



Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee

**Thursday 18th January 2024, at 6pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley. DY1 1HF**

Agenda - Public Session (Meeting open to the public and press)

1. Apologies for absence
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct
4. [To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2023 \(Pages 4 to 19\)](#)
5. Public Forum
6. [Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker \(Pages 20 to 21\)](#)
7. [Corporate Quarterly Performance Report Quarter 2 \(1st July 2023 to 30th September 2023\) \(Pages 22 to 29\)](#)
8. [Dudley Virtual School – Summary of Annual Report 2022 – 2023 \(Pages 30 to 57\)](#)
9. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days' notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).



Distribution:

Councillor K Lewis (Chair)

Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bayton, R Collins, T Crumpton, P Lee, C Reid, S Ridney, D Stanley, C Sullivan and M Webb.

Invitee: Councillor R Buttery – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Education.

Co-opted Members with voting rights on matters concerning education: -

R May – Archdiocese of Birmingham Education Service Representative

T Reid – Worcester Diocesan Board of Education Representative



Chief Executive

Dated: 10th January 2024

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Minutes of the Children's Services Select Committee

Thursday 16th November 2023 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley

Present:

Councillor K Lewis (Chair)
Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors C Bayton, T Crumpton, P Lee, C Reid, S Ridley and D Stanley.

Officers:

P Bullingham (Head of Family Solutions), V Buchanan (Independent Children's Safeguarding Scrutineer), C Driscoll (Director of Children's Services) K Graham (Service Director of Children's Social Care), J Mupombi (Head of Service for Through Care), M Palfreyman (Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion), S Thirlway (Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions), J Wood (Young Persons Advisor) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

23. Introductions

The Chair invited Officers and Members to introduce themselves.

24. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Sullivan and M Webb.

25. Appointment of Substitute Members

No substitute Members were appointed for this Meeting of the Committee.

26. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor P Lee declared a pecuniary interest as he was engaged as a Dudley Foster Carer.

Councillor K Lewis declared a pecuniary interest as an Early Years Provider.

27. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed.

28. **Public Forum**

No items were raised under this agenda item.

29. **Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker**

The Democratic Services Officers referred to the progress tracker detailing the recommendations and actions from the previous meeting.

Resolved

That the information contained in the Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker, be noted.

30. **Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership (DCSP) Annual Report**

The Independent Children's Safeguarding Scrutineer presented the report submitted, outlining her role.

It was stated that the report was prepared by the Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership (DSPP) Business Support Unit on behalf of the Partnership and recognised the progress the DCSP had made throughout the year and the challenges that remained that would continue to be addressed in 2023/24. As the Independent Scrutineer, V Buchanan had reviewed the report and confirmed that the contents were an accurate record of the activities of the Partnership and its Sub-Groups.

The two bespoke areas of scrutiny conducted on behalf of the Executive during the year, one with Russells Hall Hospital and a second meeting frontline police officers, to consider how they understood and were supported regarding safeguarding issues that they dealt with in their day to day work, following which two reports were prepared and action plans were put in place.

The focus of the Partnership on Restorative and Trauma informed practice was illustrated clearly in the two case studies at the end of the report and the approach had been strengthened by the move towards the Family Safeguarding Model that had recently gone live in Dudley. A report on the impact of the partnership working would be presented in the next annual report.

What was next for the Partnership, the issues to note and the risks to be dealt with as contained in the report submitted were referred to.

Section two of the report provided details of the statutory safeguarding partners including the senior officers in Dudley.

Section two-point three referred to the shared vision of the partnership which included the whole family approach.

Section two-point four outlined the priorities for 2022/2023 which allowed partners to be more flexible and adapt to emerging themes and trends that were referred to in the report.

Section two-point six of the report included the Dudley demographics including census data.

Section three of the report highlighted the data in relation to deprivation, child poverty and family income and it was reported that as at 31st March 2023 there were 252 children subject to child protection plans; 317 as at 31st March 2022 and over the course of the 12 months in the reporting period a total of 627 children had been subject to a plan, 698 in 2021 to 2022, therefore both the end of year total and the 12 month figures had decreased this year. These trends supported the outcome of working with families more restoratively at the child in need stage and reducing the need to enter into child protection. A further decrease was expected with the development of the Family Safeguarding model during 2023.

The progress against priorities of the Partnership and the first annual conference on 5th July 2022 were referred to.

Priority one had included a revision of the Child Neglect Strategy which was formally launched in November 2022 and ensured there was a multi-agency response to cases of neglect or suspected neglect.

Priority two included the work of the Children's exploitation sub-group responsible for delivering that priority which had strong partnership leadership with the voluntary sector and the police co-chairing the sub-group and overseeing the Children's exploitation work plan for the Partnership. Details of the work undertaken were referred to.

Promoting and sharing the language matters document in terms of working with young people at risk of exploitation, moving away from victim blaming language had taken place.

Barnardo's had supported 32 young people around child sexual exploitation and a direct quote from a young person who had received that support was referred to.

Following on from the success of the Partnership conference held in July 2022, partners felt it would be beneficial to have more opportunities to enable more discussion on the progress of priorities. In response, the Partnership organised and held a development workshop on 27th March 2023 with a theme of Think Family, which was well attended.

The Children with Disabilities Team had been part of Children's Services for over 18 months and improvements in service provision were now visible.

The Independent Scrutineer had made a visit to the Council's Corbyn Road facility with the staff speaking positively about the services offered.

Other areas of progress included the development of the Children out of Sight Strategy with safeguarding embedded into that strategy.

The Police had introduced a new internal guide (Aware) that covered the minimum standards of professional curiosity and recommended good practice for all offices when they encounter children.

Section four of the report referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) that oversaw allegations against adults in a position of trust who work or volunteer with children and young people. The management of the allegation process was referred to and it was noted that LADO records were viewed by Ofsted during an inspection in October 2022 and the feedback was that the designated officer service in Dudley responded promptly and robustly to concerns about adults in a position of trust who present risks to children.

Section 5 of the report submitted referred to details of the private fostering arrangements which were made by usually a parent for a child to stay with a friend and the Local Authority having a duty to ensure safety arrangements.

Section six of the report referred to learning from reviews with seven serious incident reviews taking place, however it was reported that the number of reviews tend to fluctuate.

Full details of the review and learning resources were available on the DSPP website.

Audits provided a valuable opportunity to dip sample multi-agency practice on specific themes and for the partnership to be assured about safeguarding practice. The audits highlighted key learning, details of which were included in the report submitted.

Details of multi-agency training and its impact were outlined together with the priorities for 2023/2024.

In conclusion the case studies in Appendix 2 to the report submitted were referred to.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted, Members raised issues and questions and Officers responded where necessary as follows: -

- (a) Councillor D Stanley referred to the high figures in relation to deprivation, raising concerns that they were significantly higher in the Dudley Borough than England and requested confirmation of the work to address deprivation and child poverty.

In response, the Director of Children's Services advised that the issues referred to were within the terms of reference of the Public Health Select Committee and should be scrutinised by them.

- (b) Councillor T Crumpton also raised concerns, referring to the constant corridor of poverty in the Borough and concerns that children within those areas were more likely to suffer exploitation and safeguarding issues.

The Director of Children's Services referred to the previous work of the Committee in relation to child poverty, with Councillor C Bayton raising similar concerns. There was a task and finish group jointly with what was then Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee,

however, with the changes in Select Committees, this area was now within the remit of the Public Health Select Committee and there was the need to ensure that work was not duplicated.

It was noted that the report was a statutory report and the Independent Scrutineer advised that the report included the priorities of the DSPP and the work in relation to whole family different ways of working could be reported on in the next annual report

- (c) Councillor C Bayton referred to the significant number of re-referrals back into early help and requested information on what was in place to address those increases.

Concerns were raised in relation to training data which offered 2068 places of which 1106 were used and only 849 delegates attending courses, and whilst noting the review the training impact process to better inform the Partnership of the impact of its multi-agency training on practice, improving attendance at training was required to better inform the Partnership.

The Independent Scrutineer referred to the reduction in re-referrals in relation to the early help services which had been evidenced by the new ways of working and she was confident that improvements would continue, as percentages of those cases being closed and not re-referring were reducing, with figures being reported on a quarterly basis. Assurances were provided that figures would continue to be monitored. There was also a Performance and Quality Assurance Sub-Group.

It was agreed that those attending training should increase and reports presented quarterly to a Learning and Improvement Sub-Group. There was a commitment to hold partners to account, whilst acknowledging that there would be sickness issues for those unable to attend on the day of the course. Further data would be included in the next annual report.

- (d) Councillor S Ridney questioned whether priority number four related to health professionals failing to engage.

The Independent Scrutineer advised that the gap for 16 to 18-year-olds in health professional attendance at safeguarding meetings had been identified and had now been addressed, with public health commissioning a service to participate.

Resolved

That the Dudley Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report for 2022/23, be received and noted.

31. Education Report

Members considered a report providing an update on the work of the Education outcomes team which consisted of the following: -

- Primary Data overview
- Attendance for 2022/23
- Suspensions Data
- Education Strategy Themes
- Alternative Provision Update
- Inspections

The Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion presented the report submitted and made particular reference to the improving picture regarding the outcomes for children in Dudley in early years and Key Stage 1 and 2. However, it was accepted that work remained as Dudley remained below the national average in most indicators and some data remained affected by Covid.

The school attendance overview was outlined with attendance rates in 2022/23 being 92.5% and in 2021/22 22.5% of pupils were recorded as persistently absent defined by the Department for Education (DfE) as missing 10% or more of possible school sessions.

843 pupils were absent from school in 2022/23 (2%) primarily as a result of anxiety and in some cases for medical reasons with an increase in parents obtaining letters from doctors being evidenced.

There remained a national picture of anxiety and parental anxiety providing the reason why children were not being sent to school, with Dudley continuing to escalate their concerns to the DfE team.

It was noted that attendance was still not back to pre-covid levels of 95% and there had been an increase in legal action and fines for non-attendance which again had been raised with DfE who had responded stating that this reflected the national picture.

The staffing within the attendance team had been increased, as there were concerns that if children were not in school, they remained out of sight and again those concerns had been raised with both the DfE and Ofsted.

The data in relation to those children who were Elective Home Educated (EHE) was reported on and the increase in numbers of those children missing from education (CME) which were averaging 300 each week due to pupils not being on school rolls.

With in year numbers increasing and 100 new arrivals into the borough it was currently part of the Alternative Provision Strategy to investigate how to engage with the new arrival centre, as there was a collective responsibility to promote school attendance.

Exclusions in Dudley remain above the national average with 128 permanent exclusions and 88 being upheld. Prevention methods in relation to permanent exclusions included accessing alternative provision, or prevention work and interventions with the capacity increasing in the Inclusion Team were referred to.

In relation to the Education Strategy Themes there included the need to increase the offer to those not in education, employment, or training earlier with it being recognised that silo working impacted on the outcomes and life chances of children and young people for the future.

There followed an Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy update, with the Strategy being redeveloped to ensure that it was fit for purpose and meeting the needs of children and young people. A secondary headteacher workshop had taken place with every school represented.

The AP Strategy was being developed to be consistent with the principles underpinning the SEND Strategy and the inclusive pathways programme.

There was the need to have a clear ethos and vision for alternative pathways.

There was a plan to pilot the 'Children North East's Poverty Proofing the School Day Programme' in 8 of Dudley's Primary Schools during the current academic year.

There was household support for primary schools of £5,000 and £10,000 for secondary schools each year to support families and children and a report would be presented to the Committee on the above programme following its roll out.

There had been eight Ofsted inspections since September with the local authority maintaining 86% of primary schools rated good or outstanding. Further work was being conducted with academies to provide an offer of help and support by the local authority.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members asked questions and Officers responded as follows: -

- (a) Councillor C Bayton in referring to the poverty proofing work outlined above enquired how that had impacted on the position regarding the affordability of school uniforms.

The Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion advised that the legislation had changed and only a certain proportion of the school uniform now needed to be branded and the work outlined above had impacted on the provision of school uniforms.

Councillor C Bayton also commented that one way of dealing with poverty was to improve education and the academic skills base referring to the challenges faced by the authority in achieving this.

- (b) Councillor C Reid suggested that information in relation to the entitlement to free school meals be made available for those families who faced language barriers.

The Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion referred to the new Arrival Centre and discussions that had been entered into with some headteachers in relation to documentation being developed and there was the ambition to establish base provision on school sites on what was available and how to access that provision.

- (c) Councillor C Crumpton referred to the work being conducted in his Ward which had been welcomed, however he referred to those with mental health issues including those with children with mental health needs and the help and information required for parents to navigate what help and services were available to deal with mental health issues.

The Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion referred to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service waiting lists, advising that some schools employed counselling staff which was having a positive impact. However, the provision of counselling staff would not be an option for every school. There were issues at national level and it was agreed that there was significant change required in the support available to children and parents in relation to mental health issues.

The Director of Children's Services referred to the challenges dealing with mental health and there was work being conducted at a national level to increase resources. There was the requirement to ensure that the correct level of emotional health and wellbeing support was offered with a real focus on partners having a consistent approach and providing early help. An information leaflet on pathways, and this had been circulated to all schools.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the issue of mental health would be a programme of work for the Public Health Select Committee who had the power to engage with mental health partners.

- (d) In responding to a question from Councillor D Stanley in relation to the household support fund for schools, it was confirmed that the money was utilised for services in Dudley schools and could not be utilised for schools outside of the borough. The funding provided was also audited.
- (e) Councillor S Ridney suggested that free school meals should be available for all primary school aged children and details of those services that were free for parents such as free school meals should be readily available to prevent the embarrassment caused to parents. It was stated that some funding was now available to provide extra family support workers, which was welcomed.
- (f) In responding to a question from Councillor C Reid, the Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion stated that the Local Authority had no jurisdiction to force schools not to use logos on school uniforms.

In responding to a further question, the Director of Children's Services stated that schools would be unable to employ a child mental health nurse as this would be on an NHS foundation requiring clinical supervision.

The Chair confirmed that she supported the comments and suggestions in relation to school uniforms.

Resolved

That the information contained in the report submitted on Education Outcomes, be noted.

32. **Family Hubs and Start of Life Information and Update Report.**

The Head of Service – Family Solutions presented the report submitted referring to an overview of the development and recent progress of the Dudley Family Hubs and Start of Life Programme, referring to the steps taken to achieve a successful launch and how the service would be developed across the Borough.

The Head of Service – Family Solutions reported that he was the Officer overseeing the implementation of the Family Hubs whilst also supporting them, with the Hubs providing strong opportunities to connect for people.

The Family Hubs provided a wide range of services including those for health and wellbeing, finance, school readiness, emotional support, and better outcomes for early years.

The five Family Hubs had been launched in August for families and young people with those entering the Hubs feeling part of their community.

Investment had been obtained from the DfE for the Family Hubs particularly for three years to provide services for families and children with specialist strands of services being delivered within the programme including midwifery and supporting opportunities for families to reduce the pressure on children's social care.

There were currently 15 families receiving autism training with the ambition to grow the 0 to 19 offer.

Partners in the voluntary community sector had been requested to join in the vision to create wrap around support system.

Practitioners had been trained in a number of areas including parenting and healthy eating.

Staff at the Family Hubs had the ability to drive down to grass route level with families and create simple access points to support.

The aims and goals of the programme which included a Start for Life Programme which was a sustainable model looking at parents, early support and mental health.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted Members asked questions and responses were provided as follows: -

- (a) Councillor D Stanley requested details of the locations of the Family Hubs.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the locations were in the former Family Centre buildings which had been re-named and re-designed with the ambition to have a bespoke opportunity to have some facilities in Halesowen Leisure Centre.

- (b) In responding to a further question from Councillor D Stanley in relation to finances the Head of Service – Family Solutions reported that £2.5m was available from the DfE to support a range of staff that equated to £500k each year to sustain the model until 2025, with assurances being provided that work and processes were being examined to investigate longer term arrangements on how to sustain the model going forward.
- (c) In response to a question from Councillor C Reid, the Head of Service – Family Solutions advised that each Hub invested time, energy and resources to notify local residents of the services available, including events, and publishing leaflets with the aim to build on the offer going forward.

Members would be provided with leaflets in order to inform their local residents of the offer available at the Hubs.

- (d) In response to a query from Councillor T Crumpton, the Director of Children's Services referred to the invitations that had been emailed to Members to attend the Family Hubs, that was referred to in the Committee's Progress Tracker.
- (e) Councillor T Crumpton referred to the need to work with Members who could provide details of small voluntary groups who could support the Family Hubs.

- (f) In response to a question from Councillor S Ridney, it was confirmed that Housing Colleagues were integrating with Family Hubs, providing advice and information when required to do so.
- (g) In response to a request from Councillor P Lee, it was agreed that details of the dates available to Members to attend the Family Hubs would be emailed again to Members.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on Family Hubs and Start of Life Information and Update report, be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Service – Family Solutions be requested to provide Members with leaflets in relation to the Family Hubs to distribute to their constituents.
- (3) That the Democratic Services Officer be requested to email to Members details of the dates available to them to attend the Family Hubs.

33. Care Experienced Young Adults Accommodation.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the delivery of accommodation to Care Experienced Young Adults as well as provide a response to the Committee's recommendations to improve suitability of accommodation for this cohort of young people.

The Head of Service for Through Care presented the report submitted making specific reference to the 274-care experienced young adults in Dudley being supported up until the age of 25. 22 individuals were currently in accommodation identified as unsuitable with 252 in suitable accommodation.

The graph setting out the summary of young people in suitable accommodation as contained in the report submitted was referred to and it was noted that care experienced young adults living in Dudley had housing priority status. That status did not however extend to care experienced young adults who were living outside Dudley.

It was reported that not all children in care and care experienced young adults wished to live independently. The Staying Put arrangement and supported accommodation arrangements were referred to along with the

specialist accommodation for young people who may have a disability or need support with mental health problems.

It was further reported that where a care experienced young person was in custody, they were allocated a Young Persons Advisor, who worked collaboratively with Youth Justice or Probation Services and Housing to ensure that suitable accommodation and support was offered when released from custody.

The new Standards and Inspection Framework for Supported Accommodation providers produced by Ofsted in November 2022 was referred to, with providers required to register their provision with Ofsted.

The DfE had provided a grant to mitigate the implications for the registration of supported accommodation.

The Young Persons Advisor presented that part of the report dealing with Homelessness Prevention and her role, advising of the work undertaken to bridge the gap with housing for the young people who were in unsuitable accommodation working collaboratively with multi-agencies and the Dudley Housing Team.

The two Homeless Workers within the Housing Team were referred to and it was noted that they notified the YPA when a young person was due to be released from custody in order that a package of support could be put in place which included work with the Housing Team and the Anti-Social Behaviour Team should any issues arise providing a holistic approach to any such situations to prevent homelessness.

In relation to the next steps contained in the report submitted, work was continuing across the region with other local authorities and Trusts. There continued to be a focus on reducing the numbers of care experienced young adults who were at risk of homelessness and those in unsuitable accommodation. That work was boosted by the presence of a Homelessness Prevention YPA and closer collaboration with all Local Authority departments and key partner agencies, including commissioner services through the Transitions Panel as well as targeted work with young people.

Work had commenced prior to young people leaving care with tenancy workshops taking place and the provision of a set up a home grant. The work of Councillor P Bradley within the Corporate Parenting Board Skills Working Group was referred to.

A new joint New Housing Protocol for care experienced young people with Housing and Commissioning colleagues had recently been drafted. Consultations had taken place with care experienced young adults during Care Leavers week in October 2023. Supported Accommodation providers were also being consulted on their views.

The Council Priorities and Projects as contained in the report submitted were referred to.

- (a) Councillor C Reid referred to some specific cases of care leavers within her Ward and in response, the Head of Through Care undertook to discuss individual cases outside the meeting.

The Service Director for Children's Social Care referred to the Staying Put arrangements and it was noted that young people were supported up until the age of 25.

The work with other authorities where care experienced young adults were placed was referred to with Dudley wishing to be in the position where any children who were placed in Dudley could be worked with. It was emphasised that Dudley children were a priority for the service.

- (b) In responding to questions raised by Councillor C Bayton, the Service Director for Children's Social Care stated that all providers of supported accommodation within the Dudley Borough had registered their provisions with Ofsted, with the West Midlands being the most reactive region to register their supported accommodation.

Each Authority prioritised their own children with no reciprocal arrangement in place. There were however good relationships with Walsall and Staffordshire authorities in relation to Dudley children placed in their authorities and their children placed in Dudley.

The types of accommodation that are not judged as suitable included sofa surfing at various properties.

There were 13 young people in custody and again that was unsuitable accommodation.

- (c) Councillor C Bayton requested that future reports include the types of unsuitable accommodation that young people were living in.
- (d) In response to a question from Councillor P Lee, the Head of Through Care advised that once a foster child reached the age of 18, Foster Carers continued to receive state allowances whilst that young person

remained in education, and young people who wished to leave their Foster Carers at 18 were provided with opportunities to change their minds and either enter into a Staying Put arrangement or where it was safe to do so return to their parents.

Once a young person reaches the age of 18 they were classed as an adult on a legal basis, however assurances were provided that YPA's would continue to work with them. The service was currently in the process of recruiting an Emotional Wellbeing Care worker to work with care experienced young people, however it was reported that fostering care rates would not continue after a child reached the age of 18.

- (e) Councillor D Stanley referred the service to Churches Housing Association of Dudley and District (CHADD), who provided accommodation for young people within the Borough.

Resolved

- (1) That the report submitted on Care Experienced Young Adults Accommodation, be noted.
- (2) That future reports on Care Experienced Young Adults accommodation included details of specific accommodation that was unsuitable.

34. **Closing Remarks of the Chair**

The Chair wished Members and Officers a happy Christmas and New Year.

35. **Questions from Members to the Chair under (Council Procedure Rule 11.8)**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.25pm

CHAIR

Children's Services Select Committee

Progress Tracker

| Subject (Date of Meeting) | Recommendation/action | Responsible Officer/Area | Status/Notes |
|---|--|---|--|
| (11 th September 2023) – Children's Services Select Committee Progress Tracker | Minute No. 17 Resolution (2) – J Branch be requested to determine the position in relation to DBS checks for Members and details of the criteria required. | Assistant Director People and Inclusion | A briefing note will be forwarded to Members following the review of the policy on DBS checks. |
| (16 th November 2023) Family Hubs and Start of Life Information and Update. | Minute No. 32 Resolution (2) - That Members be provided with leaflets in relation to the Family Hubs to distribute to their constituents. | Head of Service – Family Solutions | The Leaflets have been printed and should have been placed into Members pigeon holes at the Council House by the date of this meeting. |
| | Minute No. 32 Resolution (3) – Details of the dates available for Members to attend the Family Hubs be forwarded to Members | The Democratic Services Officers | Details of the dates were emailed to Members on 31 st October and 17 th November 2023. |

Future Business 2023/24

| <u>Date of Meeting</u> | <u>Work Programme</u> | <u>Responsible Officer/Area</u> | <u>Notes</u> |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| 11th March, 2024 | Education Report | Director of Children's Services | |
| | Child Friendly Dudley | Director of Children's Services | |
| | Learning in relation to Complaints through the Centre for Professional Practice | Director of Children's Services | |
| | | | |

Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee – 18th January 2024

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 2 (1st July 2023 to 30th September 2023)

Purpose of report

1. To present the Quarter 2 position for Children's Services of the financial year 2023/24 covering the period 1st July to 30th September 2023.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Children's Services Select Committee review the contents of this report and that any identified performance issues are referred to the relevant Cabinet Member.

Background

3. The Quarter 2 performance report incorporates quarterly key performance measures.

Within Children's Services there are five (5) Performance Indicators across two (2) Council Priorities:

Dudley the safe and healthy borough– 4 measures
Dudley the Borough of Opportunity – 1 measure

Sub-Headings

4. **Performance Summary**

Dudley the safe and healthy borough

PI.1447 - % of agency workers

Target = **15%**
Q2 2023/24 position = 18.8%

Whilst there has been a recent reduction in the proportion of the workforce employed through agency, there are continuing initiatives to tackle this and further develop the workforce for the future. These initiatives include;

- Deployment of Market Forces Supplement to recruit front line roles; effectiveness being seen in substantive recruitment.
- Expanding our commitment to 'growing our own' social workers – recent employment of a number of ASYE social workers..

Note, higher rate of agency staffing during Q1, was as a result of high rates of overall vacancies, where one on four social worker posts were vacant at December 2022.

PI.432 - Number of Looked After Children per 10,000 of the child population

Target = **83**
Q2 2023/24 position = 84.2

Our rates of children looked after are continuing to reduce and are now coming more into line with our target. This is due to a decrease in the number of children entering care alongside an increase in the number of children ceasing.

We are continuing to work with the courts to ensure that SGO applications and care order discharges are progressing in a timely manner to ensure permanency is achieved earlier for our children looked after cohort.

PI.433 Number of children subject to child protection plan per 10,000 of the child population

Target = **43.0**
Q2 2023/24 position = 22.4

Our rates of children subject to a Child Protection Plan have been on a downward trend over the last 5 years and our rate is now lower than that of all of our comparator groups.

Work has been undertaken to ensure that our reduction is appropriate and that the correct children are being made subject to a Child Protection Plan

or that other appropriate services and actions are being undertaken where Child Protection Plans are not being utilised.

PI. 2250 % of closed Early Help Cases that were not open to Level 4 Services less than 6 months after closure.

Target = **90%**

Q2 2023/24 position = 95.5%

Continued high performance on this measure indicates that families are closed at the appropriate time when there is confidence that any changes made can be sustained without early help support. A consistently high percentage of families do not escalate to level 4 once early help work has closed which indicates effectiveness of early help interventions on tackling concerns at a lower level and prevents escalation into statutory services.

Q2 2023/24 Summary

Of the five (5) Performance Indicators, four (4) have shown an improvement when compared to Quarter 1 and one (1) has remained consistent.

Service interventions put in place previously and those that are ongoing during 2023/24 have had a positive impact on performance, with a steady senior workforce contributing to driving improvements across Children Services.

5. There are no alternative options to be made in receiving this report.

Finance

6. There are no direct financial implications in receiving this report.

Law

7. There are no direct legal implications in receiving this report.

Risk Management

8. The current performance reporting period, risk management is contained and reviewed in the performance reporting, however as part of the new risk management framework approved at audit and standards committee, risk reporting will not sit within performance and each directorate will need to develop a risk register for monitoring purposes.

Equality Impact

9. There are no special considerations to be made with regard to equality and diversity in noting and receiving this report.

No proposals have been carried out.

No proposals have been made, therefore does not impact on children and young people.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

10. There are no specific direct human resource issues in receiving this report. In terms of the Council's sickness level and the management of attendance, the HR and OD team continues to work with Directors and Heads of Service to assist and provide support in tackling those areas identified as having high levels of sickness.

Commercial/Procurement

11. There is no direct commercial impact.

Environment/Climate Change

12. There is not impact on the environment or climate change.

Council Priorities and Projects

13. Within Children's Services there are five (5) Performance Indicators across two (2) Council Priorities:

Dudley the safe and healthy borough– 4 measures
Dudley the Borough of Opportunity – 1 measure

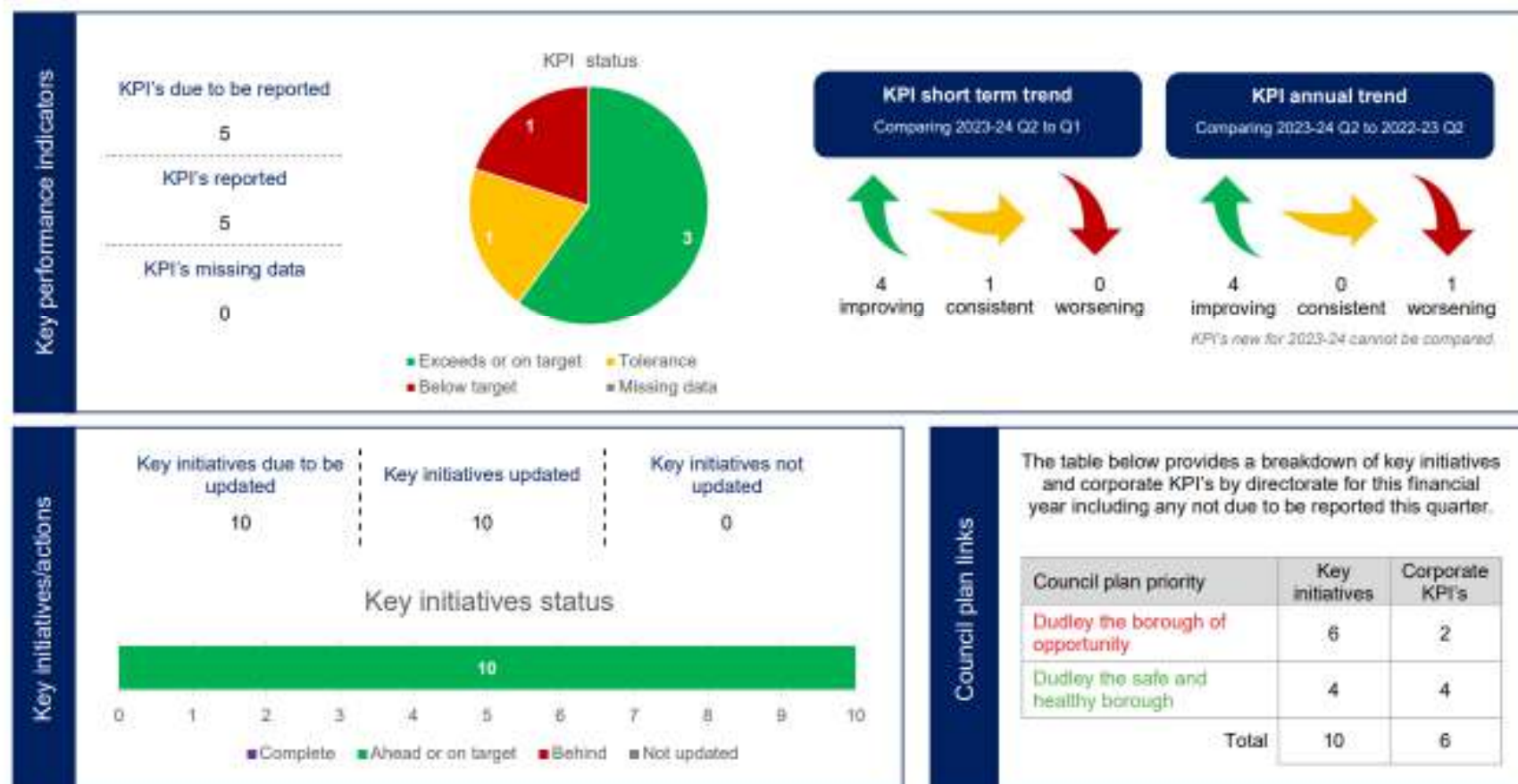


Director of Children's Services

Report Author: Matthew Smith
Telephone: 01384 817895
Email: matthew.smith@dudley.gov.uk

Children's Services overview

The following pages provide a dashboard overview for the directorate of Children's Services. They show the status of corporate key performance indicators and of key initiatives/actions being delivered. KPI scorecards are used to report and monitor performance outcomes for the given quarter along with exception commentary for those measures below target.



Children's Services scorecard

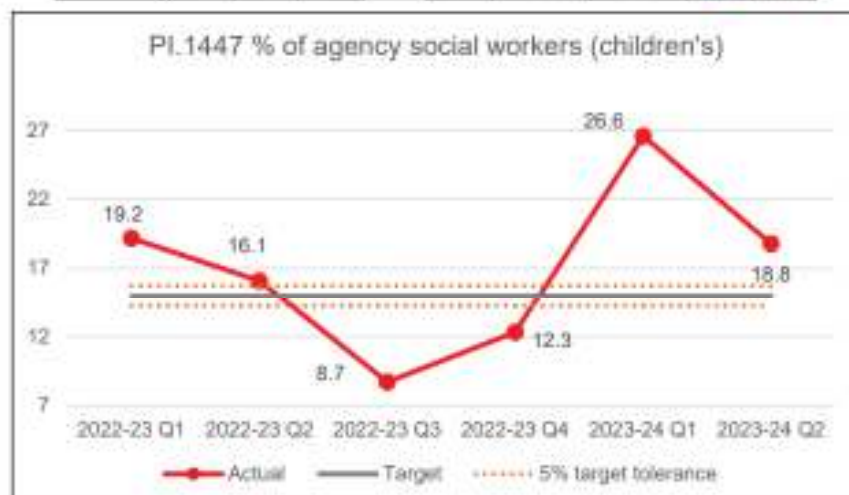
| | Performance Indicator | 2022-23 | | | | 2023-24 | | | | | | Benchmarking comparator data |
|------------------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|--------------|--|
| | | Qtr. 1 outturn | Qtr. 2 outturn | Qtr. 3 outturn | Qtr. 4 outturn | Qtr. 1 outturn | Qtr. 2 outturn | Target | Score | Short term trend | Annual trend | |
| Borough of opportunity | PI.126 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) | 2% | 2.5% | 2.4% | 3.1% | 3.2% | 1.3% (56 / 7,459) | 2.8% | ★ | ↗ | ↗ | 2.2% West Midlands regional data |
| | PI.1447 % of agency social workers (children's) | 19.2% | 16.1% | 8.7% | 12.3% | 26.6% | 18.8% (26.8 / 142.5) | 15% | ▲ | ↗ | ↘ | 17.6% Top Quartile LAIT Annual Figure |
| Safe & healthy | PI.432 Number of children looked after per 10,000 of the population | 85.2 | 88.9 | 88.8 | 86.2 | 84.2 | 84.2 (576 / 66,446) | 83 | ● | → | ↗ | 70 Top Quartile LAIT Annual Figure |
| | PI.433 Number of children subject to child protection plan per 10,000 of the child population | 38.2 | 37.5 | 39.5 | 36.8 | 28.3 | 22.4 (153 / 66,446) | 43 | ★ | ↗ | ↗ | 42.1 Top Quartile LAIT Annual Figure |
| | PI.2250 % of closed Early Help Cases that were not open to Level 4 Services less than 6 months after closure | 92.6% | 92.3% | 92.5% | 94.2% | 94.9% | 95.5% (1,565 / 1,638) | 90% | ★ | ↗ | ↗ | Local measure, no external benchmarking available. |

Short term trend compares current quarter with previous quarter within the same year. Annual trend compares the same quarter between years.

Children's Services exception commentary

PI.1447 % of agency social workers (children's)

| PI | 2022-23 | | | | 2023-24 | | | | |
|---------|---------|------|-----|------|---------|-----------|--------|---|---|
| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 | Quarter 2 | | | |
| | | | | | | Outturn | Target | S | T |
| PI.1447 | 19.2 | 16.1 | 8.7 | 12.3 | 26.6 | 18.8% | 15% | ▲ | ➡ |



Impact: what are the issues/risks for service delivery?

As we begin to consolidate a permanent workforce, children are less likely to experience a change of social worker. The implementation of our redesign has been well received; the new structure enables children to remain with their social work team (rather than move teams with our 'process').

Performance: what is the data telling us?

We have seen a consistent reduction in the cohort of agency social workers; importantly, this is in the context too of reduction of posts that are vacant (i.e. neither an agency nor permanent SW in post). As at end September, our vacancy rate was 7.1%. Our new intake of ASYE social workers (first year post qualifying) will be taking up their posts as we move into Q3.

Assurance: evidence that actions are in place and having an impact

The new Advanced Practitioner Posts in each team have enabled expert practitioners to remain working directly with children; we were able to recruit 10 of these staff internally, recognising their practitioner skill. We have secured a full cohort of ASYE social workers. We have 20 staff who are practice educators (can take students) and a further 16 in training, which will continue to support our capacity to have students.

Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee - January 18th 2024

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Dudley Virtual School – Summary of Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Purpose of report

- 1 This report is to advise and inform the Select Committee of the work of the Virtual School, programme of activities, systems and processes that are being developed to improve outcomes and enhance learning of Children In Care.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that members note the contents of this report and the actions being taken to improve the outcomes of Dudley CiC pupils. The Board may then wish to receive a future report scrutinising particular aspects in more depth.

Background

3. Dudley Virtual School is a statutory service which exists to support and challenge all those involved in the children in care. The Virtual School supports children looked after in education from 2 years old to 18 years old, with the aim to raise standards and improve educational outcomes.

It has been a busy yet successful year for the Virtual School, our aim and vision to raise the academic outcomes of all children in care is unwavering. This report will include report on progress, performance and development of the Virtual School. It is also an opportunity to share our children's outcomes and achievements and share work undertaken by the Virtual School this year.

Sub-Headings

4 4.1 Academic Outcomes for Children in care

The Virtual School tracks and monitors attainment and progress throughout each term. The attainment data is collected via the PEP and then tracked and analysed by the education advisors. Then formally data is collected for the end of Early Years, phonics screening in Year 1, end of key stage 2 and 4 and post 16.

Early Years Foundation Stage Results

Children are defined as having reached a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage if they have achieved the expected level for the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in the prime areas of learning and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.

This year 26.7% of CiC achieved GLD, this a drop compared to 2022 where 40% achieved the standard. The attainment gap has widened and the drop in attainment has been more significant for our children in care in Dudley than any other cohort, when comparing with regional and National CLA and all Dudley children, despite targeted SMART interventions planned in the PEPs during the reception year. However, it is important to note that this is a small cohort of children, and each child represents 6.6%.

It is also important to note that the attainment gap is lessened in the three prime areas: communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. These areas are fundamental to a broad and balanced base of learning for children. The EYFS states that they are 'crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive'.

40% of children the communication and language standard, 46.6% achieved the physical development standard and 53.3% of children achieved the personal, social and emotional development standard.

Phonics Screening Results

This year the children achieving the phonics standard is a very positive picture and continues is a continuing upwards trend from previous years.

The 2023 pass rate for all Dudley CiC is 70.8%, and our OC2 cohort achieved considerable higher with 90.9%.

When comparing our results with other CiC cohorts our full Dudley CiC cohort continues to achieve better than regional and national CiC, 7.8% higher than West Midlands CiC and 11.8% higher than National CiC. The OC2 cohort not only outperformed all CiC both regionally and nationally but also achieved higher than all Dudley children.

Key Stage 2 SATs Results

The SATs tests for Year 6 children took place in May 2023, children were tested on reading, maths and English grammar (SPaG). English writing and Science levels are reported as a teacher assessment judgement.

There were thirty-three children, sixteen males and seventeen females in the Year 6 cohort. 66.6% being educated in Dudley Schools and 33.3% out of borough.

There has been a reduction in the number of children with Special Educational needs within the 2022 -2023 Year Six cohort. This year 30.3% of our students are identified as either SEND or have an EHCP, compared with 60% of children in 2021 - 2022. This reduction in SEN is also observed in the school placements of our children, where we see a reduction in the numbers attending Special educational providers. The overall numbers attending these settings remains low overall at only 3%.

42.4% of children achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. Whilst this is 12.5% below the number of children achieving this standard over all in Dudley, it is 8.2% greater than last year in 2022, the attainment gap is narrowing.

When analysing these separately the children achieved better in reading with 57.6% achieving the standard. Compared with 54.4% in writing and 51.5% in maths. All of these subjects are showing an upwards trend when comparing the last three years of data. (2022, 2019 and 2018).

Key Stage Four Results

This year is the first round of GCSE summer exams without significant adaptations or allowances made for lost learning time since the disruption caused by the Covid pandemic. There has been a return to pre-pandemic grading this summer in England with protection in place for students. The DfE have stated: There has been a return to pre-pandemic grading this summer in England with protection in place for students. It is most meaningful to compare results to 2019, the last summer exam series before the pandemic.

Overall, Nationally GCSE results are similar to 2019. Outcomes at grade 7 and above are 21.6% compared with 20.6% in 2019, and outcomes at grade 4 and above are 67.8% compared with 67.0% in 2019. For our Dudley cohort, the return to pre-pandemic grading appears to have impacted on outcomes this year.

This year there is a full cohort of 56 students. When looking at our full cohort there have been a number of challenges, with some having difficult journeys through their education. There is a higher percentage of young people with an EHCP compared with last year, social care challenges, such as changes in care placements and an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers. For the purpose of the data analysis the focus will be on the OC2 cohort, there are 44 young people in this group. The percentage in this cohort with identified SEND needs or with an EHCP is 52%, this is a higher percentage compared with the 2022 cohort, where 38% were identified as SEND.

Eight, or 34%, of these young people followed a Functional Skills pathway to gain qualifications. All gaining a range of Functional Skills levels in both English and Maths. To alleviate some of the risk of 'lack of readiness to learn' the Virtual School enrolled eight students on the Juniper pathway programme, with aim to achieve Functional Skills qualifications. All but one student achieved at least one functional skills qualification.

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For those taking GCSEs, 12 gained at least a Grade 1 or higher in GCSE English and 14 gained at least a grade 1 in maths GCSE. Two of the young people didn't achieve any qualifications, for both these young people there were considerable barriers to accessing education and exams. Our Non-SEN cohort performed better with 90.4% being entered for GCSE exams and the same percentage achieving grade 1 and above in GCSE English and maths.

With the national focus by Department of Education to re-align GCSE performance to those in 2019. Our cohort this year achieved 13.6% in combined English & Maths at Grade 5+ this has maintained the improvements made over the past four years. Compared with the results in 2019 for KS4 where 8.0% achieved English and Maths at Grade 5+.

Whilst National data is still currently unavailable, in 2022 we had 14.3% achieved English and Maths at Grade 5+ compared with 11% national CiC.

Where there is lower percentage of young people achieving grade 4, this is increase in higher grades being achieved and we saw nine students achieving 5 GCSES at 4 and above.

| Category | 2023 Number OC2 cohort | 2023 percent age OC2 cohort | 2022 Number | 2022 percent age | 2021 Number | 2021 percent age | 2020 Number | 2020 percent age |
|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Eng 4+ | 13 | 29.54% | 19 | 45% | 19 | 50% | 19 | 33% |
| Maths 4+ | 11 | 25% | 12 | 28.5% | 17 | 44.7% | 13 | 23% |
| Eng 5+ | 7 | 15.9% | 10 | 24% | 8 | 21% | 11 | 19% |
| Maths 5+ | 8 | 18.18% | 6 | 14% | 12 | 26% | 9 | 16% |
| Eng 6+ | 4 | 9.09% | 2 | 5% | 4 | 10.5% | n/a | n/a |
| Maths 6+ | 4 | 9.09% | 2 | 5% | 3 | 8% | n/a | n/a |
| Eng 7+ | 2 | 4.54% | 1 | 2% | 0 | 0% | n/a | n/a |
| Maths 7+ | 2 | 4.54% | 0 | 0% | 1 | 2.6% | n/a | n/a |
| Eng 8+ | 2 | 4.54% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | n/a | n/a |
| Maths 8+ | 1 | 1.81% | 0 | 0% | 1 | 2.6% | n/a | n/a |
| Eng/Maths 4+ | 7 | 15.9% | 11 | 26% | 14 | 37% | 13 | 23% |
| Eng/Maths 5+ | 6 | 13.6% | 6 | 14.3% | 5 | 12.5% | 7 | 12% |
| E-Bacc Achieved | | | 2 | 5 | 6 | 15 | 7 | 12 |

Post 16 Outcomes

The Post 16 cohort needs to be considered over a three, and sometimes four-year period. There are a number of young people who take longer to navigate their Post 16 pathway due to such issues as mental health problems, changes in educational placements during secondary education, breakdown of residential placements etc – all adversely affecting the continuity of their education. This can, and does lead to disengagement, underachievement in outcomes, a lowering of aspirations and enrolment on inappropriate courses.

The VS has embedded excellent relationships to ensure advice and guidance can meet need and the CYP following successful courses.

The cohort attending FE Colleges fall into two categories. The first, those completing Level 2 by the end of the academic year will move to Level 3 if they want a University Course. These young people will be Year 14 before they conclude Level 3 studies, so the Virtual School is developing work alongside the Care Leavers Team.

The second group, Level 1 Students who are placed on their courses due to their GCSE Results not being at Grade 4 have to complete another year of GCSE.

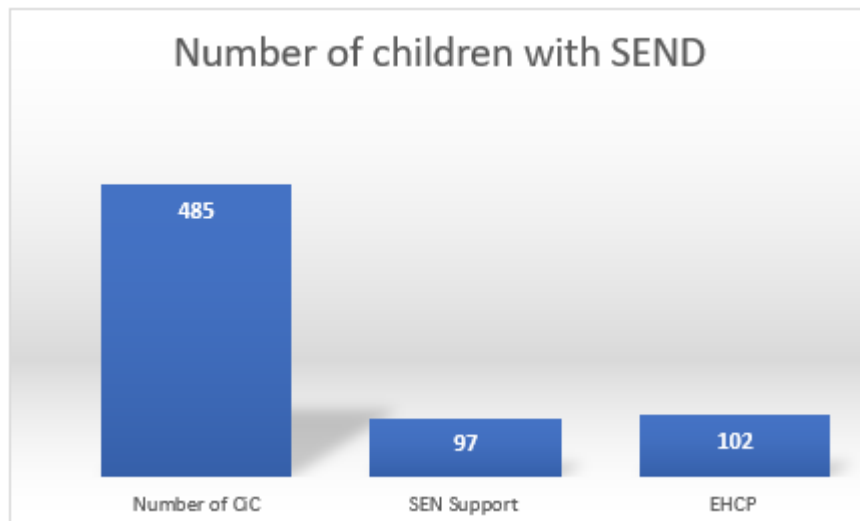
There has been a broadening of employment, education, and training pathways this academic year with the majority of the cohort continuing to follow vocational subjects in their education and training. These courses support the engagement across the cohort and enhance progression. There is an upward trend in the number of young people securing 'A' Levels, and a small number have engaged in the recently introduced 'T' Levels. The young people directly engaged with the world of work through employment, apprenticeships or traineeships has demonstrated a slight decline from the last academic year but still represents a three-year improvement.

The Post 16 Care Leavers continue the trend of an extended learning experience with a significant number completing a third year at college. The numbers entering directly to University has increased this year, with other young people deferring this transition to secure better qualifications at College first.

The number of young people who are identified as NEET tends to increase as they move towards leaving care. This is an area of focus of partnership work between the Care Leavers Team, DVS and Connexions.

Special Educational Needs

The full cohort of Children in Care has an increasing number with identified Special Educational Needs (SEND) at 41%.



Nationally, the most common type of need for all looked after children as of 31 March 2022 was 'Social, Emotional and Mental Health' this mirrors the primary need for Dudley EHCPs which indicates that 64.6% of EHCPs have SEMH as the primary need.

Our figures this year show that the identification of SEND needs and requests for EHCPs increases in Year 6 and Key Stage three and four being the phases with the largest number of SEND and EHCPs.

We continue to work with our SEND team and share with the team the details of all Dudley CiC SEND children and young people whether they live in Dudley or out of borough, as then they are out of borough the Local Authority where the child resides becomes responsible for the plan.

4.2 Children in Care Ofsted Provision Ratings

The Virtual School aim to ensure that all our CiC are able to access the best educational provision to meet their needs. This involves working in partnership with the child's Social Worker to help, advise and support the attendance at these settings.

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of looked after children' states that looked after children should be educated in good or outstanding schools and unless there exceptional, evidence-based reasons, looked after children should not be placed in a schools judged to be Inadequate. We always aim to place children in good or outstanding schools. There are occasions when a setting will have a change of Ofsted judgement. This may mean a school could be deemed 'Requires Improvement' from an 'Outstanding' or 'Good' judgement. In this case the Education Advisor, in consultation with the Head Teacher, review the academic, pastoral and emotional well-being available at the school alongside the Ofsted judgement to decide whether a

change of educational placement would be in the interest of each young person. A change of placement would not be a favoured route, so the targeted use of Pupil Premium Plus grant funding would be considered to compensate for any issues that may have a short-term effect on the progress of the young person.

Ofsted Ratings 2022 – 23

77.27% of CiC are attending a good or outstanding school.

| Ofsted Rating | No of Pupils | % |
|--|--------------|--------|
| Outstanding/Outstanding Academy Converter | 33 | 8.48% |
| Good/Good Academy Converter | 268 | 68.89% |
| Requires Improvement/Requires Improvement Academy Converter | 50 | 12.85% |
| Inadequate | 11 | 2.87% |
| Not on School Roll | 9 | 2.31% |
| Welsh School - Estyn Inspection | 2 | 0.51% |
| Scottish School - Education Scotland | 1 | 0.25% |
| No Report (See notes below) | 12 | 3.08% |
| ISI report - Excellent | 1 | 0.25% |
| Prison/Secure | 1 | 0.25% |
| Misc | 1 | 0.25% |

4.3 Attendance, Exclusions and suspensions

Attendance at school for children in Dudley remains above 90%, with primary attendance above 95%.

Attendance breakdown 2022/23

| Attendance % | No of Pupils | Male Primary | Male Secondary | Female Primary | Female Secondary |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Under 50% | 16 | 0 | 11 | 1 | 4 |
| 50 - 79.9% | 21 | 2 | 11 | 1 | 7 |
| 80 - 89.9% | 39 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 14 |
| 90% - 94.9% | 62 | 18 | 21 | 11 | 12 |
| 95% - 100% | 241 | 65 | 68 | 58 | 50 |
| No Attendance** | 10 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 4 |

*** No attendance collection may mean that children have only just become CiC, they may not be attending an education provision or are UASC.*

Virtual School advisors working in partnership with social workers to make improvements in attendance and targets are added to the PEP. For those children and young people with persistently low attendance partnership work is put in place to get children back in school. In some cases, it is because children have moved and there missed time whilst a new school is secured. Referrals are made to Evolve, Barnardo's and/ or our EP service to work with children that are at risk of emotional based school avoidance.

When comparing attendance year on year it shows a slight upward trend for the attendance for primary age children. Overall attendance has dipped slightly 1.84%, this is due to attendance for the secondary age group, where it has dipped below 90%. This will be area of priority and support in the coming year.

Suspensions Overview 2022 – 2023

In the year 2022 - 2023, none of our children were permanently excluded from school.

Most of the suspensions occur in Key Stage 3 and 4. These two Key Stages account for 84.7% of the total number of suspension episodes, the rate of suspensions are concerning. Suspensions caused a total loss of 362.5 days of education. This is 151 suspension episodes distributed between 65 children.

There is an upward trend in the number of suspension events over a five-year period. This data for suspensions shows that suspensions are too high. This is area of focus for all Dudley children and the Virtual School work with Inclusive Pathways and the Education team and the EP Service to reduce suspensions. The continuation of our support with DEEDs programme and Trauma Informed Attachment Aware Schools training programme (TIAAS) will positively impact on the practice of our settings. The data shows that children in out of borough placement are less likely to be suspended.

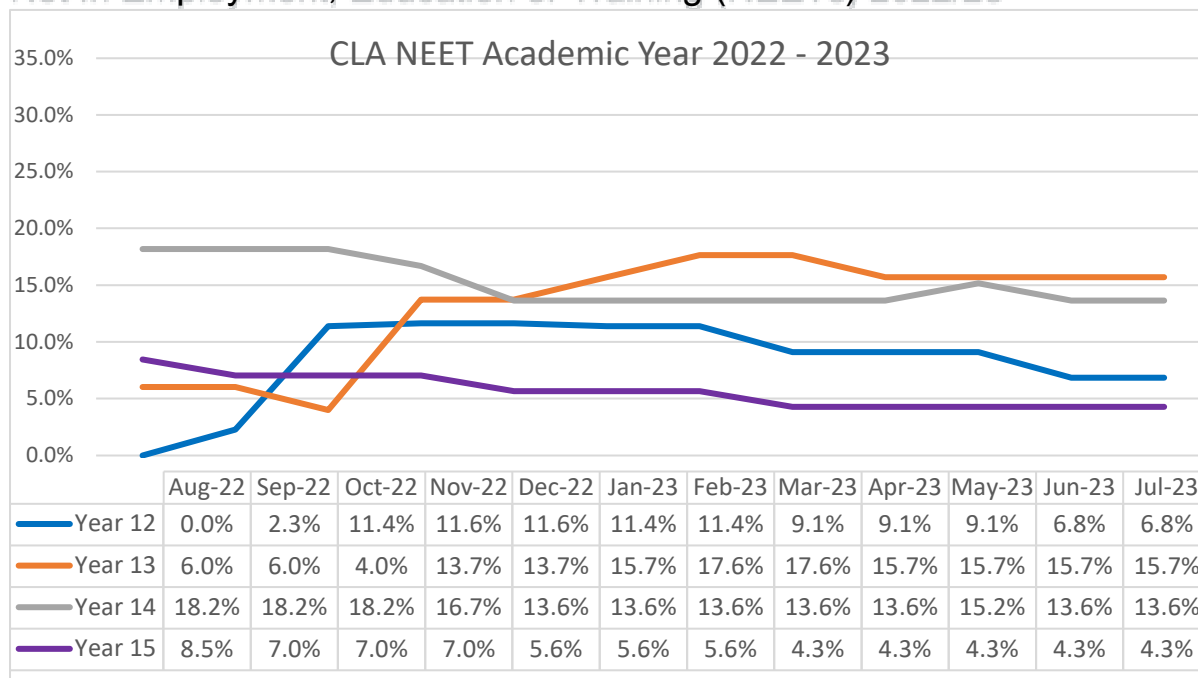
4.4 Not in Employment, Education or Training

We have low numbers of young people who are NEET and we have more young people year on year accessing the higher-level courses, though we always have high aspirations for our young people and we continuously work to reduce the number of children in care who are or at risk of becoming NEET in Post 16.

There is a continuing emphasis on access to quality Careers Education, Information, Advice & Guidance (CEIAG) with access to careers support online

platform and VS transition and pathways support from Year 11. This is ensuring a growing number secure the qualifications they need to follow education, training and apprenticeships through Post 16, university and employment.

Not In Employment, Education or Training (NEETs) 2022/23



The Year 12 cohort

The NEET figures have remained quite static throughout the year.

There was a rise in October 2022 and it is often due to movement on college courses, young people have 45 days to make change course if they want to change or move.

For all the young people in Year 12 the Virtual School know why those young people are appearing within the NEETs data, the reasons range from SEMH needs, pregnancy, complex needs and illness. There was a closure of a training provider during the year which also effected the figures.

The Year 13 Cohort

During the year there was an increase in UASC students and the Virtual School worked to support them find education or training. This links the increase in the uptake of ESOL courses in the Post 16 data.

During this year Social Care often work to move our out of borough young people back to Dudley so that they can be supported more effectively, for example with housing and be supported by a young person's advisor.

The Year 13 cohort have more young people with SEND or EHCPs, out of the eight young people recorded as NEET, four have EHCPs. Again, the Virtual

School work directly with young people to support a return to education, employment or training for those recorded as NEET the reasons included complex needs, young parents and one young person out of the country.

4.5 Emotional Well-Being Programmes

Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

Dudley EPS and the Virtual School work in partnership to provide assessment and advice for Children Looked After who reside both within and out of the Borough. The EPS is a resource which the Virtual School Service can use to offer support to schools, residential and care settings, and other agencies (e.g. Social Care) in both removing barriers to learning and also to engender greater understanding of the communications behind many of the ways in which children and young people are presenting and as such how best to support them.

This partnership provides a range of Levels of Support for Dudley's CiC

- CiC – direct case work, for example; observations, consultations, assessments, direct 1:1 work
- PLAC – advice & guidance for schools, Foster Carers, Social Workers and children
- Children with Social Worker – Provide strategic support across the system

A total of 53 Dudley CiC have been supported through the EPS over the last academic year including those within and also out of the Dudley borough.

Dudley Counselling Service

Dudley Counselling Service has supported 15 children this year 6 children have completed a Counselling or Play Therapy intervention. 7 children are currently being seen for a Counselling or Play Therapy intervention. 2 children were assessed, counselling was not recommended The Foster carers of 1 child is currently being provided with Play Therapy attachment and therapeutic support as the child is currently undergoing significant life changes. Once they are in a stable placement, they will be assessed for a Play Therapy intervention.

Barnardo's

Barnardo's has continued to support our CiC this year, the aim of the service is to provide support to young people who are facing challenges around their

emotional health, wellbeing, and education. Challenges may include stress of exam years, self-harm, support to re-engage with education and mental health challenges. Barnardo's has a series of set outcomes that are used for each CiC young person; the outcomes are measured at the beginning, middle and end of the intervention. The planned outcomes are:

- Ability to express feelings
- Increased resilience
- Improved capacity to learn in school
- Improved mental health and well being
- Remain/return to mainstream education

In the period between July 2022 and July 2023, the service received 27 referrals for children and young people.

Evolve – LEAP Programme

The Evolve LEAP programme is supporting CiC in Key Stage Four. The aim of the mentoring programme is improving mental health, improving their academic standards for further education and career ideas, boosting confidence and social skills as they transition into post 16 education or training. The programme has supported over twenty-five young people this year. Positive impacts of this programme from this programme has ranged from increased engagement in lessons, ease of being able to talk about emotions, support with applications to college.

Breathing Space

In the past academic year, Breathing Space have supported 14 young people referred to their service by Dudley Virtual School. Breathing Space is a therapeutic alternative provision which support young people that are disengaged with learning, at risk of suspensions or permanent exclusion. The provision is able to support the emotional well-being and health needs that prevent engagement in mainstream settings.

Creative Mentors

The Creative Mentoring scheme is a programme supporting care experienced young people with education and pre-employability support through creativity. The programme offers a one-to-one approach to working with identified children in and leaving care who are struggling to engage in education, at risk of exclusion or social isolation. When a young person is disengaged, resistant to support & professionals are struggling to improve the situation, the Creative

Mentor has been identified to work one to one with the young person. The Creative Mentors work in the Third Space as, working to help CYP have more:

- self-confidence
- increased social competence
- improved resilience to positively reengage in learning and/or their community.

Elements

The Virtual School have commissioned a service called Elements. Elements is a social & emotional mental health support service for children and young people. The concept of elements is to build trusting relationships with the child and young person, whilst focusing on 4 elements of wellbeing. Physical health, Mental health, Environmental awareness and social & communicational skills. This year this intervention has been introduced into two schools, Ellowes Hall and Redhill.

Hugglepets

HugglePets in the Community are offering schools in the Black Country an opportunity to book a series of 6 week sessions with our animals and trained **therapist** to help children and young people and support their mental health and wellbeing. The sessions are targeted at children and young people struggling with their mental wellbeing. Sessions are continuing in the academic year 2023 – 2024.

Role Models

Role Models sessions are online sessions for groups of children and young people to support them develop practical strategies to support them through the ups and downs of life and aimed to enable children to achieve their very best, both at school and beyond. Sessions are for children aged 5-7, 8 – 10 and 11-13 years old. For which of these groups the concepts are introduced in a way that is accessible for each age group. While older children might be learning about the workings of their brain and developing critical thinking skills to discuss and debate our themes, the younger children would be learning through carefully chosen storybooks and engaging in activities to support their self-esteem and grow their confidence. Sessions are continuing in the academic year 2023 – 2024.

4.6 Personal Education Plans

As a Virtual School one of our duties is to ensure that each child and young person has an up-to-date quality education plan. The Education advisors support this process by attending the majority of PEP meetings. The completion rates and quality of PEPs is monitored each term and reported to the governing body and Social Care heads of Service.

PEPs are given one of four possible ratings by the Virtual School, Outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.

To raise the standard and quality of our PEPs the Virtual School:

- ✓ Review PEPs together as a service to standardise across all professionals
- ✓ QA Framework - moderation process involving DTs, SWs and IROs
- ✓ Review and refine our PEP quality assurance document
- ✓ Advisors will feedback to schools when they sign off the PEP to give guidance of how to make their PEPs good or better
- ✓ Settings with more than one requires improvement or inadequate are supported by the VS advisor

PEP Completion

Statutory school age PEPs have a completion rate of 97.7%. This is higher than in Post 16 as young people can decline to have a PEP meeting when they are 18, there are other factors that reduce the completion rate within this age group. When comparing the completion rates year on year, we are seeing a three year upward trend.

PEP Quality

To raise the standard and quality of our PEPs we review and moderate our PEPs, this is a shared process involving DTs, Social Workers and IROs.

Our quality assurance document is reviewed and shared with our DTs so they are able to self-evaluate their PEPs.

We share with DTs what makes an effective PEP through our training programme.

4.7 Learning Development

The DEEDs programme

This year the Virtual School has continued to initiate work with the Primary and Secondary settings, with the aim to develop a co-ordinated programme to integrate an inclusive approach to teaching and learning across Dudley that meets the needs of all learners. The intended outcomes are:

- To improve the academic outcomes of children and young people, enhancing the focus on those with identified SEND and/or disadvantage backgrounds.
- To minimise Permanent Exclusions across Dudley educational settings
- To reduce the numbers of suspensions of children and young people from Dudley educational settings.
- To expand a nurturing approach to learning across Dudley educational settings

The Delivering Equality and Equity across Dudley Schools programme (DEEDs) will initially target the secondary age group but will also link with other initiatives in both the Primary and post 16 age groups.

It will aim engage all secondary settings in the RADY approach over three phases. This could be across localised communities or within/across a timeframe.

This year we have been working with all secondary schools to complete audit of approaches to emotional well-being (via membership to Attachment Research Community – ARC). Training providers have been linked with all school to provide whole-staff (where needed) or targeted refresher training in attachment aware approaches. This will continue throughout the next academic year.

Two Dudley secondary schools have been nominations for ARC Timpson Award, this award recognises and celebrates best practice in attachment and trauma aware schools.

At Primary, there has been continued work via the Virtual School to look to extend, develop and embed the Education Endowment Foundation approach. Following the work on the Literacy programme the Early Years Maths programme has been developed. In parallel, there will be a focus on enhancing and expanding the Nurture & Resilience approach already in place.

EEF Partnership

Our partnership with the EEF continued this year with the introduction of an Early maths programme for primary schools. The content of the programme was devised in conjunction with Local Authority Maths consultants and the Research school delivering the programme.

Objectives of the Programme

- Engage a cohort of Dudley primary schools with EEF evidence based CPD and resources.
- Build evidence-informed practice across schools, with a particular focus on early maths.
- Improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in these schools.
- Support schools to use evidence to inform decision-making and have a strengthened approach to implementation leading to a culture of evidence-informed school improvement.
- To further develop the working relationship between Dudley Virtual School and the EEF in providing support for Dudley EEF priority schools.

Modules started on the 6th October 2022, the final session will take place on 16th March 2023. These modules are a mix of online and face to face sessions. In-between sessions schools will be provided with Research and evidence related to the content so that this can be researched and reflected on between sessions.

After the module sessions visits to schools will take place. The Research school are available to support with implementation of changes in schools, this will be bespoke to each school's needs. Dudley Schools Engaged eight primary schools on the Programme.

Raising Aspirations of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY)

RADY is a long-term 'hearts and minds' programme that eventually becomes habit for every member of staff in school supporting children to make accelerated progress alongside their non-disadvantaged peers. The national data shows that the attainment difference between learners in poverty and their peers is stubbornly resilient to improvement. The changes that RADY brings about in a school take time to impact on learners, often requires changing hearts and minds and tend to be most successful when receiving ongoing support from an expert coach with school leadership experience.

At the secondary phase the Virtual School, in partnership with Challenging Education, have worked with seven schools and two primary schools.

- Beacon Hill (Dudley Multi-Academy Trust)

- Bishop Milner
- Dormston
- Pegasus (Dudley Multi-Academy Trust)
- St James (Dudley Multi-Academy Trust)
- Summerhill
- The Link Academy (Dudley Multi-Academy Trust)
- Blowers Green (primary school)
- Kate's Hill (primary school)

All of the schools have completed their self evaluations, supported by a RADY coach from Challenging Education, the coach has provided coaching for key leaders on RADY and supported with whole school launch.

Moving forward continued works will ensure that all schools are implementing equitable approaches and evaluating the impact on disadvantaged learners in particular, achieving this by:

1. providing ongoing support to secondary schools who have received 'in school' RADY training.
2. planning for ongoing support to secondary schools currently completing 'supported Recorded RADY'
3. recruiting at least one cohort of primary schools onto 'supported Recorded RADY'
4. promoting the use of, a training resource that will improve staff knowledge and skills (Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners TDfDL)

4.8 Raising Aspirations

Aspire to University Programme (A2U)

This is a programme that is run by University of Wolverhampton and is designed to support young people who are in care from year 7 through to year 13. It is for young people who have passed their KS2 SATs and who are showing the potential to one day attend University.

The programme is a partnership between the University of Wolverhampton, the young person's school, and the local authority. The young people involved take part in a series of events and initiatives with a view to giving them an insight into university life. The participants are also allocated an online University mentor, furthermore Year 9 participants are offered the chance to take part in online study skills sessions twice a month.

This initiative is a collaborative approach including **Dudley, Sandwell, Staffordshire, Walsall** and **Wolverhampton** local authorities.

Most of the outreach days take place at faculties within the Uni of Wolverhampton but they do sometimes take place at different local universities.

This academic year Dudley Virtual School has sent participants to several events. Please see below for details:

DVS has three Year 7 students; four year 8 students and two year 9 students taking part in the Aspire 2 Uni programme and have requested 8 places for the current Year 6 students for September as they enter Year 7.

Organisers of the A2U programme are organising a Launch event for all the Year 6 students who will start the programme in September. The idea is that the young people, their carers, teachers and social workers can attend along with a representative from Dudley Virtual School. This will take place on 20th October at the University and we will attend alongside Wolverhampton VS, Walsall VS and Sandwell Virtual VS. Dudley Virtual School has identified 12 young people who may be eligible to start the programme in September 2023. Conversations between VS advisors and carers and SW to start soon about the programme.

A2U to distribute outreach events schedule for 2023-4 academic year and will be distributed to all DVS advisors.

There is a Graduation event to congratulate all the students that had completed this year's A2U events. Dudley Virtual School had 4 students and their carers attend the ceremony. The event was a celebration of the young people's achievements and was well-received by the young people and their carers.

Unifrog

The Virtual School are working with Unifrog in order to provide all of our young people the chance to register on their online platform to help them research possible career choices, compare university courses and apprenticeship offers. Some of our young people have the chance to register for this service with their schools however, if this is not offered at their school the Virtual School can provide them with a log in to support them as they consider their career path. All VS Education Advisors are about to have training on this programme and so the aim is to offer this service during the Key Stage 4 PEP meetings this term.

Unifrog was presented at the 'I want to be...' event hosted at Dudley College for students from years 8 – 13. This offered some young people with an opportunity to get a log in and start work on Unifrog.

Aim Higher

Emma Sharp, Education Advisor, attended the Aim Higher Conference this term and sat in on discussions surrounding finance for young people in the care system wishing to attend University and the Cliff Edge that may of our young people experience once they turn 18 years of age.

Aim Higher will arrange a schedule of events aimed at disadvantaged young people for the 2023-4 academic year in a number of Universities in the Midlands. Schedule to be distributed to all DVS advisors and Designated Teachers.

4.9 The Arts

The Arts offer has continued to be developed for Dudley's Children In Care. This programme, Artslink, is part of the West Midlands Virtual Schools Children in Care Foundation. The programme, through the regional Arts Co-ordinator and the local Arts Ambassadors, supports the fourteen West Midlands Virtual Schools to work together to develop a regional arts and cultural offer for all children and young people in care, their Carers and foster families across the region. Artslink provides a strategic model which supports Virtual Schools to extend their existing arts offers by working in geographic clusters, Dudley being in the Birmingham and Black Country cluster. Each cluster designs and commissions high-quality arts events and training which enables all those involved to develop as learners, as people and as artists, benefitting from economies of scale and the potential to attract larger numbers of participants.

The range and number of partners now engaged through the cultural entitlement offer continues to grow and develop. The current partners include:

- Schools
- Black Country Active
- Performing Perfectly
- Women in Theatre
- West Midlands Virtual Schools

The Arts Link programme continues to be offered over a local, cluster (Black Country & Birmingham) and regional.

ArtsMark

All the children in Year 4 were offered the opportunity to complete the Discover Arts Award. 13/14 (93%) completed these awards in the Summer Term and certificates were presented in assemblies during the last week of term. In addition, all children in care receiving DPA instrumental lessons received an 'in-house' certificate with 3 targets they have achieved throughout the year presented in a gold envelope.

DVS is one of ten Virtual Schools nationally who are on a two-year journey to achieve Arts Mark status as part of a national Arts Council pilot. The areas to focus on for this work are:

- Develop and publish an annual calendar of events.
- Publish a newsletter before a main holiday signposting children and carers to arts and cultural activities in the local area.
- Embed Arts Award into Year 4 instrumental teaching.
- Gain greater and more perceptive feedback after events from carers and YP
- Pilot the success of My Creative Track with different groups of people.
- Enter children for graded music exams.
- Encourage enrolment in DPA ensembles.
- Develop the ICE programme further

Instrumental Lessons

This programme is now very much embedded in the DVS offer across Dudley Schools.

- 84% of Year 4 pupils have received instrumental lessons.
- 2 OOB Year 4 pupils have had lessons delivered by a different music hub.
- We are teaching lessons for CiC, in a range of 30 different schools across Dudley (29%)
- Continuation from Year 4 into Year 5 (61%)
- 43 young people are receiving lessons in other year groups.

Performances Annual Overview

The Arts offer has created a number of opportunities in a range of performances:

- 64% of pupils have performed either to the whole school or their class.

- Two YP attended the Vocal Festival at Dudley Town Hall, accompanied by their DT.
- 9 YP (15%) regularly attend DPA ensembles outside of school and take part in 3 concerts a year.

Exam Success Annual Overview

The active support of following the learning of musical instruments has added a further outcomes opportunity for our children and young people:

- 4 pupils have taken graded music exams achieving merits. Certificates presented in school.
- 26% of pupils are working towards an exam which will be taken at some point next academic year.

Active Sports

- The Virtual School, as part of the WM CiC Foundation offer has commissioned Active Black Country alongside Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton Virtual Schools. This opened access to a number of sporting opportunities over the summer holiday.

5 Post 16 Dfe Pilot

The Virtual School were awarded a grant from the Dfe for the Post 16 pilot to develop an offer over the academic year 0f 2022 – 2023. This aimed to create a strategic platform for the enhancement of educational provision and help inform the wider 'system' to refine processes, offers and interventions for the CiC cohort. It will also provide potential for supporting the wider needs of vulnerable groups including Children with Social Workers and those with SEND. This would contribute towards:

- Raising the profile of CLA/CLs in FE by strengthening close working relationships
- Improving the attendance of young people in FE
- Better supporting the delivery of Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
- Identifying models of good practice used by LAs across the country

The proposed model for Dudley was to work in partnership with both Dudley and Halesowen Colleges and forge connected links with training providers to ensure learning, training and employment pathways are available for all Post 16 children in care (CiC). This programme was to ensure that each individual was supported by, subject to need, a range of enhanced development offers including:

- Pastoral support

- Creative Mentors
- Post 16 Professionals Forum (College, Social Care, Health, Family Solutions,)
- Mental Health First Aid Lead/DSL
- Academic Tutors

The Post 16 workforce was to be supported by a range of initiatives including:

- The Virtual School Designated Teachers offer has integrated Post 16, apprenticeships and university pathways into its calendared training programme.
- Post 16 Professionals Forum will ensure that greater consistencies of approaches are achieved enhancing the access to, and progression through the full range of courses.
- An established CPD programme for the wider Virtual School team to develop a good understanding of Post 16 courses and training.
- A Post 16 Workforce Conference

The review and refinement of the current workforce allowed an expansion of the mentoring available to the young people in college settings. There were 51 CiC in total attending Dudley College. The 11 Dudley students are linked directly to a Mentor and this was made available to CiC from other Local Authorities. This has made an enormous contribution to the stability of those learners. The close partnership of the work with the virtual school means there have been regular and thorough discussions about young people's needs. This too has created more effective links with Carers, Social Workers and the Young People and put in support based on need and to maintain the stability of engagement with the programme. The Virtual School and Mentor have agreed a format of reporting which allowed all services to record and support each other in maintaining the student engagement with their chosen subjects including Maths & English. This has been different from previous mentor engagement with the Virtual School leading and monitoring the issues, the outcomes and the sharing of information with other professionals and recording in PEP documents the elements that need support. This has ensured that the Retention at Dudley College this academic year 100%

There were 61 CiC in Halesowen College. They have a slightly different pastoral system from Dudley, and there has been an increase in those personnel being invited to PEP Meetings.

Professional Forum

The introduction of the Post 16 Professionals Forum has involved:

- SEND representation
- Skills Training
- Juniper Training

- Providence
- Country Treks
- Connexions
- Colleges (In & Out of Borough)

This group has allowed a wider understanding around identifying the lack of provision and who is available to pursue the courses. It has helped to identifying training needs and has been able to focus on Transition (Year 11 to 12, 12 to 13, 13 to 14), clarified the agreed processes for the distribution of the Post 16 Bursary. Furthermore, it has allowed a more consistent approach to the 40 day rule, helping progression routes to be identified.

Smashlife Programme

The 'Smashlife' programme launched with 7 young people (5 Dudley, 2 from other VS). The programme has grown over the weeks with 35 young people engaged to date. This has raised awareness of Social Worker, participation and across the college teams.

The project has run across ten sessions.

This programme has enabled a lot of learning across the whole system, with a strong reflection around not what was expected, being the most intensive learning curve on what staff thought they knew and what they actually learnt.

It is this learning that has enabled the Virtual School to help develop the offer. This has resulted in a number of key initiatives being planned and delivered. One young person has been engaged in two information films, professionally recorded and produced. One of these films was entirely under his direction and has been featured in professional development conferences.

5.1 Workforce Development

Dudley Education Conference

The DVS Annual Conference has been combined with the Safeguarding event to create the Dudley Education Conference which was hosted at Dudley College. The event had over 300 delegates with a programme that included twelve educational settings presenting workshops.

Positive feedback from a selection of the delegates:

- Brilliant Conference thank you.
- Amazing day, thank you.
- Really useful workshops, which are very relevant given 'climate' in school.

- Key note speakers – inspiring. Fantastic Day thank you.
- Work resistant parents – useful in my line of work. Utterly Brilliant.
- Emotionally charged but fascinating (Steve Russell).
- SEMH relevant to current issues in my setting.
- Opened my eyes in terms of my schools current context (Mick Simpson).

DVS Team Training

The DVS Team are committed to their own professional development. This has included:

- ARC Annual Conference
- WM CiC Foundation Annual Conference
- 'Thinking differently for disadvantaged learners' – Challenging Education/WM CiC Foundation
- Emotional Well Being – Creative Education
- Trauma Informed Schools

Supporting Foster Carers

There continues to be a developing offer to support Foster Carers around the education of our young people. The Virtual School Website also hosts a range of learning resources and links to many sites for all ages.

Supporting Designated Teachers and Social Workers

The Virtual School continues to offer a wide range of training in addition to that outlined above, including:

The training offer for Designated Teachers

- Developing Primary Aged Literacy & Numeracy through outstanding Pep's
- Introduction to the e-Pep
- Developing Secondary Aged Careers Education & IAG through Outstanding Pep's
- DVS Briefing for DT/DSL's
- Emotional Well-Being & Behaviours of Vulnerable Learners in Secondary Settings
- How to ensure all Pep's are outstanding

- Emotional Well-Being & Behaviours of Vulnerable Learners in Primary Settings
- Education conference
- Post 16 conference
- The EPS CPD sessions, see below

The training offer for Social Workers

- Introduction to the e-Pep
- How to ensure all Pep's are outstanding
- Career Guidance for Secondary Aged & post 16 Learners
- Education conference
- Post 16 conference
- The EPS CPD sessions, see below

Finance

4. There are no financial implications to this report

Law

5. Corporate Parenting Boards exist in accordance with the provisions of the Children and Social Work Act 2017
The Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out Corporate Parenting Principles for local authorities. A local authority in England must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people mentioned in subsection (2), have regard to the need:
 - (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
 - (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 - (c) to consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
 - (d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
 - (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
 - (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
 - (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

(2) The children and young people mentioned in this subsection are—

 - (a) children who are looked after by a local authority, within the meaning given by section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989.
 - (b) relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A (2) of that Act.
 - (c) persons aged under 25 who are former relevant children within the meaning given by section 23C (1) of that Act.

Risk Management

6. There are no risks directly arising from the report.

Equality Impact

7. There is no specific decision required which will have an impact in terms of equality.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

8. There are no HR/organisational development implications to this report.

Commercial/Procurement

9 There are no Commercial/Procurement implications to this report.

Environment/Climate Change

10 There is no impact to environment or climate change arising from this report

Council Priorities and Projects

11 The contents of the report relate to the key council priorities outlined within the
. Children's Services directorate plan.



Catherine Driscoll
Director of Children's Services

Report Author: Emma Thomas – Acting Virtual School Head Teacher
Telephone: 01384 815208
Email: emma.thomas@dudley.gov.uk