



Report to Cabinet

Date:	Monday, 13 September 2021
Title:	Extension to the role of the Virtual School Head - Allocation of Section 31 Grant Funding
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services
Contact officer:	Emma Owen, Head Teacher, The Virtual School Elizabeth Williams, Head of Finance, Children's Services
Ward(s) affected:	None specific
Recommendations:	To note the increased responsibility of the Virtual School Head and agree Buckinghamshire's use of the allocated Section 31 Grant funding

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 On 16 June 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that from September 2021 Virtual School Heads would take a strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes of the cohort of children with a social worker and those who have previously had a social worker who are aged from 0 up to 18.
- 1.2 We know from the DfE child in need review in 2019 that 1.6 million children have had a social worker, the equivalent to 1 in 10 children or 3 children in every classroom. They fall behind their peers at every stage of their education, and poor outcomes persist even after social work involvement ends.
- 1.3 All local authorities are eligible to receive grant funding provided under Section 31 of the Education Act 2002 to deliver the extended Virtual School Head role. Funding provides Virtual School Heads with the additional resource required to take on the strategic leadership role for children with a social worker and is sufficient to recruit additional team members to support them with these responsibilities.

2. Children with a Social Worker in Buckinghamshire

2.1 In 2018/19, there were 791 children in our primary schools, 571 in secondary and 332 in special schools who had a Social Worker under a Child in Need (CIN) plan or a Child Protection (CP) Plan.

- a) Absence rates: CP - 14%, CIN - 11.4%, all others - 4.6%
- b) 4 times more likely to have a fixed term exclusion
- c) SEN Support: CIN - 16.1%, CP - 21.6%, all others - 11.7%
- d) EHCP: CIN - 31.4%, CP - 11.5%, all others - 1.7%
- e) 4 times as likely to be claiming free school meals
- f) In 2018/19, children on a CIN or CP had average attainment 8 scores of just 19 compared to 55 for all pupils in Buckinghamshire.

2.2 During the pandemic, children with a social worker were able to attend schools but generally only a minority took up this offer. Since schools have reopened, attendance for children with a social worker remains below levels seen pre-pandemic and below that of their peers.

3. Content of report

The future Virtual School Head role

3.1 On Wednesday 16 June 2021, the Department for Education announced additional funding of more than £16m to extend the role of Virtual School Heads from September 2021.

3.2 As strategic leaders who champion children with a social worker, Virtual School Heads should create a culture of high aspirations and drive improved outcomes. They should:

- Make the disadvantage of children in need visible.
- Enhance partnerships between education settings and the local authority so agencies can work together.
- Promote engagement in education, including as a means of keeping children safe.
- Identify the cohort's needs and intervene to overcome barriers to poor educational outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so children reach their potential.
- Support and advise key professionals to help children make progress.

3.3 **What not in scope of the extended Virtual School Head role**

- a) Work with individual children and their families - including tracking and monitoring educational progress of individual children.

- b) Responding to requests from parents or carers to offer advice and support in relation on individual children with a social worker.
- c) Responsibility for children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) who do not require or need a social worker, as defined above.

3.4 **This work can be successfully delivered by:**

Enhancing partnerships with education settings:

- a) Work with education settings to encourage anyone supporting children with a social worker to hold high aspirations for this cohort of children.
- b) Convene education and LA leaders to develop shared goals and set direction for improving outcomes, including addressing links with other strategic priorities e.g. the serious youth violence action plan.
- c) Clarify VSH role and communicate offer of support to education settings and others in LA so everyone has clear expectations of the VSH and what help is available.

Identify needs and intervene:

- a) Use data and analysis to understand and monitor local trends in accordance with strategic priorities, e.g. safeguarding trends, attendance rates.
- b) Promote evidence and good practice that prioritises consistency, high support, and high standards for children with a social worker and recognises the importance of stability and strong information sharing.
- c) Share knowledge and training to strengthen how education settings and social care understand the impact of adversity on education (newsletters, webinars, and workshops).

Support and advise key professionals:

- a) Engage and support key professionals and local services including social workers and school staff to promote improved outcomes for children.
- b) Advise on evidence-based interventions and strengthen links with research organisations to participate in work that will build a stronger evidence base for what works for children.
- c) Encourage schools and social care to be creative and thoughtful in communicating with children and families, including taking account of children's wishes and feelings.

Recommendations

- 3.5 All local authorities are eligible to receive grant funding provided under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 to deliver the extended Virtual School Head role.

Payments will be made in three equal tranches in September 2021, December 2021, and March 2022. The amount allocated to Buckinghamshire is £127,496.

3.6 **Option 1: Recommended option**

Use the Section 31 grant funding to increase staffing in the virtual school and the balance of the money to provide training for schools, social workers, other professionals needed to support the delivery of this work.

Part 1:

- a) Recruit a full-time assistant head with management experience to support the virtual school head deliver the new duties – 1-year fixed term contract.
- b) Advantages: They would be able to provide direct support, training, scrutiny and challenge to social workers, schools, and other stakeholders to foster and develop high aspirations and positive educational outcomes for children with a social worker.
- c) This would be a discreet role and therefore not impact on the statutory work for looked after and previously looked after children.
- d) Challenge: given the short timeframe it is likely that we will not have anyone in post before January 2022.

Part 2:

- a) Create a 1 day per week role with a teaching and learning responsibility for an existing team member (1 year fixed) to support with the implementation of the new role duties.
- b) This would allow the head teacher to be supported with time and extra capacity from the start of September.
- c) The team member would already have established relationships with partnership teams in Buckinghamshire council and with our schools.
- d) It provides career development and builds management capacity within the team and fits with succession planning objectives.

Part 3:

- a) Remainder of money to be spent on training for schools, social workers, other professionals needed to support the delivery of this work.
- b) Detail to be decided after a full data analysis of need and after conversations with head teachers. However, a focus on training schools in:
- c) Attachment and trauma (approximately £2500 for a whole school staff).
- d) This is a whole school approach regarding the impact that trauma and unmet attachment needs have on education. The aims of this programme are to:

- raise school staff awareness and increase understanding of the role of attachment and trauma in children's education and strategies to better address their needs
- reduce exclusions from school and improve attendance of children who are vulnerable
- improve educational progress and the well-being of children who are vulnerable
- develop the confidence and skills of teachers and other staff (including early years) to address trauma and attachment
- identify the most effective approaches to addressing attachment and trauma in schools and resulting behaviour

e) ELSA – emotional literacy in schools (approx. £250 for one lead member of staff)

Outcomes that will be achieved

- 3.7 Bring together key social care and education leaders:
- Share expertise and information to deliver support at home and school and develop a shared understanding that safety, stability, and educational outcomes are linked.
- 3.8 Improve attendance: medium term (1-3 years)
- Children to be supported by all agencies to reduce persistent absence, avoid children being out of school, reduce number of school moves, exclusions and increase understanding of the impact of missed education.
- 3.9 Improved understanding of children's social, emotional, and mental health needs: medium-long term (2-3 years)
- Organise, develop, and deliver training for school staff, carers, and social workers to raise their awareness of the diverse educational needs of these children.
 - Developing and sharing evidence of what works, establishing specialist support in and around schools to facilitate and coordinate effective interventions.
- 3.10 Improving educational attainment: (3 -5 years)
- Raise aspiration, provide high quality education, better access to alternative provision and more vocational routes into employment.

Financial Summary

3.11 **Use of Section 31 grant funding: Buckinghamshire allocated £127,496.**

Assistant Head position – 1 year (including on costs) = approx. £62,000

1 day per week + teaching and learning responsibility = £11,000

Total staffing costs: £73,000

Training and other resources: £54,496 – to be decided after a full data analysis of need and after conversations with head teachers.

4. Other options considered

Option 2: not recommended

- 4.1 Manage the new duties within the existing structure of the virtual school.

This is not seen as a viable option as every team member is already at full capacity and we cannot take the focus away from our statutory role with looked after children.

Option 3: not recommended

- 4.2 Distribute the leadership for children with a social worker across existing teams e.g. education entitlement and early help.

This is not seen as a viable option because the guidelines are clear that Virtual school heads are best placed to undertake this work. A similar model to the virtual school would need to be set up, this would ensure that the team focuses on children with a social worker but would mean that it wouldn't necessarily benefit from the experience of the virtual school and there could be conflicting priorities between the teams.

5. Legal and financial implications

- 5.1 The council has been allocated a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 cited as the Extension of the Role of Virtual School Heads to children with a social worker grant (2021/22). Buckinghamshire Council has been allocated £127,496 for the 2021-22 financial year. This funding is intended to provide Virtual School Heads with the additional capacity they require to become the strategic leader that promotes educational outcomes for children with a social worker. In addition to the Grant Determination Letter, all local authorities are required to sign and return a Memorandum of Understanding to the Department for Education.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the Extension of the Role of Virtual School Heads to children with a social worker grant is ring-fenced to the Education and Children's Services portfolio to enable statutory functions to be fulfilled, until such time as the grant ceases to be allocated by the DfE.
- 5.3 As the grant determination has been made part way through the financial year and additional staffing resource will need to be recruited to deliver the extended responsibilities, it is unlikely that the grant will be fully spent in the current year. It is also proposed that any unspent grant in the current financial year be carried forward to the 2022-23 financial year to enable the extended responsibilities to be delivered through the academic year.

6. Corporate implications

6.1 Not applicable.

7. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

7.1 Not applicable.

8. Communication, engagement & further consultation

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Next steps and review

9.1 The grant 31 funding is guaranteed until March 2022. The DfE are not able to confirm further funding for the following financial year due to the spending review. However, it is expected that this extension to the virtual school head role will be a longer-term commitment.

9.2 The DfE will be asking the Virtual School Head to participate in research commissioned by the Department for Education to help develop a strong evidence base for how they can effectively promote the educational outcomes of children with social workers. It is expected that the LA will take part in a monitoring activity in a timely manner.

9.3 In addition, the LA may be asked to take part in focussed interviews to understand what helps Virtual School Heads to be effective in supporting children with a social worker.

9.4 By the end of March 2022, the Virtual School Head will be able to measure some of the impact of this work and would like to be able to make a decision about the future of this role and how it fits into the long term plans and structure for the virtual school.

10. Background papers

10.1 It is a legal requirement to make available background papers relied on to prepare a report and these should be listed at the end of the report (copies of background papers for executive decisions must be provided to democratic services).

Hyperlinks to papers published online should be used where possible. Where there are no background papers, insert none.

11. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

11.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the

cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

