

Committee:	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub-Committee	12/05/2022
Subject: Virtual School for children with a social worker: Interim Report for Academic Year 2021–2022	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3, 8
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
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, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker	

Summary

This report presents an overview of the activities and impact of the City of London Virtual School for the academic year September 2021 to March 2022.

The work of the Virtual School expanded hugely in September. There was awareness of the expansion to include all children with a social worker, and it was well planned. The unplanned expansion to the Virtual School roles and activities included work to provide an education for 250 Afghan children who arrived in the City in September.

Our children, for whom we are corporate parents, continue to make progress in their education this academic year.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. In the summer of 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that the role of Virtual School Headteachers would be expanded once again, this

time to cover all children with a social worker. The expanded role would bring extra responsibilities around the education of children on a Child Protection Plan and Children in Need Plan. The new duties are not the same as they are for looked-after children, because we are not the corporate parent for the new children. The role focuses on a strategic oversight of cases, providing challenge and support to schools and social workers where necessary.

2. To support this expansion, the DfE also announced a grant to fund extra capacity in Virtual Schools. We used the grant to secure the services of Helen Priest, a recently retired and very experienced Virtual School Headteacher to become the education lead for Children in Need. Helen joined the team on 1 September 2021, expecting to work for two days a week.
3. Just as Helen joined, we received more than 600 Afghan arrivals into the City, of which around 250 were school age. Helen and I quickly found that our roles expanded enormously as we needed to source education for all the children. We both needed to work four days a week instead of two to deal with the volume of extra work.
4. We quickly had to decide how to meet the children's educational needs in the short and medium term. We had limited information from the families. What became clear was that they had a wide range of education experience in Afghanistan, but mainly low or no English language skills. The same was true of the parents.
5. We decided to set up a learning centre in the City where we could start English as an Additional Language (EAL) teaching and try to prepare the children to join schools. We had to find a suitable nearby venue, determine a structure for delivering lessons, commission a teaching team, and consider all the logistics that contribute to successfully establishing what was effectively a small school.
6. Working with conference and event group, etc.venues, we rented an old tea warehouse which had been newly refurbished as offices and meeting rooms – perfect for teaching our children and easy to get to. We commissioned Winchmore Tutors to deliver teaching to the children in two shifts of three hours a day each. We purchased all the materials needed to run a school and then planned how we would organise registration and helping children find their way to the centre.
7. We were successful in doing all this due to the wonderful support we had from partners, both within the Corporation and beyond. The Procurement team and our lawyers helped arrange contracts in time. We were able to tap into a pool of volunteers who did travel training and chaperoning with the children and parents. The Guilds were also supportive – for example, when we asked for help in obtaining school uniforms, we received donations which meant we could procure uniforms for all the children when they started at their new schools. We also commissioned support with parental communications from a charity called Paiwand. This is a charity that works with Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Their education lead continues to be invaluable for facilitating

communication between Virtual School headteachers, the schools and the parents.

8. As soon as the centre was open and running smoothly, we had to start planning for phase two – to get all the children registered in schools. Registration had to happen by 9 October 2021 in order for schools to receive funding for the new students from April 2022. We had to negotiate with schools in Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Islington, and Southwark as well as the Aldgate School here in the City. We were supported by the Education team here and by some amazing headteachers who went above and beyond expectations to extend a warm welcome to our new arrivals. We then had to work quickly with a uniform supplier who measured all the children and supplied their uniforms for each school. Again, we used wonderful volunteers to help children and parents work out their new bus routes to the different schools.
9. All this was achieved in the first six weeks of this academic year.
10. After half term, all the children started in their schools. We were able to use the funding we had received to maintain the teaching team from Winchmore. This time, they were allocated to all the schools to provide in-situ support. Schools were also given per-pupil funding through us to help them with their additional staffing costs and the cost of free school meals.
11. Once we had all the Primary and Secondary children placed, we had to sort out education for the 16- to 18-year-olds who were all placed into colleges in the area.
12. Helen and I have continued to keep in touch with the schools and colleges to iron out any issues and to monitor how well students have settled in. We also delivered training to some of the schools to help them understand the trauma the children have suffered in escaping from Afghanistan, and that they continue to suffer as they await transfer to more permanent housing.
13. The children are very keen to learn. When we visited one school a couple of weeks ago, the children were excited to see us and show us how much their English skills had progressed in speaking and listening, and also in reading and writing too.
14. We are just starting to plan a celebration event to bring together all the children and parents, possibly at the City of London School for Boys. This would take place in July, subject to confirmation.
15. The day-to-day work of the Virtual School continues. For Helen, that is about advising on a handful of cases of Children in Need. Within the directorate, we established a system to manage her involvement in cases as her work straddles education and social care, and she needs to work with a range of professionals. There is a referral process that social workers follow, and oversight comes through me and the social work team leader.

16. The funding for Helen's post has been extended for another year. I will report further on how we plan to manage the extended role in a future meeting.
17. The looked-after children cohort remains fairly stable. So far this year there have been four new arrivals, which is lower than in previous years. Schools and colleges are running as normal. I monitor teacher absence at the termly Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings. To date there has been little impact of staff absence on our children who continue to generally make good progress.
18. Attendance is always a key focus. For the second year running I am using an incentive of vouchers for those who end the year above 90% attendance. Most of the learners are above this figure, but some are not. I work closely with the social workers and the education settings to investigate absences and keep on top of trends. I know in detail which student's attendance is rising or falling, and why.
19. The Virtual School Dashboard is attached below as Appendix 1. This shows the breakdown of the cohort by key stage and gives a summary of PEP and attendance data.

Options

20. N/A

Proposals

21. N/A

Key Data

22. See Dashboard at Appendix 1.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

23. Financial implications – N/A

24. Resource implications – the additional responsibilities of the Virtual School are funded by a DfE Grant.

25. Legal implications – N/A

26. Risk implications – N/A

27. Equalities implications – N/A

28. Climate implications – N/A

29. Security implications – N/A

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Virtual School Dashboard

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Appendix 1

Virtual School Dashboard 2021–22

29/03/2022

Key Stage	Number on roll	Number in school/ college/ uni	Working or training	Tuition class	NEET	New/ to be placed	Missing	CiN/ CP
EYFS	0	0				0	0	2
KS1	0	0				0	0	2
KS2	0	0				0	0	8
KS3	1	1				0	0	5
KS4	2	2		0	0	0	0	3
KS5	19	17	0	0	1	1	0	2
18–25	45	26	10	0	9	0	0	n/a
Total	67	46	10	0	10	1	0	22

Arrivals since start of academic year

4

PEPs								
Term	Required	Completed so far	% in time	% Good+		Attendance** / <90		Excl
Term 1	19	19	100%	75%		89%	7 of 20	0
Term 2	16	12	75%	68%		90%	8 of 20	0
Term 3	16	0	-	-		-	-	-
% attended by AR this year to date		78%						

Ofsted ratings*	
Outstanding	43%
Good	24%
Requires Improvement	33%
Inadequate	0%

67% good or better

% making expected progress		
No	Yes	TBC
10%	72%	18%
Based on information in PEP meetings		

Notes:

Ofsted ratings are for those in education up to Key Stage 5 = 21 learners

PEP % in time – the deadline is the end of term, which is this week.

Three PEPs not completed and one due this week.