of London Corporation.

Governance and organisation

11. The VSHT is part of the senior leadership structure in the People's Directorate. This brings the added value of bridging the two key areas of Education and Social Care under a single management structure. The VSHT has a standing item in the Children's Senior Management Team meetings. The VSHT also regularly meets directly with the Assistant Director of Children's Services.

12. The VSHT reports into the Safeguarding Sub Committee which acts as the Corporate Parenting Board and provides additional scrutiny and challenge.

13. One development this year came at the request of the VSHT. This was to have a 'School Improvement Partner' as an independent person to provide challenge and support. This relationship started in the summer term of 2020, with the first formal meeting in the autumn of 2020. This partner will regularly report to the Assistant Director (People). The relationship has started very positively.

Cohort characteristics

14. The nature of the City of London Virtual School cohort is unique compared with other local authorities and London boroughs. It is very small, which means it is dynamic – any changes have a big impact. One learner in a cohort

of around 30 learners can change statistics by 3%. Compare this with a 'normal' VS cohort of 300 learners where one makes a difference of 0.3% in the statistics.

15. At the end of the 2019–20 academic year, the demographic of the cohort was:

Key stage	Number on roll	Number in school / college / uni	Tuition class	Working or training	NEET	Missing
EYFS	0	0				0
KS1	0	0				0
KS2	0	0				0
KS3	0	0				0
KS4	9	5	3		0	1
KS5	24	19	3	1	1	0
18–25	23	17	0	2	4	0
Total	**56**	**41**	**6**	**3**	**5**	**1**

Arrivals since start of academic year = 9 (22 the previous year)

Notes:
- NEET = Not in education, employment or training
- The '18–25' group = Care Leavers
- Of the 56 young people above, 52 are male. This is very different to an average VS. [Update September 2020 we now have two new girls in care.]
- Of the 56 in the cohort, 53 (94%) came to the UK as refugees. The majority arrive with almost no English and initially study English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at Entry Level 1. This is a much higher percentage than all other local authorities.
- Missing – many of the cohort arrive in debt to people traffickers. Once they are here, some disappear because they must go away to pay off the debts owed. This can often be against their own will.

16. The majority have Arabic as their first language, but we have many other first languages in the cohort, including:
    - Pashto
    - Vietnamese
    - Amharic
    - Dari
    - Farsi
    - Oromo
    - Tigrinya
    - Albanian

17. In some cases, an interpreter is present in meetings. During the year it is pleasing to see that the need for interpreters reduces as the young people improve their skills in English.

18. As well as limited skills in English, the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) arrive with varying amounts of education in their home countries. A few have had almost no formal education. Others have only had three to four years. Others might have had more. In all cases, however, we

must focus on their English skills first so they can then progress onto vocational courses.

19. In most local authorities, the majority of the looked-after children live within the local area. This is not the case in the City of London: 95% of the cohort live outside the City, scattered across London, with a cluster in Luton. This has several impacts on the work of the VS. Education provision must be sourced from the local area and meetings are held locally, therefore involving a lot of travel. It makes it harder to gather the cohort together locally for activities and events such as the celebration event. The VSHT attends almost all the PEP meetings wherever the young person lives. This is a key commitment to our young people. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on PEP meetings – see paragraph 40.

Attainment and Progress

20. The VSHT monitors attainment and progress throughout the academic year. This is usually through the PEP meetings which take place every term. The VSHT also gathers end-of-year attainment data directly from schools and colleges. For young people who have extra tuition and those in the tuition class, monthly reports are received from the tutors.

21. Measuring attainment and progress in this unique cohort is very different from other schools and VSs where attainment can be tracked from one key stage to another and compared with national statistics. In this current cohort there are no young people with a previous key stage result so they cannot be compared with the national cohort. In addition, there is no national comparative data for ESOL attainment. So, attainment can be measured when the learners take assessments, but progress can only be measured individually, comparing a learner's attainment at the beginning of the year with their attainment at the end. In PEP meetings this is a question asked of the school or college often in the context of 'is the learner making expected progress to reach their end of year target?'

22. Only two in the cohort were in a school five days a week at the start of the year. The majority are in colleges local to where they live and studying a variety of courses. More recent arrivals have individual tuition until they can start a school or college in September. Another group attend a tuition class that was set up locally which runs five days a week – an increase on last year when it was three days a week.

23. The table below shows the rates of progress for the whole cohort, however long they have been with us and includes those looked-after and care leavers. The progress measure is based on attainment results and feedback from schools and colleges and the tutors. It is based on the expectation for each individual as it is not possible to relate progress to any national data with this

group. The data has been severely impacted by COVID-19, which meant that most end-of-year assessment data was diminished.

Making expected progress	%
Too recently arrived / too little data	2%
Limited data from school / college (COVID-19)	50%
Below expected	15%
Expected	33%
Above expected	0%

Attendance

24. With such a diverse cohort, making sense of attendance data is a challenge. We use a company called Welfare Call to contact schools and colleges daily to monitor the attendance of 24 of the cohort. Once lockdown started it became much harder to gather meaningful data on how fully engaged the learners were with their online learning. The VSHT and social workers contacted carers and key workers weekly to find out how well the learners were engaging with their online learning: 23 of the KS4/KS5 cohort were engaging for at least 50% of the time with their online learning.

25. The table below shows the attendance figures for the half year to the February half term, after which lockdown started:

Total attendance 2019/20 (half year)	91.7%
Total attendance 2018/19 (full year)	88.25%

26. It is worth noting that 15 of the cohort have attendance above 90% -- an increase on the figure of nine last year.

27. It is impossible to accurately analyse the attendance against previous years due to the huge change once lockdown started.

Exclusions

28. There were no exclusions or behaviour issues reported this year.

The City tuition class

29. Following the success of the tuition class in the previous year, plans were set to run the class again. At the beginning of the school year, new arrivals can be placed into local colleges. As the school year progresses it gets harder to join courses at college. The demand this year wasn't as high as last year, so it was decided to run the class with some learners from the Islington Virtual School joining City learners. Learners were charged for £50 per week per learner for this service. There were two learners from Islington and initially three from the City.

30. Working with the Head of the Adult Education Service, we created the class at the Golden Lane Community Centre again. This year we ran a daily class instead of the three days a week. Another change this year was that we planned for the learners to stay on the course through to the end of the school year to get them ready to start colleges in September.

31. The class started in January with two tutors sharing the weekly sessions. In March lockdown meant the class had to move online. This took a few weeks to arrange as we had to get laptops for the learners and get everyone proficient at using Zoom. Moving online was never a 100% satisfactory replacement for the face-to-face classes. The tuition class caters for the most recent arrivals with limited English language skills and limited experience of using IT equipment. Even once they were set up and able to connect, some learners were unreliable in logging into classes consistently and on time.

Enrichment

32. The successful enrichment project with the City of London School in 2019 was planned to be repeated in the summer of 2020. Unfortunately, like many things, this was cancelled due to the lockdown. Plans are being made to develop and expand the range of enrichment opportunities for the new academic year.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

33. One of the main ways of engaging with education settings is through the termly PEP meeting. These take place when the young person arrives or comes into care to the City of London. An initial PEP is carried within two weeks of a young person coming into care. This is followed by termly reviews, three times a year. If there is a change of education setting, there will be another PEP within two weeks of the move. PEPs took place as normal until lockdown in March. After that they were completed using a specially designed form emailed to the key participants. This form focused on the wellbeing of the student and their engagement with the online learning.

34. Since changing the PEP forms and process last year, the quality of the PEPs has improved. There is still room for more improvement to ensure that each social worker (and school) understands what makes a good SMART target, and to ensure they chase up all the actions that were agreed in the meeting.

35. PEPs cover students aged 3–18. For students older than 18, the VSHT monitors the education section of the Pathway Plans, giving feedback and coaching to social workers around targets, where necessary.

Budget

36. The operating budget for the VS is £14,000 (not including the VSHT salary). In addition, there is a variable amount of Pupil Premium for looked-after children. This is determined by the number of young people in care aged 4–16

in January each year. This year the additional figure was just over £9,000.

37. The vast majority of this is spent on tuition – either individual or the local tuition class. Some also goes toward resources. This year extra laptops were purchased before the Department for Education (DfE) scheme was able to be used.

Celebration event

38. Due to lockdown, it was not possible to run the event this year.

Ofsted

39. Ofsted carried out an inspection of Children's Services in March 2020. The report was very positive regarding the work of the VS. These are the relevant paragraphs:

- *22. The virtual school is creative, relentless and effective in its work with other professionals and external partners to ensure that the growing cohort of children in care do well. Children make good progress in their learning and grow in confidence. This is due in no small measure to the careful and timely attention paid to their individual needs and the excellent support they receive, for example at the weekly local tuition and enrichment classes. This paves the way for meaningful engagement with education, employment and training opportunities. The majority have good attendance at all education and enrichment classes, and they engage in their learning. The low drop-out rate in college reflects the secure grounding they have had, the effective support they receive and their own commitment to learning.*

- *23. Children enjoy a rich range of opportunities which open the doors to the arts, culture and sport. Some opportunities are noteworthy, such as the joint project with boys from a local independent school. This has had a palpable impact on both groups of children, who get to learn from each other's experiences and cultures. Personal education plans are of good quality and are purposeful. The vast majority of care leavers are in education or employment, and the local authority is ambitious for them and supports those who wish to attend university.*

COVID-19

40. The impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown on the VS and the learners has been mentioned above.

41. In summary:

Before lockdown	During lockdown	VS actions
All learners attending school or college	All learners at home accessing lessons online	- Ensure learners have access to laptops or purchase laptops as required - Work with DfE to order required laptops - VSHT deals with numerous issues relating to DfE laptops (log-ins, access to software, etc) - VSHT contacts learners by text to check in with them about their learning - Regular emails to key workers to encourage engagement with online learning
Tuition class at Golden Lane Community Centre	Tuition class closed and moves online	Work with class tutors to ensure that they can deliver lessons to learners
PEP meetings were taking place in all schools and colleges	PEP meetings became 'virtual'	- Design a new proforma and process for 'virtual' PEPs - Chasing social workers to complete PEP paperwork and upload PEPs
Enrichment project with City of London School	Cancelled	
Celebration event	Cancelled	
Refugee week activity was planned	Postponed to 2020/21	

Priorities for 2020/21

- **Celebration event:** This had to be cancelled for the 2019/20 academic year due to the national lockdown. It is a priority to run the event this year, either online, or preferably face-to-face if it is later in the year.

- **PEPs:** Investigate implementation of an electronic PEP platform and VS Information Management System.

- **Data:** Effective data collection and reporting – develop an improved dashboard.

- **IT**: Investigate a qualification that young people can take as well as extension courses on programming.

- **COVID-19:** Identifying the vulnerabilities of this cohort related to the impact of COVID-19.

- **Career Information Advice and Guidance:** Ensure that the cohort receives aspirational advice from all partners.

- **Enrichment:** Seek ways to expand the enrichment programme, both within the partner school and geographically to cover more learners.

- **Projects**: Consider how to promote City of London-led best practice projects

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