

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board

Scrutiny Review – Virtual School
TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Background

The Virtual School provides guidance and support to Headteachers, designated teachers and class teachers, School Governors, support services, social workers, carers and adoption services in order to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for children looked after. In Calderdale there are currently 347 children who are looked after, approximately 60% of whom are of statutory school age, (as December 2019).

The vision of the Virtual School is that all children who are looked after receive the best education and support, so that they are successful learners, positive citizens, creative individuals and aspirational about their futures. The service ensures that schools and other educational settings are positive, safe and understanding environments, where everyone involved is doing all they can to ensure education is a positive aspect of each child's life.

The Virtual School presented its annual report to the Corporate Parenting Panel in January 2020, where the service capacity and limited resource available, was raised an issue following changes to national legislation. The service has had no increased capacity to support children from the early years through to post-16. The service welcomes the review and sees this as an opportunity to consider new and alternative ways of working; the service has undertaken some internal changes to ensure efficiencies already, such as: changes to posts within the team, learning from other neighbouring authorities, etc. The pressures the service faces are not dissimilar from the regional picture, but the Virtual School is an important factor in the holistic approach to supporting children who are looked after in Calderdale.

2. Review Membership

Members: Councillor Howard Blagbrough, Councillor Helen Rivron and Councillor Colin Raistrick.

The Members of the Review Group were appointed at the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board on 5th February 2020. Members agreed to appoint one (additional) Member to this Review Group, outside of the formal meeting.

3. Review Objectives

This review will mainly focus on the challenges the service is facing with regards to staffing capacity and resource. Changes in the national guidance require the Virtual School to support children and young people from 0 – 19 years, which has increased the staffing caseload, the range of support required and how this is provided. Since the changes in legislation, there has been no increased capacity.

The Virtual School Head and Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion welcome the opportunity to do things differently, consider alternative approaches to the range of support the service provides to children in Calderdale, as well as consideration being given to recruitment/retention opportunities and other efficiencies through this review.

- a) To fully understand the existing pressures and gaps within the Virtual School (increased caseload and staffing resource/capacity) and the impact that this has on children who are looked after in Calderdale;

- b) To identify any gaps within the existing service structure and consider the resource and financial implications (such as: use of funding, staffing, non-teaching qualifications for specific posts, etc.);
- c) Review the relationship between the Virtual School, Fostering Service and Children's Social Care in terms of supporting children who are looked after;
- d) Consider new and alternative ways to support early years children who are looked (specifically 0 – 3 years) and how best to work in partnership with other organisations to ensure added value and no duplication;
- e) Evaluate and implement support for children who are looked after at post-16 to ensure continuation from Years 12 to 13;
- f) Review learning from other authorities who are undertaking successful work for early years and post-16 and consider how different approaches to this work could be implemented.

4. Key Participants

- Virtual School
- Young people (through facilitation at 'Thursday Club')
- Calderdale Schools (representatives will be asked to attend a focused session)
- Fostering and Children's Social Care (Children Looked After Pod) Representatives
- Designated teachers for looked-after and previously looked-after children

5. Methodology

- A series of focused meetings to interview key representatives and partner organisations.
- Desktop research and analysis; including national guidance, learning from other local authorities etc.
- Formulate a report with findings and recommendations, which will be submitted to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board.

6. Resources & Timescales

The Review will be Member-led and supported by the Scrutiny Team.

A final report will be considered by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board in April 2020.