

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

DATE: 11 November 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director - Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Halton's Virtual School Annual Report 2023-24

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide the board with the Headteacher of the Virtual School's Annual Report 2023-24 on the educational outcomes and achievement for Halton's Children in Care, and the school's wider work across children's services.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

- i) Note the information provided; and**
- ii) Accept the Headteacher of the Virtual School's annual report as an accurate account of the performance on the education outcomes and achievement of Halton Children in Care.**

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 2023-24.

3.2 The work of the Virtual School has continued throughout the academic year and the full annual report provides detailed analysis of how Halton's Children in Care have performed against each of the individual key performance indicators, as well as a summary of the Virtual School's progress towards its identified key priorities for the academic year 2023-24 and the priorities for the Virtual School in 2024-25.

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 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, for the staffing required to carry out its duties to a high and effective standard, and the ability to commission specialist services such as psychological assessments, for example, as well as provide direct curriculum support for the children and young people. There is currently an agreement that this funding will remain in place until 2025 but that it will be reviewed to take into account other national budgetary changes and pressures. However, in recent years the remit of the Virtual School has only expanded and there is an expectation that this will continue.
- 5.2 Nevertheless, 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. Since Halton's ILACS inspection in 2020, the Virtual School has added more capacity in order to keep delivering its very good work, so the grant funding has been used to meet this suggestion (details of the staffing structure are contained within the full annual report). If the grant funding used by the Virtual School ceases this will have a direct impact on its capacity to meet not only the statutory requirements but continue to deliver its Ofsted validated bespoke support model to Halton's children in care and our wider duties. 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 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

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.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

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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.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The educational outcomes for children in care, care leavers, post looked after children and those with a social worker remain a key priority for the council.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Our most vulnerable children and young people will be able to make choices that mean that they can thrive and achieve. Children and young people will feel heard and have a positive experience of their time in education, they will be supported in realising their aspirations and feel supported to achieve. Young people will have positive experiences of growing up in Halton and be equipped for adult life.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None identified.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Due to their lived experiences Children in Care can be at higher risk of child criminal and sexual exploitation, and episodes of missing from care or school. Research does indicate that these factors, along with poor school attendance, 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.

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. The expanded remit of the Virtual School is working with wider children's Services and partners to mitigate this risk and therefore a risk assessment is not required.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Children in Care and care experience young people continue to be vulnerable groups 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 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

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

None under the meaning of the Act.
