Committee and Date	Item
People Overview committee 23 May 2022	 Public

REPORT FROM SHROPSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

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1.0 Synopsis

The purpose of this report is to share an update on the performance of the Shropshire Virtual School, provide key themes for development and make recommendations so that the service can secure high quality outcomes for the groups of children we support and advise on.

1.1 Executive Summary

The Shropshire Virtual School report contains information and data around the key performance indicators for Virtual Schools in line with expectations from DFE guidance, it gives the context in which the Shropshire Virtual School operates and an overview of the cohort of children and young people that are supported or advice is given about.

A significant theme is the pressures that are increasing on the Shropshire Virtual School with regards to the evidenced rise in numbers of children in care over the last year, as well as how further rises are foreseeable in the coming months and years. The increasing vulnerabilities of the cohort (e.g around SEN and UASYP) are evidenced in the data and along with new Extended Duties for Children with a Social Worker these have combined to place additional demands placed on the Virtual School. Consideration about how to futureproof the school going forwards in the light of this is advised.

There have been a number of successes that have been achieved at the Shropshire Virtual School during 2021– for example with the favourable GCSE results and Performance Predicted Outcomes for Children in Care at the end of Key Stage 2 in Summer 2021, despite the impact of covid. There have been a multitude of developments since September that have been embraced by a dedicated but small team and these developments are supporting the tracking and reporting of data across the school, with swiftly improving outcomes in attendance indicators and PEP completion, some exciting participation activities and the introduction of focused actions for the workstream around PLAC (Previously Looked After Children) and CSW (Children with a Social Worker).

The evidence illustrated in the report indicates that whilst there is much good practice in PEP meetings themselves the content of information in the PEPs, as well as the process, roles and responsibilities involved are needing review and development. This review would emphasise effective joint responsibility across the LA with the aim that all children in care have the good quality PEPs that they deserve going forwards.

The committee is asked to note the details given in this paper and consider the recommendations.

1.2   REPORT

1.3 SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Shropshire Virtual School currently supports 549 young people in care to Shropshire from the ages of 2-18. There are 5.8 staff plus the Virtual Head Teacher and a Business Support co-ordinator for this workstream. The current Virtual School Head Teacher started in September 2021. Five members of the team by nature of their contracts are available on a Term Time Only basis and the average working ratio of support is 1 member of staff: 95 children in term time. There is one member of staff to support the Post 16 cohort of 121 young people and a Specialist Access to Education Officer to support with attendance tracking and monitoring plus the postholder has a caseload of 60+ young people to support. The 3.8 Specialist Teachers are funded through the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) Grant. During the Autumn Term there were periods of significant staff absence, at one point there were 3 members of staff not at work plus one on reduced hours, this left the Virtual School in a vulnerable position and a letter was sent out to Head Teachers and Social Care to make them aware of the situation.

1.4 The workstream around Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and the new extended duties for Children with a Social worker (CSW) was supported entirely by the Virtual School Head Teacher in the Autumn term. An Asst Head Teacher has been employed to support these duties and the postholder started in January.

1.5 Recent data* indicates a 1% rise in Children Looked After (CLA) nationally for the year March 2020-21, with a significant fall in numbers of children going to adoption and also for CLA ceasing their care status. Research commissioned by LAs predicts a rise in number nationally to 100,000 by 2025. In Shropshire there has been a +27% change in numbers from Year R to age 18 since May 2020 to September 2021 - and from September to March numbers rose by a further +9% change with the most significant increase in the post 16 cohort with a +21% change. The end of March data snapshot highlights that numbers of UASYP had grown from 16 to 40. It is foreseeable that with the National Transfer Scheme now in operation that numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People (UASYP) arriving in Shropshire will also increase going forwards.

*Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2021 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

1.6 In September a new Pupil Tracker based on National Association of Virtual School Head Teachers (NAVSH) guidance was developed to support with routine data gathering and identifying patterns/needs within the school. This has evidenced the pressures on the Virtual School with average case holding ratios increasing month on month.

Pupil data overview by Key Stage (current academic year):

Month End	Year -2	Year -1	Year R	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	TOTAL No in STATUTORY SCHOOL YEARS	KS5	TOTAL of all CLA yr -2 to 13)
Sept	29	39	23	55	109	89	61	337	100	505
Mar	29	39	22	57	117	94	70	360	121	549

1.7 16% of the Children in Care are in the Early Years Foundation Stage phase, with numbers peaking in Key Stage 2 (at 21%) and then in the Post 16 phase with 22%.

1.8 There has been a continual increase in the number of young people with an Education Care and Health Plan (EHCP), especially in the Post 16 cohort. The total number of Shropshire Children in Care with Special Educational Needs (SEN), including those with an EHCP, is now at 198 ie 36% of the total cohort. Overall, there are 57 young people attending LA Specialist Schools or Specialist Independent Schools and 12 attending Alternative Provisions.

1.9 ATTENDANCE

In September an Attendance Task & Finish group was created to support developments and a new tracking process for Attendance was developed within the school. Monthly Attendance Scrutiny meetings started with follow up actions for the team (plus linking with Social Workers and Foster Carers where relevant action is needed.) There was good progress but then a recent rise in Reduced Timetables (RTTs) in March mainly for those in KS4 to support prevention of Exclusions. However, in September 92% of CIC on a Reduced Timetable had an EHCP – and this is now reduced to only 35%. Of young people on RTTs, 50% were on one last academic year and this has been reduced down to 29%. As a result of this targeted work there is an improving offer for Inclusion of CLA. The use of Flexible Learning Programmes has been a key factor to support this improvement, as has the development of the new SEN Tracker.

2.0 At least 9 Permanent Exclusions have been prevented in the Autumn and Spring terms - with additionally 1 being directly prevented for a PLAC. Of those 9, 4 have an EHCP and an additional 3 young people have High Needs Funding. The current context in Shropshire is one of recent high number of Permanent Exclusions across the county and so this excellent achievement was recognised at Corporate Parenting Panel. Days lost to FTEs from September to the end of March currently total 146 - some of these lost days supported the prevention of a permanent exclusion by giving time for professionals to meet and create a personalised plan.

2.1 The PAF (Persistent Absence figure) reduced from 19.34% in September to 18% in November but rose to 20% during January-February which is no surprise in the context of Covid and the new variant outbreak. However, the February data snapshot for CLA indicated attendance in the statutory school years to be 91%, which is excellent considering covid related absences and this figure is in line with *all* learners nationally. To support identification of educational impact arising from covid, the Shropshire Virtual School added a new element to the PEP in the Autumn so that schools are asked to a) outline the impact on our children and b) identify what might be needed to help support reset and recovery so that interventions can be targeted as appropriate.

2.2 A new SEN Tracker was developed in October and includes fortnightly Complex Case meetings with SEN and the VS team so that there is clear focus every fortnight on Child in Care with an EHCP (or where Statutory Assessment is in process) and actions are needed to improve educational outcomes because there is a RTT, a Flexible Learning Programme or need a new Education provision. This now also includes post 16 students and has supported the targeting of improved outcomes for our learners. For example, there were 29 young people on this Tracker in February and we have secured successful outcomes for 4 children in one month, so this is currently down to 25. To support this work there has also been creation of Transition Planning Meetings jointly with SEN to identify and act early on yr 6 and 11 with EHCP/undergoing Statutory Assessment who will need specialist placement for secondary or post 16 education. Additionally, a monthly update now goes to the Education Access Service Manager and SEN Manager regards our learners with an EHCP (especially those attending specialist provision) but who are on a RTT/PLP so that supports a LA approach.

2.3 COVID IMPACT

There is undoubtedly an impact on our children's achievements as a result of covid – in January 2021 only 63% of those in the statutory school years were attending their provision and this was even lower at 49% in Key Stage 4. Additionally, schools across the county report that vulnerable young people in general and across the age ranges have struggled with getting back into routines and with demonstrating positive behaviours for learning. For example, several fixed term exclusions have been for not following instructions or leaving school site – and some have had a focus around substance misuse (which could potentially be linked to safeguarding or mental health/emotional well-being themes where children have not been in a structured educational environment for many months at a time.) Pupil Premium + has been used to support interventions focusing on reset and recovery – for example the Band Build at the Hive in the summer and two more are planned for the Easter and Summer breaks. Additionally, there has been a focus in the VS Team (through the new Raising Attainment and Progress data and meetings around year 6 and 11 students) to carefully target tuition so that we can support our children to achieve their potential in the assessments/exams for summer 2022.

2.4 ATTAINMENT and PROGRESS

Despite the barriers around covid and the challenges our young people face, Shropshire CLA in the SSD903 cohort* at the end of Key Stage 4 have achieved an improving picture year on year and achieved comparatively higher than CLA Nationally for the 9-5 English and Maths GCSE indicator in summer 2021. The results indicate an improving picture for Attainment 8 from last year, but less so for Progress. The progress outcomes for our
students with an EHCP and/or SEN support are not as robust, reducing for those learners with an EHCP from -2.15 to -3.08 and for SEN support from -0.42 to -1.94 from summer 2020 to summer 2021.

End KS4 outcomes, SSD903 cohort, Summer 2021

| | English & Maths grades 9-5 | |
	2020	2021
CLA Shropshire %	10.5	16.7
CLA National %	14	13

| | Attainment 8 (A8) | A8 | Progress 8 (P8) | P8 |
	2020	2021	2020	2021
CLA Shropshire %	30.2	34.9	-0.52	-0.68
CLA National %	30.6	32.1	-0.96	-0.64

2019/20 and 21 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years due to the difference in the way GCSEs were awarded during Covid Pandemic

2.5 At the end of Key Stage 2 Shropshire Children in Care achieved well above the National CLA indicator for Combined i.e. for those underlined predicted to achieve Expected Standard or above – and Shropshire Children in Care progressed better than other children in care nationally.

2.6 Attainment and Progress - End of Key Stage 2 'Predicted Performance Outcomes' for SSD903 cohort, Summer 2021**

| Indicator and % predicted to achieve Expected Standard | Reading | Writing | Maths | RWM Combined |
Year	2021	2021	2021	2021
Shropshire CLA	56.5	47.8	52.2	43.5
National CLA	50	40	46	36

| Indicator and Average Progress | Reading | Writing | Maths |
Year	2021	2021	2021
Shropshire CLA	0.31	0.76	0.46
National CLA	-1.57	-1.84	-1.79

*SSD903 cohort is the group of CLA that the DFE ask Virtual Schools to report on. Children are eligible for reporting on in the SSD 903 cohort if they have been looked after for 12 months continuously at 31 March on the year of their examinations.

**SATS were not undertaken in 2020 or 2021 and so this data is based on Performance Predicted Outcomes ie teacher assessments

2.7 Data with regards to the Phonics Benchmark indicates that 50% of Shropshire year 2 Children in Care (in a cohort of 12) achieved 'working at' standard in 2020. This was comparable to 59% in the West Midlands and 62% for CLA nationally. Analysis indicates 25% of our children achieved 24-31 points (ie were on the cusp of achieving the benchmark) and so this autumn term the Virtual School team had a focus on increasing targeted phonics / literacy interventions to support this year's cohort and the outcome was that 64% of the group achieved the standard.

2.8 Overall, there have been a multitude of new approaches to support the raising of achievement and outcomes. A Task and Finish group for Attainment and Progress was created in October to support this workstream. Raising Attainment and Progress meetings for Year 6 and 11 were started in Autumn 2 and are now embedded into team practice, this will support forecasting and targeted interventions going forwards.

Year 2: Our forecast is for only 24% of this group to be on track to achieve Expected standard in Reading, only 21% in Writing and 20% in Maths. This group have been particularly hard hit by the Covid years.

Year 6: Our forecast is as follows -

Indicator and forecast for SSD903 cohort	% on track to achieve Expected Standard or above
Reading	57
Writing	47
Maths	53
Combined	34

Year 11: Our forecast is as follows -

Indicator and forecast for SSD903 cohort	% on track to achieve Grade 4 or above
English	62
Maths	38
English & Maths	35

2.9 An autumn network session for Designated Teachers (DTs) focused on a consultation around attainment and progress data because an Audit the Virtual School team undertook has identified this is an area for development at PEP meetings with regards to quality. The outcome of this has been a new development for the Attainment & Progress section on the PEP with relevant up to date language and indicators for each age phase - and this is currently with the provider for a build. The aim is to improve integrity of data capture and thus forecasting as well as being able to have more targeted conversations at PEPs to support raising of attainment.

3.0 PERSONAL EDUCATION PLANS (PEP)

It is statutory that all Children who are Looked after must have a Care Plan, of which the PEP is an integral part. The PEP should reflect a personalised approach to learning that meets the child's identified educational needs, raises aspirations and builds life chances – and the PEP should be used to support achieving these for our children. Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children (publishing.service.gov.uk). In Autumn 1 a PEP Task and Finish group was created to support developments to tackle legacy approaches around PEP quality and processes, including roles and responsibilities - because the Virtual School had stepped in to support the Social Worker's role at PEPs during the Lockdown periods. A Shropshire VS PEP Tracker has also been created to support tracking and reporting on PEP completion in timescales plus quality of PEPs.

3.2 The Virtual School achieved 93% PEP completion for Autumn 1, but as the report indicates, this has been a struggle because of significant staff absence and capacity during the Autumn term. The previous Head Teacher set a target for 60% of PEPs being of good or outstanding quality and this had been improved upon by the end of November. However, at the end of the Autumn term this stood at 58% and the standard to aim for should be at least 90% of Children in Care's PEPs in a LA being of 'Good' quality.

3.3 The previous Head Teacher of the VS identified that Early Years PEPs were a high priority for development in terms of improving completion and quality. Each child in year -1 was allocated a Link person in the Virtual School team in early Autumn so that PEPs can be achieved for this group of Children in Care. Virtual School support for Year -2 PEPs is needed going forwards and will be included in the recommendations. The Post 16 groups have been historically supported with EET/NEET Plans and there are developments currently on a new Post 16 PEP, the VS Post 16 PA has been consulting with Shrewsbury College on the proposed format.

3.4 An Audit in November indicated good practice in many PEPs but also a need for practice developments to support improvements in quality, especially around:
  1) attainment & progress
  2) target setting
  3) PP+ impact
  4) Social Worker role in participation, completion of Care section and Summary of Meeting
  5) Roles and responsibilities – the Virtual School agreed to arrange, run and complete PEPs during the Covid lockdown but this practice is unsustainable for the Shropshire VS going forward and needs urgent review.

3.5 There is now agreement from The CLA Service Manager that a standard email will come from Social Care when there is a change of Social Worker so all partners are kept in the loop, this will also support essential partners attending PEP meetings and enable a high-quality discussion; additionally, that the Virtual School and Social Care CLA Team administrator can together support with an improved process around new into care PEPs. The PEP Audit also highlighted that a RAG standard checklist would be supportive for ensuring consistency across the Virtual School team, this has been drafted with the team ready to share with Social Care practitioners in Spring term 1 at a 'working group' meeting.

3.6 Around 60 Designated Teachers (DTs) were consulted in the Autumn Network and the main activity was a discussion on improving PEP quality as well as roles and responsibilities. Their feedback was around a) the improvement of effective discussions with engagement from key partners and b) for the Attainment & Progress section on epep to develop in line with differing phase needs at primary and secondary, as well as to be made clearer and simpler (see recommendations). A response to feedback from DTs has also been that the Virtual School has developed questions in the PEP for young people – these have been reduced to increase focus, participation and improve the voice of the young person being heard at PEPs. The new questions are child-centred with first person terms being used eg My or I. There has been positive feedback on these from DTs and some great comments from individual children, for example:
  Q. *When I grow up I would like to be……*
  A. *"First I'm going to learn to be a basket-baller then a footballer. Then I'm going to be a hairdresser and then I'm going to be a teacher at (name of school). I won't get married because I have got too many jobs and I don't want any children, not even a foster carer."*

3.7 Other improvements to the PEP in addition to those mentioned already (covid and young person's questions) have been made in the Autumn term – for example the EYFS attainment and progress section has been updated in line with the recent framework so the Virtual School can identify needs and report thoroughly. The Shropshire VS Team have been focusing on securing attainment & progress data for discussion *at the PEP meeting* (as this was being added later in the term) and targeting quicker PEP sign offs so that any successes or concerns can be addressed as early as possible.

3.8 PLAC and THE NEW DUTIES RELATING TO CSW.

The DFE announced that from September 2021, Virtual School Heads will be strategic leaders who promote the educational outcomes of children with a social worker (CSW) from the ages of 0 up to 18 in all education settings. This will ensure that more focus is placed on children with a social worker, targeting support earlier on in these young people's lives and helping improve how they engage with education. A Section 31 grant is being distributed to Virtual Schools to support this work and Shropshire Virtual School is receiving £117,434.00. This will support how the role of the Virtual School Head Teacher develops to help champion and improve the educational outcomes for children in or on the edge of care, enhancing relationships between schools, colleges and local authorities so that pupils receive support from professionals that will help them develop and progress throughout their time in education. More information can be found in the guidance at Promoting the education of children with a social worker (publishing.service.gov.uk)

3.9 Extending the role of Virtual School Heads delivers on a key recommendation of the Government's Children in Need review in 2019. The VSH's newly extended role includes additional responsibilities, such as increasing awareness among schools, colleges and social workers, of how education plays a crucial part in the care of these children, improving the visibility of support services for children with a social worker and ensuring Virtual School Heads champion this group in local authority planning. The additional role of the VSH does *not* require the following: provision of direct intervention, help and support for individual children with a social worker or their families ; tracking and monitoring educational progress of individual children or providing academic or other interventions ; response to requests from parents or carers to offer advice, intervention and support in relation to individual children with a social worker ; taking responsibility for children with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) who do not require or need a social worker.

4.0 The role of the Virtual School Head for Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) attending education in the area is to promote their educational achievement through the provision of advice & information to parents and educators. For more information please see Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children (publishing.service.gov.uk). Shropshire VS have combined the two roles for PLAC and CSW together so that the advice workstream in the service can be resourced and developed – and there is a Draft Action Plan for the academic year 2021-22 which will be finalised imminently now that the new VS Asst Head has started this January 2022. During the Autumn Term the Virtual School Head Teacher has taken on responsibility for advice and guidance around both families of children (PLAC and CSW) because of the capacity of the team would have prohibited them taking these additional workstreams on. Two new postholders are due to start after the Easter break to support these two specific workstreams, these being for an Education Advice and Support Officer and a Participation Support Officer.

4.1 An analysis of advice given for PLAC during the Autumn term indicated that with 40% of the children discussed the need for advice/guidance was on avoiding a permanent exclusion. The secondary themes for advice were around accessing or use of PP+, supporting behaviour or learning and how funding works re accessing early years settings. An analysis of the advice given for Children with a Social Worker indicated that 60% of the advice/guidance was needed around access to education and that 30% was around avoiding permanent exclusion or a RTT.

4.2 Data* indicates that for the reporting year ending 31ˢᵗ March 2020 Shropshire is around mid-range in terms of performance relative to our 'extremely close' statistical neighbours for absence:

LA	Absence % CIN	Absence % CP
Shropshire	11.5%	13.4%
Herefordshire	11.3%	12.7%
Devon	11%	13.3.%
Dorset	13.2%	14.2%

4.3 The data* indicates for CIN that Shropshire had around half the *number* of Permanent Exclusions compared to those in Devon and Dorset (but that this was a relatively high %)– and a relatively lower

percentage of Fixed Term Exclusions compared to all of the other three LAs. For CP Fixed Term Exclusions were slightly lower in percentage terms than the other LAs who reported data.

LA	Permanent Exclusions CIN *(total number of young people)*	Permanent Exclusions CP *(total number of young people)*
Shropshire	6 (1.16%)	Unknown*
Herefordshire	Unknown	unknown
Devon	13 (0.62%)	unknown
Dorset	11 (1.24%)	unknown

where Shropshire data is unknown this will be a focus for the spring term so that clear baselines are able to be obtained

LA	One or more day Fixed Term Exclusion CIN *(total number of young people)*	One day or more Fixed Term Exclusion CP *(total number of young people)*
Shropshire	52 (10.04%)	33 (16.3%)
Herefordshire	27 (10.9%)	unknown
Devon	233 (11.3%)	60 (17.4%)
Dorset	137 (15.4%)	33 (19.5%)

Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting Year 2020 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

4.4 During the Autumn term there have been a multitude of actions to support this workstream, including recruitment. The Virtual School has bought licences with PACT for a resource called the Adopter Hub and have agreed to share these with the Adoption Team so that parents/guardians can also be supported through the webinars and other resources this offers. The DT Network session in the Autumn term included information on the extended role and consulted on what training schools feel is important going forwards for our three families of children – CIC, PLAC and CSW. Training has been bought from Nurture UK for 2 roll outs of the 3 days Theory and Practice for Spring and Summer 2022 – this will enable schools to set up their own on-site Nurture group/resource and support inclusion of vulnerable learners across the family of Children in Care, PLAC and Children with a Social Worker. A new Service Level Agreement has been newly created with an independent Educational Psychologist to provide some time for consultation and training, this is planned to start in May and is in response to a request from DTs. The Shropshire VS website has also been updated to indicate how to access support re the new extended role for CSW. Going forwards, the Draft Action Plan for PLAC and CSW includes actions for improving the Virtual School website, consulting with partners in order to develop an effective advice/information and training offer - and development of a data baseline and reporting approach (including for impact) in relation to Children with a Social Worker.

4.5 PUPIL PREMIUM +

There is now a tighter process around PP+ spending and this is supporting analysis of the Virtual School's spend and impact from the PP+ Grant. We have undertaken a focused piece of work around what we use PP+ for especially in relation to attainment and progress so that we can look ahead and plan for using PP+ effectively by purchasing appropriate resources/interventions/training and developing a 'Virtual School PP+ Provision Map' which will show our partners what is available to meet the needs of our young people in a timely way. These actions will go towards review of the Shropshire VS PP+ Policy and development of one ready for the new financial year 2022-23.

4.6 A significant part of the Virtual School's PP+ spend this financial year to date is on tuition as well as supporting recovery, cultural participation and aspirations. The SLA with the Shropshire Educational Psychology (EP) service reaps significant benefits in that our children/schools have swift access to an assessment when needed and this is invaluable when a significant number of our children come into care with unidentified needs or their social/emotional/mental health needs become apparent when they find it difficult to cope with the environment in their education setting. The Shropshire EP service have also been able to support a number of our young people when they have moved out of the county so that we can continue to offer a high level of support despite where they are living. Mentoring work being done through the provider Smashlife has been of great benefit to our young people who indicate enjoyment and good engagement – and the intervention focuses on supporting them to feel heard, make improving choices and raise aspirations.

4.7 PARTICIPATION and YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICE

In the summer holidays of 2021 eight young people aged 14-15 attended a music workshop at a local provider over 4 days which culminated in a performance on the last day. This was well attended by Foster Carers, Social Workers and Virtual School staff - and it was a joy to see the young people perform the songs they had written, as well as some covers and a whole group drumming piece. Of note was one young person who wrote a song called Angels and Devils – and gave an emotional solo singing performance. One young person who barely manages to engage in any lessons at school took to the guitar and performed each piece. The Virtual School has also been contacted by one young person's birth father to say how fantastic he thought the workshop was and what a difference it has made to his son. Other young people reflected that the workshop had given them improved confidence and had felt able to make relationships in the group, whereas this was something many of them were struggling with at school. Each young person had a letter from the Virtual School thanking and congratulating them for their performances – plus PP+ has been used to support some of the group where they wanted to start actual music lessons at the centre. Since this activity two further Band Builds are being created for 2022 – and one young person who has had to move some distance out of Shropshire is being supported by the same provider to develop her own lyrics and record them through online liaison.

4.8 Further cultural participation is now being supported by engagement activities for every school holiday, for example – Music Give it a Go! And Street-dance (which is what the young people asked for). In conjunction with Telford and Wrekin a visit to the theatre took place for our primary aged children recently and an overview of the joined-up work in the West Midlands for Arts can be found here at Artslink HOME | Artslink (artslinkwm.org.uk)

4.9 A participation workshop took place on 28th October for our young people to redesign the Shropshire VS logo with the support of a designer. This competition was then widened out to all of our children in care - and we have had many entries. A panel to select the successful logo included a Care Leaver Apprentice and a young person in care in year 11. All the children and young people who took part will receive a thank you postcard and a voucher in recognition of their time and achievement. The winning designs are currently being created into an e-graphic by an artist with the support of the young people.

5.0 A Shropshire Virtual School Twitter account is now up and running so the Virtual School Head Teacher is now regularly posting tweets to share the achievements of our children as well as inform interested practitioners what our Shropshire VS is doing to support them. Our reach is now 43.5k! Follow us - @ShropVirtualSch

5.1 The Shropshire Virtual School Head Teacher has just started to lead the Participation sub-group and so there will be opportunity to bring together practitioners across the LA to develop a strategic approach which will include opportunities for our young people to be engaged and have their voices heard to influence service design and delivery. A Celebration event will be planned as part of this activity.

5.2 PROGRESSION and POST 16

This Autumn a new tracking and reporting routine has been introduced for Post 16 and this now gives a robust data set on a monthly basis. In the post 16 cohort numbers have risen by a +21% change since September. The key change is as a result of growth in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People - from 14 to 36 since September. College courses have a September start and so this negatively impacts on the possibilities for EET for this group and most go to live Out of Area, so this adds an extra dimension of need which our own LA has little control over if acting alone. The current NEET figure has increased as a result from 12% to 15.7% - which is in the context of a rise of 15 new into care young people between early January to the end of March. The challenge is that 52% of the post 16 young people are Out of Area as well as the pressure around having 1 member of staff on the team for this duty with a ratio of 1:121

5.3 The data indicates that the most significant risk factor for a young person being NEET is having an EHCP or having barriers around emotional/mental health. BeeU is commissioned to provide a service for supporting positive mental health for young people in Shropshire.

EET							
Month/number of yp by indicator	Total number EET	Attend college	Attend 6th form	Employment	Training	Apprenticeship	Missing
Nov	91	72	8	5	4	2	1
Mar	100	77	8	3	10	2	1

5.4 The Virtual School has a Governing Body and very recently a Terms of Reference has been developed to make it even more robust. Kirstie Hurst-Knight is the Chair and there are representatives from Education, Social Care, the Virtual School itself and a Parent. The aim is to bring together a range of stakeholders with an interest in achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people in care/care leavers, as well as the outcomes for the Shropshire Virtual School as a whole and how it supports parents or practitioners with advice for Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker. The purpose of the Governing body is to be a forum for discussion and to act as a 'critical friend' with support and scrutiny – to ask "would this be good enough for my own child?" and support the Corporate Parenting principles:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- 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
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

There is a clear code of expectations for Governing Body Members and going forwards it is an aim to develop focus working groups to support areas for development.

6.0 Recommendations

The committee is asked to note the details given in this paper and consider the following recommendations:

a) A proposal to be developed for the Director by the Virtual School Head Teacher re future proofing the Shropshire Virtual School and reviewing the structure to reduce caseloads.

b) The Virtual School Head Teacher to lead a working group across Social Care to focus on improving PEP quality and effectiveness across the LA - the PEP itself being a joint responsibility and integral part of the Care Plan. Key outcomes will need to be an agreed process, clear roles and responsibilities and agreed standards of quality practice as every child in care deserves to have a good quality PEP. The Virtual School Head Teacher to also consult with Schools on how the new Shropshire PEP will develop ready for a September 2022 start.

c) The Virtual School Head Teacher to plan for improving Attainment and Progress data capture on the PEP as this will support robust reporting and planning. This would be for roll-out in the new academic year 2022-23 so no current data Is lost on the ePEP system.

d) The PEP working party to consider how all Year -1 and Year -2 children will have high quality PEPs as a joint responsibility across the LA; this will also be dependent on staffing ratios and capacity at the school (in relation to Recommendation a)

e) Consideration to be given to how the Post 16 PEP can be developed on to an electronic platform for September 2022 so that it is fit for purpose and robust reporting is able to be achieved.

f) The Virtual School Head Teacher to review the PP+ Policy for the new financial year 2022-23.

g) The Action Plan for PLAC and CSW to be rolled out with the support of the new Asst Head.

h) A celebration event for Shropshire's Children in Care to be created in consultation with the Participation sub-group. Development of the Children in Care Council to also be a key focus of this group.

i) The Virtual School Head Teacher to work in conjunction with Health and Social Care in order to develop effective use of SDQ information in relation to supporting positive mental health of our Shropshire Children in Care.

REPORT

7.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

There is risk to the quality of service being offered to our CLA if numbers continue to rise as predicted and as a result pressures on staff are likely to increase (which could impact on their well-being). As a result, the ability of the Shropshire Virtual School to deliver well on performance indicators is likely be reduced. Any risks or opportunities arising from this report will depend on any recommendations made by the committee which are subsequently agreed by Cabinet or Council.

8.0 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report, as it is for information only.

9.0 Climate change appraisal

There are no climate change implications arising directly from this report.

10. Conclusions

In order to ensure that the Shropshire Virtual School is able to deliver a high-quality service in line with guidance to our children and the practitioners supporting them it is vital for a piece of work on futureproofing to be done early in the new year. Improvement in performance indicators around PEPs are in need of significant focus as this is a joint responsibility for Social Care partners, the Virtual School and our Education practitioners so that every child in care has the good quality PEPs that they deserve as an integral part of their Care Plan. It is firmly in the interests of Shropshire to invest in our children's futures to ensure the stability and growth of our communities and wider society as we face the challenges to come – and support a reset and recovery from the covid impact.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information) None
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
Local Member Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Appendices None [Please list the titles of Appendices and provide a link to the Sharepoint site where the document is located]