

REPORT TITLE:	CONTINUED EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
REPORT OF:	JAMES BACKHOUSE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks approval for Wirral Virtual School to carry out a mini competition with supply or tuition agencies. These agencies would need to demonstrate how they could provide school staff (eg, teachers/TAs), face to face or online tutors, and mentors for Wirral Looked After Children. This support is needed on an often urgent but generally temporary basis. Wirral Virtual School aims to offer short term support to individual looked after children to allow them to have better educational outcomes. This support has been made even more necessary following the pandemic and the impact it has had, with children displaying heightened anxiety and challenging behaviours which schools struggle to cope with and manage.

Wirral Virtual School is a statutory local authority service with the responsibility of supporting and improving the education and outcomes of Looked After Children and Young Care Leavers. There are currently 780 children in the care of Wirral Local Authority. Wirral Virtual School promotes their educational achievement in Wirral and also nationwide due to some looked after children being placed out of borough. Their primary role is to ensure looked after children are in education, supported in education and make academic progress and achieve good outcomes. The team consists of highly experienced staff many of whom were senior leaders in mainstream/specialist education across all key stages.

The report supports the Implementation of the Wirral Plan 2021 - 26, specifically the Brighter Futures theme.

This matter affects all wards and is a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Director for Children, Families and Education is recommended to approve a recruitment exercise using a mini competition with tuition agencies to source a 5 year contract to provide school staff/ tuition/ mentoring for Wirral Looked After Children at a value of £600,000.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 This contract is needed to allow Wirral Virtual School to use Government Grants to support the education of Wirral Looked After Children. They need to access teachers, tutors, mentors and Teaching Assistants quickly so that they can support this extremely vulnerable cohort. This support can take place in school or in other locations depending on the needs of the individual child.
- 1.2 This support is often needed very quickly so Wirral Virtual School are looking for permission to source a 5-year contract with a supply/tuition agency who can provide all of the above at short notice. They would also like the agency to offer ESOL support for Wirral's Unaccompanied asylum seeker Children (UASC) and work with Wirral Virtual School to offer programmes to schools which would help them to fully support and care for Wirral's Looked After cohort.
- 1.3 All progress has to be tracked, monitored and analysed with pre and post assessment with clear outcomes for the cohort. Wirral Virtual School would closely monitor expenditure against impact. This is a condition of the governments grants which would be used to fund this contract.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Wirral Virtual School has considered using multiple supply agencies on an ad hoc basis this does not give the consistency and quality of provision that is absolutely necessary for this vulnerable cohort of children. Wirral Virtual School needs to have quick access to teachers or TAs so having to contact multiple agencies during a time of crisis would not be appropriate and would mean that support for Wirral's Looked After Children was delayed.
- 2.2 Wirral Virtual School has considered employing a teacher and TA to work as part of the Virtual School team but this would not be economically viable as they would only be able to offer support to a limited number children at any given time and this support would also be Wirral based only. They could not offer the same level of the support which would be provided by a nationwide supply/tuition agency. There would also be times when the teacher's services would not be needed and this would not be economically viable.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Wirral Virtual School is responsible for ensuring that Wirral Looked After Children are fully supported in schools/colleges to allow them to meet/exceed their targets. They work with social workers, school staff and carers to offer the best opportunities to the cohort. The Government provides grant funding to support the service and the funding can only be allocated according to strict criteria. Any unallocated funding has

to be returned. A 5-year contract awarded to a company with nationwide coverage would allow them to correctly use the funding to support educational outcomes for Wirral Looked After Children.

- 3.2 Having this contract in place would ensure that the education of Wirral Looked After Children is not disrupted in times of crisis or placement move. It would allow Wirral Virtual School to offer the necessary support quickly, to ensure the best outcomes for their Looked After Children. Wirral Virtual School supports schools, social workers and carers in many ways. For example, by sourcing teachers or teaching assistants, tutors, and mentors for looked after children which allows them to make improved progress, to be able to self-regulate more easily in lessons and to better understand how to keep themselves safe or to have higher aspirations for their future. The needs of each child are different and sometimes urgent support is needed for a short time until a more suitable school or provision can be found. At other times, schools need support outside of school hours to help boost understanding and knowledge ready for exams or to build self-esteem.
- 3.3 Due to the urgent needs of this vulnerable cohort of children, Wirral Virtual School would need a provider who can offer a Managed Service Provision to source the right staff immediately, with national coverage as the children are frequently placed out of borough.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This contract would be funded using Government grants allocated to Wirral Virtual School to support the education of Children Looked After. The continuation of the contract over 5 years would be dependant on these grants still being in place. The grants are named LAC Pupil Premium, Recovery Funding and School Led Tuition Funding.
- 4.2 This mini competition would take place on a Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System (PDPS). This has been fully discussed with the LA Procurement team.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Funding has to be used according to government criteria in line with Children Act duties to Looked After Children.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no staffing implications for the Council arising out of the recommendations set out in this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Any reduction in the level of LAC Pupil Premium, Recovery Funding and School Led Tuition Grant funding used to enable the Council to pay for this contract or a change in priorities identified in relation to the associated grant conditions, may result in necessary action to reduce the amount of services obtained by the Council under the proposed contract.

7.2 If it is not agreed that Wirral Virtual School can go out to mini competition, they will not be able to provide the necessary support for Wirral's looked After Children which could lead to poor academic performance, poor life chances/outcomes and often loss of school place. Another risk would be that children would be out of education and at risk in the local community due to their vulnerable nature. Wirral Virtual School will find it difficult to allocate the government funding given to them to support the Looked After cohort and this funding would be claimed back by the Department for Education.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The required services described in this report are designed, based on and respond to findings from personal education plans for our Children Looked After and discussions with schools/colleges, social workers and carers. Views from the Children Looked After are also considered in developing the support provided going forward.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Equality implications will be part of the procurement process.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 A proportion of the support/tuition to be delivered via this contract will be online which will have a positive impact on carbon footprints and air pollution.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 This will support Wirral Looked After Children to achieve their academic targets and have better life outcomes. It will enable schools in Wirral wards to fully support their Looked After Children Cohort and ensure that they have the same opportunities and chances to succeed.

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APPENDICES

Tender Specification

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date