

Report of:	Councillor Stephen Hill - Executive Member for Education Rob Brown - Director of Education and Partnerships
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Submitted to:	Executive - 7 December 2021
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Subject:	Virtual School Peer Review
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Summary

Proposed decision(s)
That Executive endorses the Virtual School peer review.

Report for:	Key decision:	Confidential:	Is the report urgent? ¹
Information	No	Not applicable	No

Contribution to delivery of the 2018-22 Strategic Plan		
Business Imperatives	Physical Regeneration	Social Regeneration
Provides the Council with an opportunity to commission a peer review of the Virtual School which will help shape the improvement journey as well as providing external evidence of impact for Ofsted and others.	Not applicable.	Not applicable.

Ward(s) affected
Not applicable

¹ Remove for non-Executive reports

What is the purpose of this report?

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Executive that Children's Services has commissioned a peer review from the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) as part of the Council's commitment to continuous improvement. Children's Services would like Executive to endorse the findings of the peer review to improve service delivery to young people.

Why does this report require a Member decision?

2. Given that NAVSH peer reviews involve external consideration of the Council's processes and procedures with regard to the support offered to looked after children, it is appropriate that Executive endorsement is sought on this proposal.

Report Background

3. All Local Authorities must have a Virtual School Head in place. A Local Authority Virtual School is the commonly used term for an individual or team employed by the Authority to support and champion the learning needs of looked after children (CLA) in schools. Generally the Virtual School will liaise between Social Care, Foster Carer and school to help ensure that the child is given the best possible opportunity to thrive and succeed at school. The person responsible for leading this work is commonly known as the Virtual School Head.
A system of peer review has been developed by the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) to help Virtual Schools improve and develop. The Council is keen to regularly access such support to independently assess its position in relation to services provided to support children.
4. As part of regular engagement with NAVSH, and in line with the Council's commitment to ensuring the sector-led improvement opportunities provided by NAVSH are used to their full potential, Children's Services have requested NAVSH undertake a peer review of the Virtual School. This will be the first such review NAVSH has carried out in Middlesbrough.
5. NAVSH will assess the Council against four core themes:
 - How well does the Middlesbrough Virtual School and the Local Authority work with external partners, specifically schools, to improve outcomes for children in their care?
 - How effective is the PEP process and are the current monitoring systems effective?
 - What steps have been taken to ensure the Virtual School Head and the Virtual School champion all children with a social worker: How strong is partnership working between the Virtual School and Children's Social Care in Middlesbrough
 - Are the Virtual School's current arrangements for tracking, monitoring and supporting children who have been excluded, are without a school place or are on part-time tables effective in ensuring these children are accessing appropriate and quality education?
6. In line with the Council's commitment to transparent and honest engagement, the findings of the review will be published and brought back to Executive for consideration, along with an action plan to address any recommendations made by the review, taking into account what can be delivered within the resource constraints the Council is operating within.

What decision(s) are being asked for?

7. That Executive endorses the proposed peer review.

Why is this being recommended?

8. Utilising the NAVSH resource provides an opportunity to gather views from a range of experienced Virtual School Heads from Local Authorities in other parts of the country.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

9. The Council could choose not to access this support and undertake an in-house review or commission external specialists to deliver the review. These options are not recommended because it is healthy to seek external views from external peers who are experienced in the running of Virtual Schools. Sourcing alternative specialists would be at significant cost, while the cost for the NAVSH peer review is kept low to only cover the costs of those delivering the review.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

Legal

10. There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Financial

11. The cost of the review is £2500. This cost will be borne by the Virtual School and no additional funding is sought.

Policy Framework

12. No impact on the Policy Framework.

Equality and Diversity

13. Not applicable.

Risk

14. Commissioning a peer review is not directly relevant to risk management, however findings may identify new risks or suggest some current risks should be reassessed if the review finds that there is a disconnect between the Council's understanding or a risk and wider perceptions.

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

15. If approved, work will be undertaken to prepare for the review, further communications will be issued in due course.

Appendices

16. None.

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