

**JOINT EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE, AND
SOCIAL & HEALTHCARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 17 th June 2021
Report Subject	Looked After Children in Flintshire
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report provides Members with an overview of the support provided for looked-after children during the academic year 2019/2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the ability to report meaningful outcome data in the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	For Members to actively engage as Cooperate Parents for looked after children, promoting awareness and challenging provision within Flintshire educational settings.
2	For Members to actively encourage all educational staff to promote the educational welfare of looked after children within Flintshire establishments at a 'whole school level'.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE PROVISION FOR FLINTSHIRE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
1.01	The definition of looked-after children (children in care) is found in the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a council's children's services department has cared for the child for more than 24 hours.

	<p>The lead responsibility for the educational support of looked after children within the Education & Youth Portfolio sits within the Inclusion & Progression Service which has oversight of children meeting the definition above and also previously looked after children as per the definition below:</p> <p><i>A previously looked after child is one who is no longer looked after in England and Wales because s/he is the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order which includes arrangements relating to with whom the child is to live, or when the child is to live with any person, or has been adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales.</i></p>
1.02	<p>The number of looked after children fluctuates month on month but stood at 259 (0-18 year olds) in October 2020, with 165 being of statutory school age. The following shows the breakdown across school key stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation Phase – 29 • Key Stage 2 – 54 • Key Stage 3 – 44 • Key Stage 4 – 38 <p>Of the 165, 126 looked after children attended Flintshire schools with the remainder accessing either mainstream schools in other geographical areas, or independent specialist provision.</p> <p>A significant proportion of the children are identified as having special educational needs, with 17% of the looked after cohort having a Statement of Special Educational Need; this compares with approximately 3% of all pupils across Wales.</p>
1.03	<p>The Covid-19 pandemic impacted significantly on the way in which education was delivered and accessed during 2019/20. The extended periods of lockdown resulted in a move to the remote delivery of education, and support services had to develop very different ways of engaging with pupils and families. The implementation of a corporate emergency response structure to the pandemic ensured all relevant Council services were sighted on the presenting needs and were able to respond in a timely fashion. Through the Silver Education Tactical Group, the working definition of vulnerable children below was developed to support the identification of those who were potentially most at risk at the early stages of the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who are at a significantly increased safeguarding risk from being at home. • Anyone whose family/placement would be at risk of imminent breakdown without access to external provision. <p>Social Services worked in close collaboration with Education to identify children who were 'vulnerable' and would benefit from additional support. The circumstances and needs of looked after children were considered as part of this exercise. Children identified as 'vulnerable' were offered</p>

	<p>access to the Resilience Hubs that were established across Flintshire's network of schools in response to the first lockdown in March 2020. Engagement with schools, along with the cross-service partnership working facilitated the ongoing monitoring of pupils in terms of their safety with home visits being undertaken where required.</p>
1.04	<p>In response to the transition from face to face to remote learning, officers worked in collaboration with schools to ensure looked after children had appropriate devices to secure their access to education. IT support was also offered to carers, where required, to enable them to support pupil engagement. Targeted engagement activities were also offered to vulnerable children during the summer holiday of 2020 to facilitate learning, development, play and support. This included provision at Theatr Clwyd and community based sport opportunities through Aura.</p>
1.05	<p>Council processes such as the Moderation Panel and the joint-commissioning Out of County Panel which oversee and allocate provision for those with special education (SEN) and additional Learning Needs (ALN) were quickly moved on line. This ensured that the processes around statutory assessments and the commissioning of specialist placements was continued in response to individual needs reducing the impact of delay on looked after children. Where pupils were accessing their education through out of county provision, contact was made by officers to request a copy of risk assessments and their models of delivery/engagement.</p> <p>Other key meetings such as 'looked after' reviews, Case Conferences and Education Planning meetings were also undertaken virtually.</p>
1.06	<p>Training and awareness raising has continued during the pandemic. Training and support has been offered to school-based staff with regards to Trauma Informed Practice, Attachment Theory and Boxall Profiling amongst others. Education officer contact details were also shared with foster carers and also included on the Fostering Facebook page. Education staff have regularly attended meetings with a range of Social Services teams to ensure a shared understanding of strategies and developments in each sector.</p>
1.07	<p>Additional funding is available to schools to support them to meet the educational needs of looked after children. This funding is known as the looked after Pupil Development Grant (PDG). This is allocated from Welsh Government (WG) to GwE, the regional school improvement service to support improved outcomes for learners. The allocation for Flintshire for the financial year 2020/21 was £163,300. The terms and conditions around this grant require schools to collaborate and develop a cluster approach to intervention, with the majority of the funding (£119k) being allocated to this. A 'Dashboard' has been developed for clusters to submit their bids for funding and the impact of these is monitored and evaluated by GwE. A further £30k was allocated to support Flintshire looked after children who are educated outside of Wales and £14,300 was allocated to the Council to cover local schemes/individual bursaries. Along with the individual allocations, the central funding has been used to support training for school staff and the purchase of the online assessment Boxall Profile tool. School bids have included requests to</p>

	fund additional staff intervention, targeted training and a range of resources, e.g. unearthing boxes.
1.08	Other sources of funding such as the Education Improvement Grant (EIG), have been used by the Council to develop and expand its offer of alternative education. Where possible and safe to do so, programmes continued to be offered to maintain levels of engagement. In recognition of need, a range of welfare and wellbeing activities were also undertaken to support children and young people and key services such as the Young People's Counselling Service developed online ways of working.
1.09	In response to the pandemic and the extended period of lockdown in 2019/20, it has not been possible to generate meaningful data in relation to the usual areas of reporting for looked after children such as educational outcomes, attendance, changes of school placements and levels of exclusion. All of the 19 Year 11 looked after children, had a post 16 outcome identified which included staying on for sixth form, accessing courses within the local further education institutes and continued placement in specialist provision.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018 brings additional duties for the Council in response to LAC who have additional learning needs (ALN). From September 2021, Flintshire will be responsible for implementing the new legislation for all of its looked after children, irrespective of where they live in Wales; the current system puts the responsibility for some elements of the process on the authority in which the child is residing. In response to this, additional funding has been allocated to the Inclusion & Progression Service to enable the statutory duties in relation to looked after children to be fulfilled.
2.02	A number of looked after children require specialist provision which is often only available through the specialist independent sector. The increasingly complex needs exhibited by some individuals and the increasing costs of provision does impact on the Out of County budget. Both the Education and Social Services Portfolios are exploring and developing ways to reduce the expenditure in this area including the expansion of in house provision and alternative forms of intervention.
2.03	The PDG is the main source of additional funding to support looked after children. Officers are working closely with schools to promote and support the submission of cluster bids to ensure the funding is accessed and goes to those who need it most.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT & RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Risk monitoring is a regular feature of Portfolio Senior Management meetings to ensure senior officers are sighted in relation to these.

3.02	Expenditure on specialist non-maintained 'Out of County' provision constitutes an ongoing financial risk to both the Education & Youth and Social Services Portfolios. This is monitored on a monthly basis and the findings reported to relevant members of the Council's Senior Leadership Team.
------	--

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	None required.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	N/A

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<u>WG Guidance - Making a Difference a guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools</u>

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Jeanette Rock, Senior Manager – Inclusion & Progression Telephone: 01352 704017 E-mail: <u>jeanette.rock@flintshire.gov.uk</u>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>Pupil Development Grant – Welsh Government funding to improve outcomes for learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and Looked After Children (LAC). It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that prevent learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential.</p> <p>GwE: Regional school improvement service</p> <p>Out of County provision: Specialist education/residential provision which is not maintained by Flintshire County Council. This could include mainstream provision maintained by an alternative authority or specialist independent provision.</p> <p>Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018: New Welsh legislative system relating to the support given to children and young people aged 0 to 25 who have additional learning needs and are receiving education and/or training.</p>

Education Improvement Grant (EIG): Welsh Government grant funding to improve educational outcomes for all learners and reduced the impact of deprivation on learner outcomes by:

- improving the quality of teaching & learning;
- addressing learners' barriers to learning and improving inclusion;
- improving the leadership of educational settings; and
- improving the provision for learners, and the engagement of learners.