



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Virtual School Handbook for Social Workers, Foster Carers, Parents, Independent Reviewing Officers, Key Workers and Supervising Social Workers



2025-2026

Contents

Contents
Introduction
What is a Virtual School?
Meet the Team
Corporate Parenting
Working Together
Admissions
Suspensions, Exclusions and Modified Timetables
Virtual School Events
Foster Carer Workshops

Address:

**Telford & Wrekin Council
Darby House 6c
Lawn Central
Telford
Shropshire
TF3 4JA**

General Enquiries: 01952 381045

Secure email: virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

Introduction

The role of the **Virtual School for Children in Care** is to champion the needs of Telford and Wrekin's looked after children, wherever they may be placed. This is achieved through support, guidance and challenge to schools and other education providers, the local authority, and any other relevant partners to ensure these children have the best possible education. The Virtual School also offers strategic advice support & guidance for Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and all kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangements Orders. In addition, as from September 2021, additional duties for the Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) include Children with a Social Worker (CWSW) - the VSHT/dedicated CWSW Team based within the VST provide further advice, support, guidance & challenge to further promote positive educational outcomes.

Telford and Wrekin Local Authority Virtual School is located within the Education & Skills Directorate and is part of the wider Children's Services. We are the Corporate Parent, meaning we advocate in the best interests of our young people. We are incredibly proud to have retained an outstanding judgment in the recent Ofsted ILAC Inspection (Children's Services Outstanding, April 2024 [50252260 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50252260) making us one of only a handful of councils to retain our outstanding rating. We are also the only 'outstanding' authority in the region.

Our children and young people are our highest priority, and this latest report states we put our young people at the heart of everything we do. In Telford and Wrekin, children have said that they 'feel cared about and that the adults in their lives are genuinely proud of them and their achievements'.

We work as part of the team around a young person and work closely with many multi-agency key stakeholders. We provide a variety of training to support education establishments further, including termly network meetings and an annual VS Conference which focuses on improving outcomes for our Children in Care, Previously Looked After Children, children in kinship care arrangements and Children with a Social Worker.

We provide termly CPD/ updates to Telford & Wrekin Foster Carers with a specific focus.

In addition, we also provide a variety of training to key stakeholders - please contact us directly for further information. virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

We want to ensure you have support and advice when needed; the partnership between the Virtual School for Children in Care and yourselves is crucial to improving outcomes. As part of this, the handbook is designed to give you a quick reference to key information that you will need in your role. However, we will always respond promptly if you need information which is not contained within this document - our contact details are on the previous page. We look forward to working with you all closely, as we continue to ensure our children are cared for and cared about.

What is a Virtual School?

A statutory duty in accordance with Children & Families Act 2014 VSHT appointed to oversee the education and outcomes of children in care (LAC). Monitored through termly Personal Education Plans (PEPS).

Strategic advice support & guidance for Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and all kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangements Orders

Strategic responsibility for Children with a Social worker

The Virtual School works across early years settings, schools and colleges, mainly with children and young people aged 2-18.

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School is a source of advice and information for carers and parents of previously looked-after children and all kinship carers with special guardianship orders and child arrangements orders and those working with these children. It is part of Telford & Wrekin's corporate parenting role. The Virtual School Head Teacher oversees an education team who promote educational attainment and achievement, and works with schools, services and other virtual schools. **The Virtual School does not replace the school or setting attended by Children in Care and previously looked-after children** but provides challenge and support to promote the best possible educational outcomes. We could not do this alone and that is why it is paramount we have effective positive working relationships with you all. You are all a team around our young person, encouraging them to be the best they can be.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further advice, guidance and support.

Meet The Team:

VS Leadership Team	Role
Michelle Salter	VS Head Teacher Strategic Lead SEMH Lead
Luke Baker	Deputy Head Teacher (Children in Care)
Suzy Rogers	Deputy Head (Extended Duties)
VS Team	Role
Sarah Summers	PEP Lead Education Officer In Borough compulsory school age
Sharron Jones	Education Officer Out of Borough compulsory school age Events Lead
Anita Farrant	Education Adviser Early Years (2 years old upwards)
Elizabeth Fisher	Education Adviser In Borough compulsory school age CPD Lead
Nick Cunliffe	Education Adviser Post 16 Lead
Suzanne Ellams	Education, Employment, Training Officer Post 16 Team
Amy Shadbolt	Education Officer – Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers
Zoe McLaughlin	Education Adviser Extended Duties Primary/ Arts Lead
Rebecca Best	Education Adviser Extended Duties Secondary/ CSE Lead
Shannon Atkinson	PEP Support / Tracking Officer
Curtis Tonks	PEP Coordinator /Sports Lead

You are able to contact us via virtualschool@telford.gov.uk

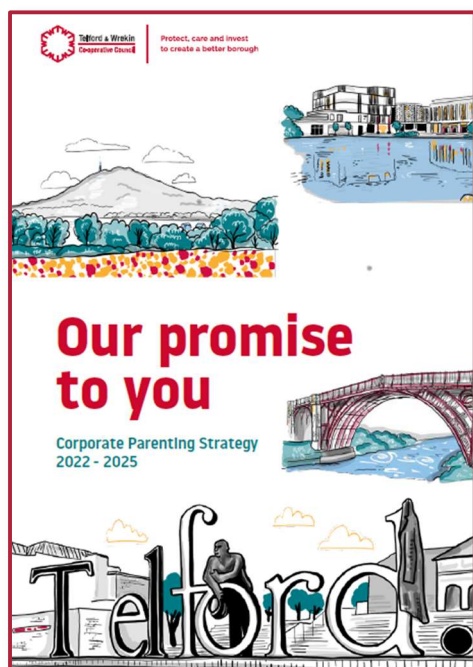
Corporate Parenting

All children need love and stability in order to thrive. A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person.

Corporate Parenting Principles (The Children and Social Work Act 2017)

The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children in care, as follows:

- 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.



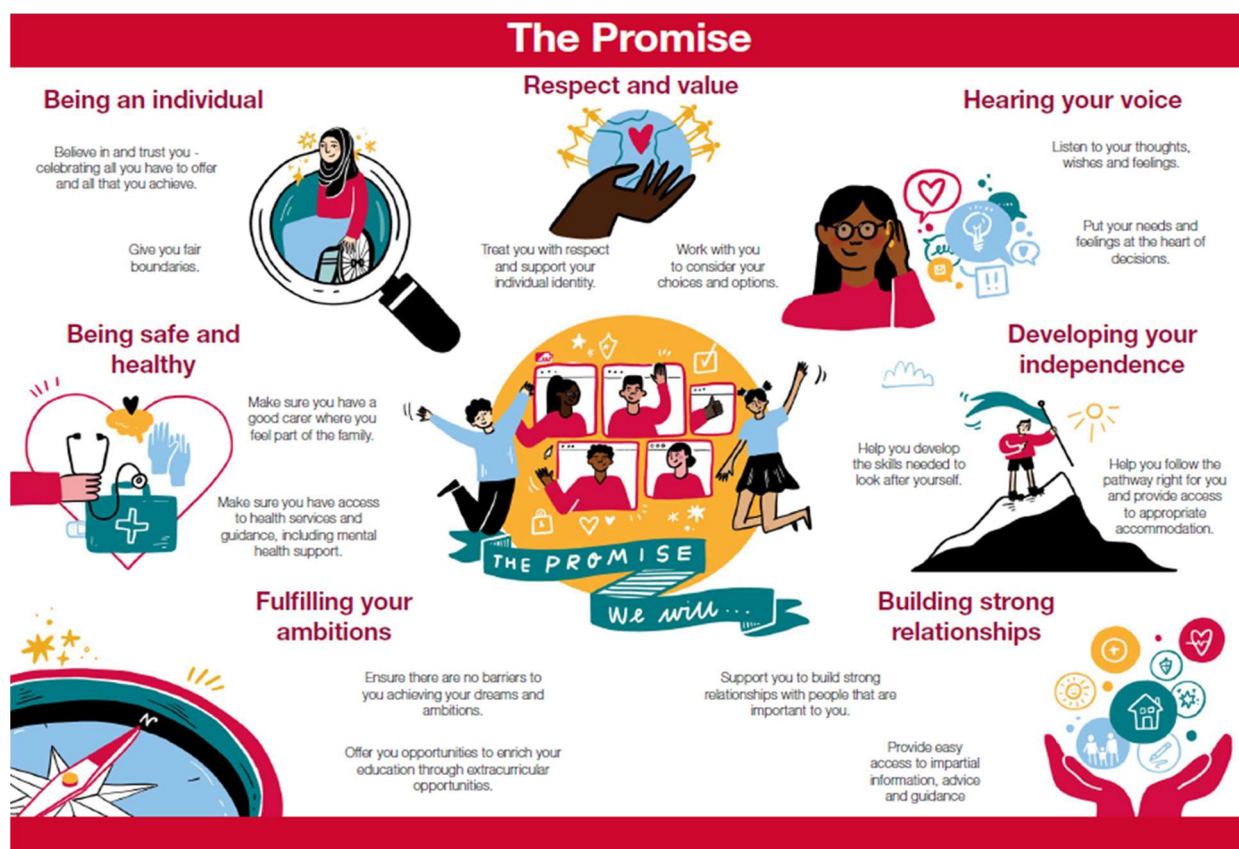
Our promise to you:

- 3 year Corporate Parenting Strategy, entitled 'Our promise to you' which runs from 2022-2025

Find the Corporate Parenting Strategy here:

[Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 \(telford.gov.uk\)](https://www.telford.gov.uk/corporate-parenting-strategy-2022-2025)

We will be working closely with our Care Leaver apprentices to review and refresh the strategy.



Young Persons Panel - In addition we have a young person's panel that has representation from a wider range of groups including: Voice (T&W children in care advocacy group) Care Leavers, care experienced young people who also present with special educational needs (SEND), other young people who have accessed Peer Mentoring from Smash life and a wider range of representation from other groups to ensure equality and diversity for all. The panel meets regularly to explore each area of the promise and feedback to the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board (CPSG) which is represented by the Virtual School Head Teacher and chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services. Feedback is twofold thus ensuring that the young people recognise that information is shared and action taken.

Our Virtual School Team has hosted the brilliant Young Person's conferences, with a range of workshops (arts, music, sports, peer mentoring) for our young people in care.

On the day, young people also had the chance to 'takeover' the job of one of our council's officers or partner organisations. The Chief Executive commented that 'Having a young person shadowing me was really amazing and inspirational, I am sure all my colleagues who took part felt the same. We, too, have so much to learn from these young people!'

To give you a flavour of how the day went, [watch this video](#) from the Communications Team with the young person they have mentored on the day. Another recent video created by some of the young people with the support of the Virtual School Team showcases the thoughts and feelings of our young people in care and why it's important for us to continue to listen to them, learn from them and support them to get the very best in life. [Watch this video](#)

Working together to promote good outcomes

- **The Virtual School leads on education** and as such we have a dedicated post holder who coordinates all of the statutory requirements re Personal Education Plan (PEPs). We expect all of our young people to have termly PEPs from 2-18 year-olds and expect all stakeholders to attend. **The PEP Co-ordinator organises all PEPs** so any questions, advice and guidance can go to them in the first instance, and they will forward to the relevant team member.
- **Any requests for school changes / modified timetables must be authorised by the Virtual School Headteacher.** We expect all our young people to attend education, employment or training and we recognise through research that education is a key route to stability.
- Both the **PEP Coordinator & PEP Lead deliver regular training** to schools re the PEP portal and also offer training to Social Workers. **It is strongly recommended as part of T&W employees Induction for Social Care Colleagues** - new to role/council that they attend a VS CPD session by either contacting virtualschool@telford.gov.uk or VS PEP Lead: sarah.summers@telford.gov.uk
- We continue to provide termly PEPs up to the end of Yr 13 academic year summer term. We pride ourselves as a team and through effective multi agency working - PEP completion rates are consistently 100% term on term for all our young people and PEP quality remains consistently high above 90%.

It is the young person's Social Worker's responsibility to...

- **Ensure, once the PEP has been quality assured and signed off by the VS caseworker, that they share the PEP with relevant stakeholders including foster carers. PEPS are seen as a live working document to ensure all our young people continue to thrive.**
- Ensure that all parties have **high expectations** of the young person, encouraging achievement and ambition, and ensuring that the child makes accelerated and rapid progress.
- Ensure children and young people are included in **school-based interventions**, even if they may not appear to meet the criteria, and actively promote their best interests.
- **Challenge suggestions** that a child's emotional needs are greater than their learning needs and that they 'just need time', as this results in poor outcomes for children in care, previously looked-after children and children with a Social Worker.
- **Challenge any suspensions / exclusions for our young people – link with the Virtual School immediately.**
- If a child is not making progress or there are concerns, then we strongly urge the school/foster carers and social workers to **use the local referral system** to access advice, support and contact the Case Worker within the Virtual School. **Swift, timely intervention is key.**
- Promote and **celebrate the achievements of children and young people**, sharing positives with school (particularly at times of transition).
- **Actively encourage and support the engagement** in 'leisure and cultural' activities - the Virtual School offer considerable amount of variety of out of term activities open to all and we also offer accredited Arts Awards as a registered arts centre. In addition in 24-25 we collaborated with the share foundation and introduced stepping forward arts programme. [Stepping Forward — The Share Foundation](#)
- **Attend and champion our young people at our annual Celebration awards evening (which is held in the summer term).**

- **Maintain contact** with the school/Virtual School between PEP meetings to ensure that the PEP targets are being implemented and that all staff maintain high expectations.
- Ensure our young people have access to **appropriate space and resources** to engage in education activities including computers, technology, books and study spaces. **Refer to Pupil Premium Plus policy 25-26 located on VS website.**

Admissions:

Schools should give children in care and previously looked-after children the highest priority on their admission arrangements. “Such children must take precedence over those on a waiting list and cannot be refused a place because of challenging behaviour.”

The 2021 School Admissions Code requires children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England, and who have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted, to be given equal first priority in admission arrangements alongside looked after children (LAC) and children who were previously looked after by English local authorities (PLAC). The advice refers to these children as internationally adopted previously looked after children – “IAPLAC”.

[School admissions code 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Local authorities may issue a direction to a maintained school and ask the Secretary of State/DFE to direct academies to admit looked-after children. Guidance: School Admissions Code. Statutory guidance for admission authorities, governing bodies, local authorities, schools adjudicators and admission appeals panels (December 2014, revised September 2021, updated March 2022).

Things to consider before applying for a new school place:

- Consult Virtual School at the point of considering any placement changes and before approaching your local school.
- [Removal of Ofsted single word judgements: what it means for schools and parents – The Education Hub](#)
- [Ofsted sets out proposals for fairer education inspections and new, more detailed report cards - GOV.UK](#)
- [Improving the way Ofsted inspects education: consultation document - GOV.UK](#)
- The old Ofsted rating for Telford & Wrekin schools can be found on school finder at www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables

In-Year Admissions:

The School Admissions Team co-ordinates all in-year admissions into Telford & Wrekin schools. More information can be found www.telford.gov.uk/admissions To apply for a Telford & Wrekin school place at any time other than the point of transfer to a school, an In-Year Admission application must be completed online. **This must be completed by the social worker in consultation with the Virtual School.** The School Admissions Team will then aim to notify of the application outcome within 15 school days & consult with the VSHT & SW.

Out of county placements:

Admissions to schools that are not in Telford & Wrekin will either be coordinated by the local authority area in which the school is based or will be processed by the schools themselves. The website for the relevant local authority should have information on the process, but if there are any queries please contact the School Admissions Team and T&W VS.

Refused applications:

If an application to a Telford & Wrekin school is refused, refer to the Virtual School for advice. The responsible Local Authority for CiC can take enforcement action to require a school to admit by using the direction process. This process will differ depending on which type of school it is, and advice will always need to be sought from the admissions team when considering taking enforcement action. The enforcement process is not a quick solution and can take several months to conclude.

Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions:

All our young people are allocated a VST case worker, and we review weekly the level of support required for all our young people. Our expectations are very clear, in that schools communicate with the Virtual School in the first instance if any of our young people are experiencing any difficulties, as there is a variety of support, training and interventions which are available to prevent exclusions, linked to our Belonging Strategy and Rarely Exclusion policy.

An exclusion must be lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate and must be in accordance with the school's published behaviour policy and the statutory guidance on exclusion. The 2022 DfE guidance states that, '*In the case of a looked-after child or child with a social worker, the school and the local authority should work together to arrange alternative provision from the first day following the suspension or permanent exclusion.*' (Part 6 paragraph 92).

If a school is considering issuing to a care experienced young person, previously looked after or a young person who has a social worker we expect the Designated Teacher/ School to contact the Virtual School to discuss. If issued, there is an expectation that the local authority is informed immediately. A copy of the letter must be sent to accessandinclusion@telford.gov.uk the virtual school caseworker copied in, as well as sending to virtualschool@telford.gov.uk. We also expect the social worker / carers to be informed and link with the Virtual School

The VS also needs to be informed to ensure that they are aware and will attend any re-integration meeting with the school following any suspensions.

A school can only permanently exclude:

in response to serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school. Exclusion Statutory Guidance September 2022 - [Suspension and permanent exclusion guidance](#)

Modified Timetables: (MTTs)

We expect all our young people to have a full-time offer; it is their legal right to an education and to attend. **In exceptional circumstances**, as per Telford & Wrekin Guidance distributed to schools in relation to MMTs, modified timetables for our Children in Care should be created through co production in consultation with the Virtual School, young person and Social Worker reviewed every 6 weeks. All modified timetables require a parental signature. For Children in Care, this would normally be the Social Worker, but there is an **expectation that the Virtual School agrees any MTT prior to a Social Worker signing. The VSHT has complete oversight of any MTT and any care experienced young person who is placed on a MTT is reviewed regularly and is seen as a short term measure.** It is the responsibility of school at which the child is on roll to liaise with the VS regarding number of hours the child is receiving. We review all MMTs weekly and expect to see an increase in the number of hours of education.

Virtual School Events and our wider educational entitlement cultural offer

At Telford & Wrekin Virtual School, we offer a range of events and activities including Year 6 Transition Residential activity based events for our young people to come and attend. These offer a chance to try something new, meet other young people in care in the county and spend time with the Virtual School Team.

We are part of a wider West Midlands Children in Care Foundation [Welcome to WMVS Children In Care Foundation | WMVS Children In Care Foundation \(wmvscicfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.wmvscicfoundation.org.uk)

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School is registered with Trinity College London as an Arts accreditation centre.

What are Arts Awards?

This is a creative journey, exploring the arts world, discovering your potential as artists, developing leadership skills – and gaining a recognised qualification along the way. Open to anyone aged 25 or under, this unique set of arts qualifications builds skills essential for success in the 21st century: Creativity and communication, along with problem-solving, reflective-thinking and confidence. Our young people can achieve Arts Award in any art form, from music to mime, poetry to pottery, dance to drumming. Through the five levels – **Discover, Explore, Bronze, Silver and Gold!** To date, over eighty young people have already achieved Arts awards.

Collectively as a region we have established 'My Creative Track' which is embedded in all termly PEPs.

[My Creative Track | WMVS Children In Care Foundation \(wmvscicfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.wmvscicfoundation.org.uk)

Foster Carer Workshops

Telford & Wrekin Virtual School offer free foster carer workshops which are held online on Teams each term.

Post 16 Support: FC Workshop

Learning objectives

Date: Monday 8th September 12:00pm – 2:00pm



Aimed at those who are supporting young people in Year 10 and above, this workshop will explore the following:

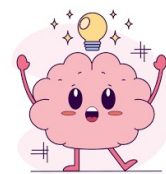
- The role of the Virtual School and other professionals who offer support e.g. Future Focus
- Post 16 Options for Education, Employment and Training
- Post 18 Options for Education, Employment and Training (including Becoming a Care Leaver)
- Successful Transitions between school, higher education and further education
- Preparing for Post 16

SEND Code of Practice – Understanding the graduated approach and how to seek additional support.

Date: Tuesday 18th November 10:00 am – 12:00pm

Thursday 20th November 18:00 – 20:00

Learning objectives



During this workshop we will support attendees to be able to:

- Understand what is meant by the graduated approach.
- Understand the processes and principles behind assess, plan, do, review and what is meant by SEND Support.
- Identify the four main area of need within the SEND Code of Practice.
- Know how to apply for an EHCP and understand the processes involved in the Education and Health Care Needs Assessment
- Understand how schools can support young people through reasonable adjustments and describe some examples of these.
- Understand and explore strategies to support learning for young people with SEND at home.

Supporting School Transitions

Learning objectives

Date: Tuesday 27th January 10:00 am – 12:00pm

Thursday 30th January 18:00 – 20:00

During this workshop we will support attendees to:



- Understand the process of applying for and moving to a new school within a local context
 - Understand what is involved in an appeals process.
 - Know what support will typically be offered to a young person who is moving schools
 - Understand and apply practical suggestions which can support a young person moving to a new school.
-

Supporting the Early Years

Learning objectives

Date: Thursday 1st May 10:00 am – 12:00pm

Thursday 1st May 18:00 – 20:00

Aimed at those with children aged 0-5, this workshop v

- How Telford & Wrekin Virtual School supports scho
- The most important principles behind what children in the early years' need to thrive, both in education and at home, to support their emotional wellbeing.
- How to support with transition between home and school
- Understanding the EYFS prime areas of learning with a focus on communication and language
- Understanding the graduated approach to SEND and how to get additional support (e.g. EHCP)
- Ensuring your voice is heard in the PEP.
- A real opportunity to ask questions and share your own good practice.



We also work in partnership with the West Midlands CiC Foundation to offer training courses for those supporting previously looked after young people and kinship carers, through A-Z Education Consultancy.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill:

[The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) was introduced in Parliament on 17 December 2024.

Part 1 of the bill contains reforms to children's social care. Part 2 makes provision relating to education in England.

Key points:

Family group decision making

The bill would add a new section to the Children Act 1989 to impose a duty on local authorities who are considering making a court application for a care or supervision order, to offer a family group decision making (FGDM) meeting to the child's parents or any person with parental responsibility for the child.

The purpose of the FGDM meeting is to enable a child's family network to meet to discuss the welfare needs of the child and to make a proposal in response to concerns about the child's welfare.

The duty does not apply if the local authority determines that it would not be in the child's best interests.

Child protection and safeguarding

Safeguarding partners

The bill seeks to amend the Children Act 2004 to make it a requirement for the three safeguarding partners (the local authority, NHS integrated care board and police) in each local area to include education and childcare "relevant agencies" as mandatory participants in their multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Currently, safeguarding partners only need to make arrangements to work with a "relevant agency" if they consider it appropriate to do so.

Multi-agency child protection teams

The bill would insert new sections into the Children Act 2004 to require safeguarding partners to establish and run at least one multi-agency child protection team in their area. The main purpose of these new teams is to support the local authority in delivering its child protection duties under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

ICBs will be required to nominate a health professional with experience in relation to children's health, while the police will be required to nominate an officer to be part of each multi-agency child protection team. The local authority is required to nominate someone with experience in education in relation to children and a social worker with experience in relation to children, and may appoint other appropriate individuals after consultation with safeguarding partners.

Information sharing

The bill would also amend the Children Act 2004 to impose a duty on specified persons and bodies to disclose information that may be relevant to safeguarding or promoting the welfare of a child, to other relevant persons in certain circumstances. The duty applies where the person considers that the disclosure may facilitate the exercise by the recipient of any of its functions that relate to safeguarding or promoting the welfare of children, unless disclosure would be detrimental to the child.

The duty to share information will apply to persons listed in section 11(1) of the Children Act 2004, including local authorities, ICBs, NHS trusts/foundation trusts, police forces, probation services and youth offending teams, along with education and childcare “relevant agencies”.

Consistent child identifier

The bill also makes provision, under the Children Act 2004, for a consistent child identifier (also known as a single unique identifier or SUI). Designated persons must include the consistent identifier when processing information about a child for safeguarding and promotion of welfare purposes.

Support for children in care or kinship care, and those leaving care

Kinship local offer

The bill would amend the Children Act 1989 to require local authorities to publish information about their general approach to supporting children in kinship care and kinship carers in their area, as well as financial support which may be available to them in their area (the “kinship local offer”).

Local authorities must take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that children in kinship care and kinship carers receive the information in the kinship local offer.

Supporting educational achievement

Under amendments to the Children Act 1989, local authorities would be required to take appropriate measures to support the educational outcomes of children in need and children in kinship care.

The steps that can be taken under this duty include enabling children to overcome barriers to their educational achievement and improving educational attendance. The duty is a strategic duty, which does not extend to the educational outcomes of individual children.

The local authority must appoint at least one person to discharge the duty (in practice this is usually the virtual school head).

Supporting care leavers

The bill would also introduce a new provision in the Children Act 1989 to require each local authority to consider whether each former relevant child (up to age 25) requires “staying close support” and where their welfare requires it, to offer that support.

“Staying close support” is support to assist the former relevant child: (1) to find and keep suitable accommodation and (2) to access services relating to health and wellbeing, relationships, education and training, employment and participating in society. Support means the provision of advice, information and representation. There are also amendments to the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to require each local authority to also publish the arrangements it has in place to support and assist care leavers in their transition to adulthood and independent living.

Accommodation of children

Regional co-operation

The bill seeks to amend the Children Act 1989 to give the secretary of state powers to direct two or more local authorities to make regional co-operation arrangements to carry out their functions in relation to the accommodation of looked after children.

The arrangements could be: (1) to carry out their strategic accommodation functions jointly, (2) for those functions to be carried out by one of the local authorities on behalf of the others or (3) for a corporate body, of a kind that may be specified in the secretary of state's direction, to support them in carrying out those functions.

Deprivation of liberty

The bill also includes a number of changes to section 25 of the Children Act 1989. It would change the references from "restricting" liberty to "depriving" children of their liberty, to better reflect the nature and purpose of this section.

The bill would also provide for the authorisation of the deprivation of liberty of children in alternative placement types beyond just a secure children's home. It brings within the scope of section 25 accommodation provided for the purpose of care and treatment of children that is capable of being used to deprive a child of their liberty ("relevant accommodation").

The secretary of state would have powers to set out in regulations: (1) the maximum period for which a child may be kept in relevant accommodation both with and without the authority of a court, (2) the cohort of children who may be placed in relevant accommodation, and (3) a description of the alternative accommodation.

Currently, many children are being deprived of their liberty outside of a statutory framework, via the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court.

The government's intention is to "provide an alternative statutory route to authorise the deprivation of liberty of a child in a more flexible form of accommodation, bringing more deprivation of liberty cases under a statutory framework via section 25, including its criteria for access, mandatory review points and parity with [secure children's homes] in terms of access to legal aid".

Regulating provider groups

The bill would give new powers to Ofsted in relation to parent undertakings (ie where more than one setting is owned or controlled by the same private or voluntary provider group).

The bill seeks to place a duty on parent undertakings to develop and implement an improvement plan where Ofsted have identified quality issues in multiple settings and reasonably suspects there are grounds for cancellation of registration in relation to those settings.

Should parent undertakings not comply with these requirements, Ofsted will have the power to issue an unlimited monetary penalty.

Tackling unregistered children's homes

The bill also includes new powers for Ofsted to impose monetary penalties for breaches of the Care Standards Act 2000, including for operating unregistered

children's homes. This is designed to give Ofsted a quicker alternative to prosecution in these cases.

Financial oversight regime

The bill would also introduce a financial oversight regime for relevant children's social care providers who meet conditions that will be set out in regulations. These are likely to relate to the size of the provider and whether it would be difficult to replace were it to fail.

The bill would give the secretary of state the power to require providers made subject to the regime to submit a "recovery and resolution plan", setting out risks to their financial sustainability and actions they propose to take in response to these.

The secretary of state would also have the power to arrange an independent business review of a provider where there is significant financial risk to its sustainability. The secretary of state would also be under a duty to warn local authorities if there was a real possibility of relevant services failing, with potential adverse effects for the councils or any children looked after by them.

Limiting profits

The bill also provides for regulations to be made enabling the secretary of state to cap any profit made by a non-local authority registered children's social care provider. The secretary of state may only make such regulations if satisfied that it is necessary to do so.

The government has said that it only intends to use the provision if other policies do not sufficiently reduce profiteering in the children's social care placements market.

Agency workers

The bill seeks to provide a power for the secretary of state to make regulations applying to all English local authorities on the use of "agency workers" in children's social care. The regulations may require that the agency workers meet certain requirements and make provision about how they should be managed and the terms on which they are supplied to local authorities.

When in force, this regime would replace the [rules, introduced in 2024 under statutory guidance, regarding local authorities' use of agency social workers in children's services.](#)

Ill-treatment or wilful neglect

This bill also intends to close a gap in existing legislation by extending the offences of ill-treatment or wilful neglect by a care worker or care provider to someone in their care, under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, to children aged 16 or 17 in regulated establishments in England.

Currently, the 2015 act protects against ill-treatment or wilful neglect by care workers providing health care for an adult or child or social care for an adult, while the Children and Young Persons Act protects those under 16 from cruelty by those who have responsibility for them.

Children not in school

The bill proposes a number of reforms aimed at protecting children who are being educated at home. Most of these involve amendments to the Education Act 1996 and include:

- Compulsory registers of children not in school in each local authority area in England, and a duty on local authorities to support the children on their registers (should a parent request this).
- Changes to the school attendance order (SAO) legal framework, for example, by introducing statutory timeframes for issuing and processing SAOs and making it an offence for parents to withdraw a child subject to an SAO from school without following the proper procedure.
- A requirement for a parent to obtain local authority consent to home educate if a child is: (1) subject to an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, (2) on a child protection plan, or (3) at a special school or academy.
- A power for the local authority, in cases where a child is subject to a section 47 Children Act 1989 enquiry or on a child protection plan and is already being home educated, to review whether it is in the best interests of the child to be in school and require that the child be registered at a school.
- A duty for local authorities to consider the home environment and other learning environments when determining whether or not such children should be required to attend school.

Check out our Virtual School Website

https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20642/virtual_school_for_children_in_care

[Galleries: Virtual school for children in care - Telford & Wrekin Council](#)

If you would like to submit anything to be showcased on our gallery, please send to: virtualschool@telford.gov.uk