

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 27

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Education of Children in Care		
Date of Meeting:	3rd January 2013		
Report of:	Headteacher – Virtual School for Children in care		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The local authority has a responsibility to promote the educational attainment of Children in Care (The Children Act 2004). Where local authorities make best progress, the Corporate Parent Committee ensures the responsibility of the LA to Children in Care is one shared by all senior officers and elected members. Opportunities are also made available to young people within the council for high quality work experience, work shadowing and apprenticeship opportunities. There is a clear understanding of the barriers to educational attainment and how these can be overcome.
- 1.2 Where practice is most effective, the commitment shown by senior officers and elected members is clearly demonstrated. (All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children – Report September 2102)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee receives the report, and continues to monitor educational outcomes for Children in Care
- 2.2 That the committee identifies any issues arising from the report that may require further action or clarification

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1.1 All the national research that has been undertaken into outcomes for looked after children identifies that they have poorer social, education and health outcomes than their peers. It is widely recognised that achieving a good education is one of the most protective factors for children & young people in care. The Virtual School for Children in Care was established in September 2010. The aim of the school is to secure improved outcomes for children in the care of Brighton & Hove. The progress, attainment and attendance of all school aged children in care are tracked by the Virtual School. The Virtual School works to raise aspirations, understanding and commitment from partners. It advocates on behalf of children in care, shared good practice and challenges practice and decisions that are not in the child's best interests.

- 3.1.2 The Virtual School team are qualified and experienced teachers in the primary and secondary setting who are familiar with the classroom environment and have an expertise that is recognised and appreciated by schools, social workers and carers alike enabling them to perform a valuable role of pulling people together for collaborative working. The team are able to communicate with young people in a role other than that performed by a social worker or teacher which gives them a particular focus to engage with them. This enables the team to support carers and social workers in communicating and working collaboratively with schools where often they may have felt intimidated and used avoidance strategies.
- 3.1.3 The team are able to raise the profile of the Children in Care and their particular additional needs within schools where they will always be a tiny minority that is little understood. It can also deliver training to foster carers and social care professionals about education both formally and informally facilitating their greater participation and completion of better quality PEP's. The Virtual School has been able to successfully engage young people in clubs for art, music, dance and table tennis which has given them important social opportunities where they feel less self conscious and have a sense of belonging.
- 3.1.4 The Virtual School reports on a number of indicators, similar to all schools, including end of Key Stage outcomes, attendance and exclusions and the timely completion of Personal Education Plans. Information on these indicators is set out below.

Percentage of Children in Care achieving 5 A* - C GCSE at KS4 including English & Maths.

Definition: The number of looked after children who were in care for at least one year who were in year 11 and achieved the equivalent of at least 5 A*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics (or equivalent) as a percentage of the total number of looked after children who were in care for at least one year who were in year 11.

Of the 42 Year 11 pupils in the Virtual School at the end of the last academic year, 34 will be formally reported on to the DfE with regard to their GCSE or equivalent results. These children have been in the care of Brighton and Hove continuously for a year on the 31st March 2012.

Nationally 58.2% of children achieved five good GCSEs including English and Maths, for children in care this was just 13% (2011). In Brighton & Hove 2 pupils achieved five A*- C GCSEs including English and Maths – this equates to 6%. This is a significant decrease on last year's validated figure of 19.2% and is below the national average of 13%. However, we achieved well in what was the previous target of 5 good A*-C in any subject, with a total of 76 passes, compared with 27 in 2012 and 57 in 2011.

The alteration of the grade boundaries for GCSE English Language summer exam has had a detrimental impact. Some pupils who were predicted to achieve a grade C in English and Maths (and who had achieved this grade in their mock examinations) were affected and were awarded a D grade. We requested remarks for these pupils but unfortunately no grades were uplifted. Students have been provided with additional tuition to support them in preparation for the

November re-sit. The results of these will be available on the 19th December 2012.

In terms of the overall number of GCSEs (C grade and above) achieved in all subjects, there is a significant upward trend over the past three years. There remains a challenge in securing the bench mark of 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths. That said we must be mindful of the differing needs of the cohorts year on year and we must consider the individual needs of all pupils. As important as the GCSE performance indicators are; they do not account for the achievements accomplished by children in care who attended special schools this year.

2012 - 34 pupils achieved 76.5 GCSE passes, grade C and above (data not validated)

2011 - 26 pupils achieved 57 GCSE passes, grade C and above

2010 - 36 pupils achieved 27 GCSE passes, grade C and above

Of the 34 students 9 (26.5%) achieved 5A* - C at GCSE. (This is currently below the national average of 31.%)

Of the 34 students 18 (53%) achieved 5 A* - G at GCSE. (This is currently higher than the national average of 51%)

Of the 34 students, 27 (79%), achieved 1 A* - G at GCSE. (This is currently higher than the national average of 73%)

15 students (44%) within the cohort of 34 have special educational needs. Of these 15 students, 12 were educated in special school provision which has had a bearing on outcomes

KS 4 Performance 2013

Of a cohort of 41 children it is currently expected that:

- 8 (19%) will achieve 5 A-C including English and Maths
- 12 (29%) will possibly achieve 5 A-C
- 8 (19%) will possibly achieve 5 A-G
- 13 (31%) will possibly achieve 1 A-G

It should be noted that those in the lowest group are primarily children with statements of special educational need whose cognitive ability is not high enough to achieve GCSE.

These Year 11 students will be taking mock GCSEs now and the Virtual School will collate these scores and match them against the schools' predictions to identify those who are under performing in order to target our work in the months leading up to the exams .

The focus of this work will be to closely monitor attendance, broker individual packages of support in terms of revision tuition and ensure that children, their carers and social workers are all aware of revision options offered by schools and supported to access them.

KS2 English 2012

There were 11 Year 6 pupils in care this year, 8 boys and 3 girls. 8 (73%) reached Level 4 in English. This is above the 2011 figure of 60% locally, and the national average of 50%.

KS2 Maths 2012

There were 11 Year 6 pupils in care this year, 8 boys and 3 girls. 6 (55%) reached Level 4 in Maths. This is above the 2011 figure of 40% locally and the national average of 48%.

KS1 Reading

There were 12 Year 2 pupils in care this year, 8 boys and 4 girls. Of these, one was not entered for SATs tests due to his special educational needs. Of the remaining 11 pupils, 5 (45%) reached Level 2 in Reading. This is significantly below the 2011 figure of 75% and the national average of 59%.

KS1 Writing

There were 12 Year 2 pupils in care this year, 8 boys and 4 girls. Of these one was not entered for KS1 teacher assessment due to his special educational needs. Of the remaining 11 pupils, 3 (27%) reached Level 2 in Writing. This is significantly below the 2011 figure of 75% and the national average of 52%.

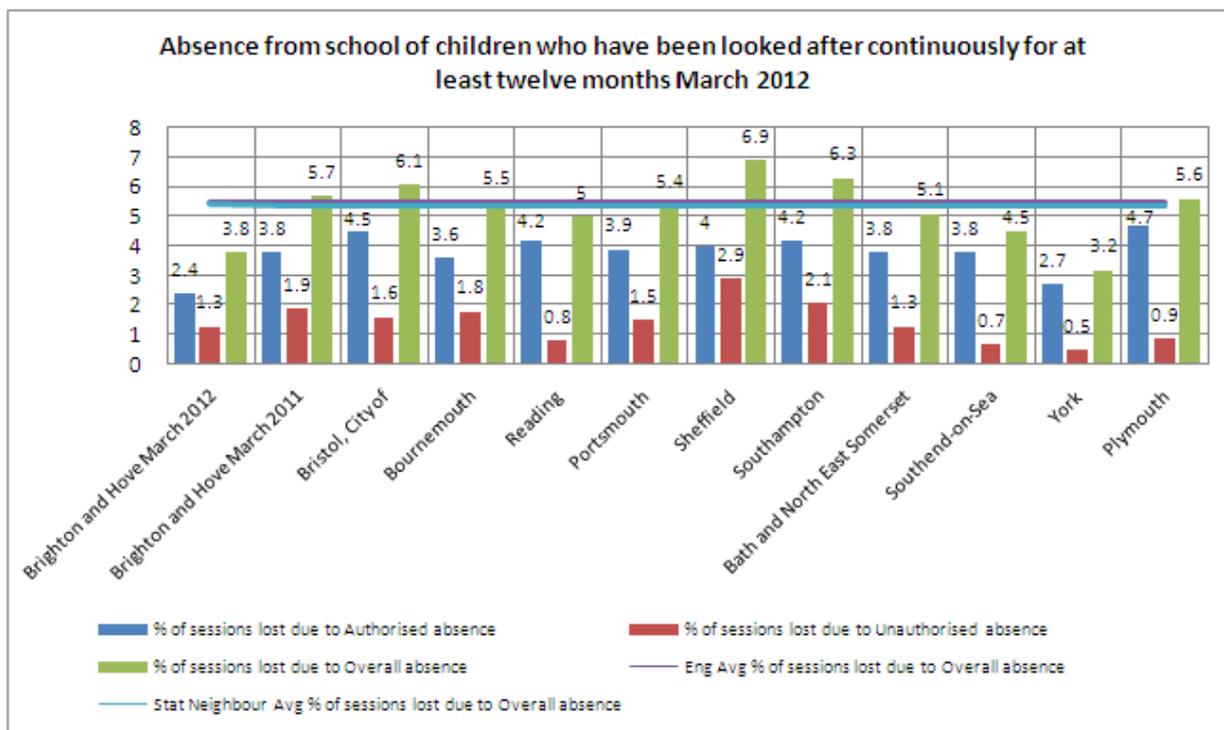
KS1 Maths

There were 12 Year 2 pupils in care this year, 8 boys and 4 girls. Of these one was not entered for KS1 teacher assessment due to his special educational needs. Of the remaining 11 pupils, 7 (64%) reached Level 2. This is below the 2011 figure of 75% and slightly above the national average of 63%.

Our results for KS1 are below national expectations for Reading and Writing but in line with national expectations for Maths. Four children had statements of educational needs including severe learning difficulties, Speech, Language and Communication Needs, and Emotional, Behavioural and Social Difficulties. Of the remaining 8 children in the cohort, 5 were on School Action Plus on the SEN Register and 2 were at School Action, giving an overall percentage of 92% of children with identified SEN. This is extremely high for at KS1 and explains this cohort's poor performance in Literacy.

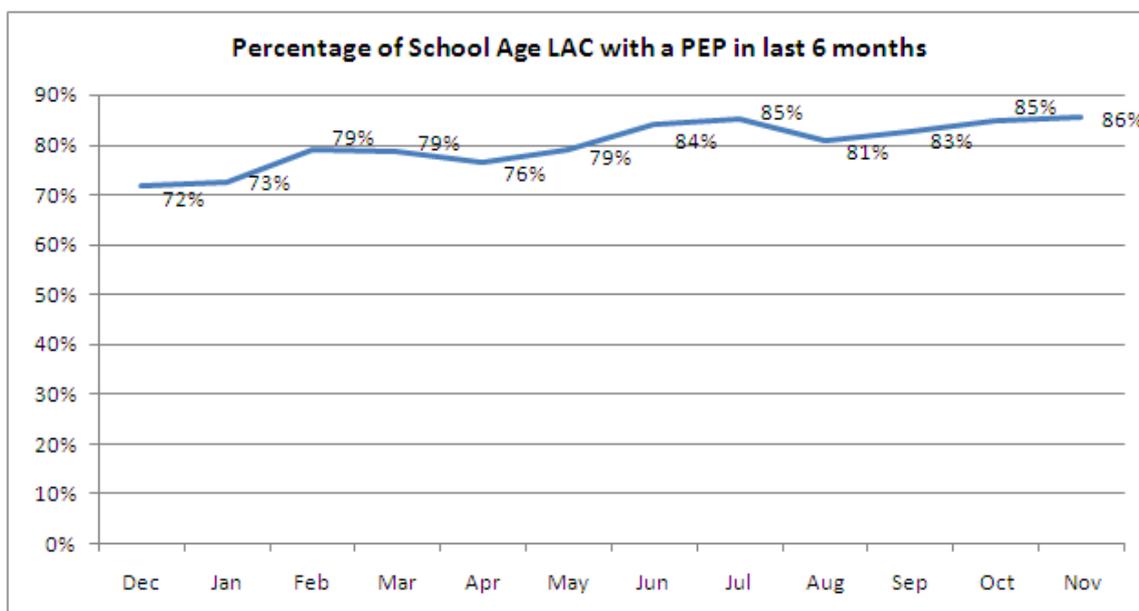
Attendance

The graph illustrates absence for children looked after continuously for at least 12 months as at 31st March 2012 for Brighton and Hove compared with the 2011 position for our statistical neighbours. Please note that the data is unverified and figures are likely to be amended once validated. The data reveals that 3.8% of sessions were lost due to overall absence in Brighton and Hove (2.4% authorised, 1.3% unauthorised), better than the 2011 national average of 5.5% (4% authorised, 1.5% unauthorised) and 5.4% for our statistical neighbours. The 2012 figure is an improvement from 5.7% in 2011 where 3.8% of sessions were lost due to authorised absence and 1.9% lost due to unauthorised absence



Personal Education Plans Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are a statutory requirement for all children in care. A PEP meeting is held at the school and should involve the child, the designated teacher for children in care, the social worker and carer. A PEP is a personalised plan that records each child's progress and identifies strategies to support their learning and engagement. All aspects of school life are considered; strengths and success, as well as areas of concern.

The PEP is reviewed every six months, although earlier reviews can be called when needed. Staff in the Virtual School support this process and prioritise attendance when the child is new into care, when the child is experiencing difficulties, when a child is making a school transition and when the social worker is new to the role.

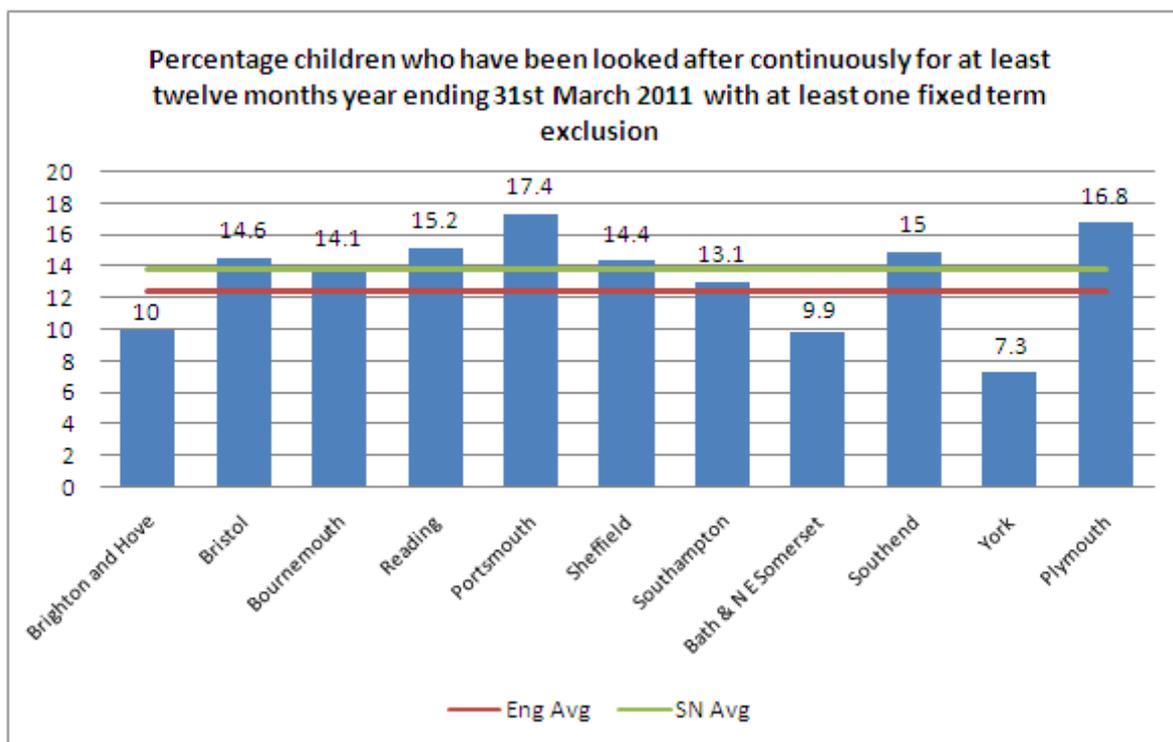


Steady progress has been made over the year in terms of the numbers of children who have an up to date PEP in place. The co-location of the Virtual School team with social work colleagues in the Children in Care team will enable improved practice through both formal and informal development opportunities. The target is for 95% of PEPs to be completed within the statutory time frame.

The Virtual School team is about to start recording PEPs electronically on Carefirst. This will be rolled out across the social care teams with appropriate training offered in the coming months which will result in better analysis and quality assurance taking place. Since September a project has been underway to develop a Post 16 PEP. Although this is not statutory it is considered best practice as mentioned in the cross party report referenced at the end of this report. The aim is for this process to be embedded into the core work of the 16+ team by the end of April resulting ultimately in better educational outcomes for care leavers.

Fixed term exclusions

10% of children looked after continuously for 12 months (March 2011) received at least one fixed term exclusion. This is an improvement on 2010 figures of 17.6% and compares well with the average for our statistical neighbours which is 13.8% and the national average which is 12.4%.



Many children in care need additional support when they move from their primary school to secondary provision. Children experiencing social, behaviour and emotional difficulties will have an escalation of these needs as they move to adolescence. Contributing factors include children who have had a number of placement moves and children who are older when they come into care

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

4.1 The Virtual School works collaboratively with children and young people, school and social care colleagues and carers and other partners to raise awareness and

improve outcomes for Children in Care. The views of young people are regularly sought during 6 monthly personal education plan meeting and via direct communication about events and activities. The Virtual School website is planned to be launched in the spring, enabling another source of information sharing to be accessed by partners.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 Raising Participation Age (RPA) will have financial implications for the Virtual School and Social Care budget. This requires the creation of a new 16+ educational adviser post, and will ensure support from the Virtual School to young people in Key Stage 5 is secured. A provisional agreement has been made that this post will be joint funded from Learning & Partnership and Social Care budgets.
- 5.2 Consideration will be given to exploring whether the current staffing capacity of the Virtual School team can provide high quality and timely support to meet the needs of the high numbers of children in care who are of school age. The equivalent of 2.8 full time equivalent staff currently manage a caseload of approximately 300 children in care. Staff capacity has not been reviewed in light of increasing numbers of children in care.

Finance Officer Consulted: Paul Brinkhurst 21 December 2012

Legal Implications:

The Children Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children in care. These duties are further amplified in DfE Guidance, 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (March 2010).

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 also lay greater emphasis on the role of the foster carers and the part they play in delivering improved outcomes for children in care.

There are no other legal implications in this report.

Legal Officer Consulted: Serena Kynaston 21 December 2012

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Children in Care have far less favourable educational outcomes when compared to their peers; leading to poor opportunities and life chances as they move through to adulthood and are likely to be more dependant on community services. By securing significant improvements in educational outcomes these inequalities can be reduced

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Closing the Attainment Gap between children in care and their peers will enable them to take greater advantage of opportunities and make positive life choices as they move toward adulthood. This enable young people to make a positive

contribution to their community and will reduce the demand on a wide range of community services.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Vulnerable learners, including children in care are more likely than peers to become NEET – Not in Employment, Education and Training. Research shows that being NEET is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, offending behaviour, teenage motherhood. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) are at risk of not achieving their potential, economically or socially.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 Young people that achieve good educational outcomes are more likely to make positive health and lifestyle choices. Young people with poor educational attainment are more likely to experience difficulties with regards to their emotional health and well being.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The Corporate Parenting Committee has the opportunity influence practice across the authority and ensure all members and departments understand what a good corporate parent is and what contribution they can make to improving outcomes
- 5.9 Closing the attainment gap for children in care will enable progress against the council's priority of 'Tackling Inequality' and 'Improving Sustainability'.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Despite some improvements, outcomes for children in care remain poor when compared to their peers. The recommendations are being proposed in order enable members to have an overview of the key issues and to ensure there is clarity across the authority about what good corporate parenting will look like.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

1. 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (March 2010)

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DCS-F-00342-2010>

2. All Party Parliamentary Report for Looked After Children & Care Leavers Education Matters in Care September 2012

<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15782/>